
WDSS NOTES

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Six Practice Hacks for Students who are Too Busy to Waste Time

from Ms Sandy

Most of us live jam-packed lives filled with music as well as school, sports, vacations, and busy social agendas. How lucky we are! But we must use our time efficiently in order to

balance all the things. Here are some practice recommendations for everyone, but especially Middle and High School students who have a lot on their plate and are unable to practice the recommended 40 hours a day.



1. Know how your piece goes! You will save hundreds of hours of practice time by listening to what you are trying to learn before you put your fingers on the string. If you can't sing the piece in your head, go back to a recording and listen to it until you really know it. Listen while looking at the music (active listening). Listen while you are doing other things (like eating breakfast or sitting in the car or doing homework—passive listening). Listen all the time. You will be amazed how much faster you can learn your music.

2. The form of the piece is not usually the form of the practice. If you do not have a lot of time, be sure to prioritize the items that need daily refresh in order to be learned well. In your newest/working piece, find the “preview” spots that require more repetitions and focus on refining

those places rather than simply trying to play through the whole piece start to finish.

3. **Practice makes permanent.** Take care to practice tricky places slowly and mistake-free from the beginning. Make passages easier by breaking them down into smaller or slower bits. Your brain will then have learned only the correct notes/rhythms/bowing/shifts. For every repetition that has a wrong note in it, you will need to play the same passage correctly at least three times to un-do the undesirable habit. If you don't have time to play a passage slowly and correctly from the start, you certainly don't have the time to fix it later.
4. **If you do something well, do it again!** So often when we are feeling short on time we practice only until we "get it right." If you play a practice spot 3X with mistakes and get it mistake-free on the fourth try, your neurons have no way to know which version was the desirable one, and when you come back to it you will have to begin again from scratch. If you instead play the passage 5-10 more times correctly after the first correct repetition, you will build neural pathways in your brain that favor the correct fingerings/bowings/shifts when you come back to the same passage again. NB: This can feel like boring work, but it is really the gold of your practice.
5. **Sleep between your practice sessions.** This may sound funny, but neural science supports the idea that you need to sleep to fully absorb new physical and mental skills. Music includes both kinds of skills. Practice shorter amounts every day and your learning will be far more successful over the long term than a longer practice once a week.
6. **Review is important.** It may seem like review is ok to skip if you are running out of time but many teachers say that review is the most important part of the practice. Spend a few minutes each day playing something easy-ish that you know from memory. Enjoy your tone, your beautiful intonation, and the story that you can tell with music that you know well.

For more practice hacks, or to more deeply understand how our brains learn music, I recommend exploring Molly Gebrian's website "Music and the Brain:"

<https://www.mollygebrian.com/music-and-the-brain>.

"To make a resolution and act accordingly is to live with hope. There may be difficulties and hardships, but not disappointment or despair if you follow the path steadily. Do not hurry. This is a fundamental rule. If you hurry and collapse or tumble down, nothing is achieved. DO not rest in your efforts; this is another fundamental rule. Without stopping, without haste, carefully taking a step at a time forward will surely get you there."

Dr Suzuki From Nurtured By Love



Turkey Talk #4

(to talk frankly and honestly)

Don't get Left Behind!

from Mrs B

In last month's TT, I encouraged parents to be just a little smarter and curiously creative in order to help their students with the psychological difficulty of practice. This month I want to address your intellect, your knowledge base about your child's instrumental studies.

The Suzuki Method is dependent on the Suzuki Triangle: teacher, parent and student all working together. Each of these three equal partners upholding their side in a strong way ensures steady and healthy progress on the instrument.

In order for the parent side of the triangle to become and remain strong you need try to keep up with your student. Keeping up with your student necessitates you putting some time and effort into learning about how to play the basics of their instrument, learning the basic elements of music and carefully observing how your teacher teaches in lessons so that you can emulate them at home. If you do not invest some extra time learning and observing, you risk being left behind, weakening the triangle. I want to encourage and challenge you to press forward by learning all you can about how to play the instrument and about reading music.

Some parents, but very few, are themselves, violinists or cellists. That is great, they really have a leg up. Others studied an instrument, say piano or clarinet in school or perhaps sang in choir, they also have a head start into this vast music world. But more often parents are making the very admirable decision of offering their child an experience with music which they were not able to have themselves making it all new to the parent as well as the student. This makes it very hard for the parent to be a solid, confident practice guide at home. In addition to the parent being more unfamiliar with music, your child's *full-time* job right now is learning and they are very good at it! Children are brilliant and often learn much faster than we do, so we have to put some time and effort into not being left behind.

At WDSS and in my own private teaching, I have not put in place an intentional, strong program that helps equip the practice parent. I think it is a weak spot in my own teaching. I just expect the parents to jump in and keep up. This is not the way in many Suzuki programs or studios. Some have in place extensive parent education sessions, requiring as many as six weeks of parent-only lessons before they even begin with the student. This additional education allows any parent but particularly the non-musical parent to feel much more confident to take the lead at home.

Since we do not, at this time, have a structured parent education program, here are some suggestions that might keep you from being left behind by your own very capable student.

1. Read Nurtured By Love by Dr Suzuki. It is a short book that will help you get the basic philosophy and flavor of what we are about. There are several copies at St James which you are welcome to borrow. Just ask your teacher. Try the audio book! I am sure someone has recorded it so that you can listen while you drive, jog or get dinner.
2. Ask your teacher if you could schedule several lessons for yourself. Three should get you a long way towards the understanding and empathy needed to be a more helpful guide.
3. Be a super attentive parent during lessons. Develop the habit with your teacher of taking the last 5 minutes of your lesson time for questions so that you can leave the lesson with a clear understanding of the week's work.
4. Take lots of videos during lessons. Perhaps you will only need to refer to 1 out of 5 but being able to refer to that one will save you a week's worth of practice.
5. Be willing to text or email your teacher during the week to ask questions. I am very welcoming of the text which reads something like, 'In Mignon, is the second note of measure 57 a D or D sharp?'
6. If you have never had the opportunity to learn to read music, *learn*. We can teach you. It's an amazing and very sensible code that has endless and understandable derivations once you know the basics. I'd be glad to teach you the basics in an hour for a cup of coffee!
7. Scour the internet for information and ideas! There are Suzuki Parent Corner sites and blogs. I have a Pinterest Board with hundreds of ideas which I would be glad to share.
8. The day after your private lesson, as part of your first practice, take time with your student to sit down with your lesson notes and videos and plan the week of practice. This will help you and your student to become a strong team for the practice week ahead. By reminding yourself through the notes, you are also reminding your student as well as opening up a time for them to share with you what they remember of the lesson.

Hopefully some of these ideas will help you to keep up with your student and not be left behind too soon. For me, getting left behind by my children has been a wonderful inevitable as they surged forward deep into adulthood. I smile when my oldest, who is now 46 years old, tries to explain to me what he does for work. 'Wah, wah tech this' and 'wah, wah code that'. This is the little blondie I taught to talk and we did spelling homework together, but now, I am left behind in knowledge and understanding of what he does. However at this point in our relationship, for me that's ok, because that knowledgeable, foreknowing guide that was me then is not the Mom/friend he needs now. However, I am so grateful that when he did need me, in that way, I tried as hard and as long as possible to keep up.

Important WDSS Dates

May 1 Wednesday 5:00pm Group Class Concert Call time 4:30pm St James Sanctuary

May 6-10 Piano Rehearsals scheduled through out the week. Ask your teacher about your time.

May 19 Saturday WDSS Spring Solo Recitals 10:30am, 12:15pm, 2:00pm, 3:45pm
Sign up for your recital time with your private teacher.

WDSS Reading Party



Thanks to Lily, Isabelle, Sam, Ms Crystal, Maddie, Rowan, Autumn, Twylah, Ms Autumn, Emmy, Emerson, Ms Gill, Ms Sandy, and Ms B (taking the pic)

Congratulations! to everyone who came to WDSS' first ever Reading Party held on 1/28. Five teachers and nine students gathered at Mrs B's home for a fun time filled with sight reading and food.

Reading Parties are common among college students as a time to gather, not in the serious, structured way of orchestra rehearsals or quartet practice, but in a casual relaxed way of enjoying playing music and time relating to one another. Mistakes are expected and accepted with humor while sight-reading to enjoy the profit from all the years solitary personal practice.

At our Reading Party we played through a little Tango, a Bach Brandenburg, some tricky Mozart, all the way to a Cold Play song. The cellos were awesome, keeping us on track. The viola section, once they adjusted to two flats, was exceptionally strong! The violins hung in there while playing a million notes, Rowan's Sushi treat was a big hit. Ms Gill helped us find the correct tempos, Sandy helped us understand interpreting the beat and Ms Crystal and Ms Autumn bravely pulled the violin sections along.

We played for nearly two hours and still had stacks of music left to go. Let's plan another!

'Sight-reading an interesting piece of music is like meeting an interesting person. We enjoy the pleasure of a new encounter, sense perhaps a mutual affinity, and look forward to a deeper acquaintance.'

K Johansen/T Hardaway



Faculty Recital Fundraiser

Thank you for all of your generosity and support at the faculty recital this past weekend. We had such a great time sharing our music with you! 100% of your donations will go to need-based student scholarships for the 24/25 school year.

If you weren't able to make it to the concert and still want to donate, you may give cash or a check made out to West Denver Suzuki Strings to your private lesson teacher or send a donation through Zelle using the

email info@westdenversuzuki.com.

Thank you for investing in our musical community!

My Note Reading Journey

By Ms Autumn

“I started playing the violin after I heard Celine Dion’s performance of ‘To Love you More’ on the Jay Leno show! I was 7 years old and I thought it was the most beautiful sound I had ever heard. It was the sound that hooked me. My mother wanted to nurture my passion so she got me a violin and found me a teacher! My first teacher was a college student at the community college in Safford, AZ which is a VERY a very small town! Ms. Lela taught me by ear and with the Suzuki book, but when she graduated from the college, I didn’t have a teacher anymore. The town was so small that there was only one Suzuki teacher and she didn’t have room to take me when Ms. Lela moved. So, I joined the school orchestra. I will never forget how uncomfortable I felt in that first class when everyone was talking about scales, time signatures, rhythms, etc. Beause I had learned to play by ear I had no idea what they were talking about! I felt that I didn’t belong and so I quit. I shed many a tear with my violin since I wanted to be able to make beautiful music but I just didn’t know how! Finally, Mrs. Barney had an opening in her studio and I was able to study with her soon after all that and after I proudly presented her with Etude, she gently told me that we would back up just a bit to fix a few things. She helped bridge the gap between what I heard and what I saw in the sheet music. I dedicated myself to practicing and quickly went through books 1-8 in just a few years. I remember she blew up the Bach Double for me and taped the parts to gigantic poster boards. We color coded each position and had finger patterns for each passage.

Getting over that note-reading hump was a big one for me. Going through music school in undergrad and in graduate work even, I felt like my sight-reading skills greatly improved since you have to do it all the time! Only recently have I really began to feel comfortable sight-reading and I still practice a lot for all of my professional performances. I learned to



read alto clef when I started teaching viola 8 years ago. I started with “middle C” and counted up and down with my students! I have found that keeping note reading centralized around “note-reading” and “pattern-reading” to be the best long-term solution. Reading fingers only works if you’re going to stay in first position forever! I would recommend to anyone learning to bridge the gap between listening and reading: take it slow! It’s just like reading English or any other language that’s written out. It can be frustrating for Suzuki kids since the ear is so well-developed, but consider it an aspect of music playing that needs to be practiced and honed. Eventually, note reading will reflect the playing ability, but literally no one can sight-read as good as they can play something by memory! Keep in mind that it’s the sound that grabs us as music lovers, just like me when I wanted to play the violin. I didn’t see written sheet music and think “Wow, I need to know what that means!” I heard the violin and said “Wow, I want to learn how to play like that!” Note-reading is a means to an end, and an important one not to be taken lightly, but always keep in mind that it serves the music and the better we serve the music, all the better we’ll be, as well!”

CSO Invite from Mr Zach

As many of you know, for this season, I am playing with the Colorado Symphony Orchestra in Denver. Our schedule typically includes multiple performances each week, and before the weather gets too warm for indoor activities (I’m loving these late February sunny days!), I wanted to let you know about some interesting programs coming up at the symphony in March.

From March 8th-10th, the symphony will present three performances of Igor Stravinsky’s *Firebird Suite*, which incorporates music from his ballet of the same name. This program also includes a percussion concerto by Danny Elfman, and a theme and variation by Erich Korngold. Those last two composers both made huge marks writing for Hollywood, and *Firebird* was featured in *Fantasia: 2000*, so this might be a great concert for all the movie buffs out there.

For families with younger students, the symphony will perform Serge Prokofiev’s *Peter and the Wolf* on Sunday, March 17th at 2:30 PM. This is a great opportunity to hear the sounds of all the different parts of the orchestra along with the narration of this classic story.

There are so many wonderful ways to make music as violinists, violists, and cellists, but playing in an orchestra is one of my favorites. I hope you can make it out to some of these performances, and if you do, please say hi when you come! **Mr Zach**