

STRINGS

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Excerpts from article:

Personal Practice Planning

by Tom Heimberg

“Good practicing starts with good planning. Whether you are squeezing five minutes of practice into a busy day, or setting aside an entire afternoon, guidelines can help in sorting through the thousands of details that music study and instrument playing entail. There will certainly be adventures in the course of the work: surprises to deal with, experiments to try, problems to solve. But you can be prepared for them if you have a plan to help mobilize your attention and focus your concentration. . . .

. . . The literature of music pedagogy is packed with written teaching aids: checklists of repertoire, progressive learning plans, outlines of practice sessions, assignment calendars. You can benefit from these advance labors, rather than reinventing them. . . .

If you are seeking something broader than an intensive emphasis on time use, try *The Musicians' Practice Log*, which delves into the very psychology of the practicer. Author Burton Kaplan is well known for his Magic Mountain Marathon Practice Retreats and his seminars on practicing, which have devoted followers all over the country. This log (available from PDT, 415 West Hill Road, Morris, NY 13808, for \$9.95) is one of the tools he uses in his teaching of practice.

In addition to allocation of time (the reusable Practice Time Management Sheet is quite handy), this book attends to the practicer's emotional relationship to the practice experience. Moods, interruptions, ideas, and feelings in the course of practice, and the sense of progress or lack thereof are

important in the complete picture; the book provides a systematic approach to recording and graphing these themes.

The first 15 pages of the book give clear directions on how to use the system. This is followed by 16 weeks' worth of Daily Practice Logs and weekly summaries, followed in turn by sections devoted to weekly and monthly reflections, and graphs, technique and repertoire achievement lists, and a performance record.

‘During the eight years that I was teaching practice at the Manhattan School,’ says Kaplan, ‘I would make this agreement with my students: If they filled out the practice log, they would get an A on that part of the course. Content was never graded; they just had to make entries. It doesn't take very much time — just do it, and at the end of just a month the student might have provided himself with very valuable counsel.’

The Musicians' Practice Log is part of a well-thought-out system, and anyone can benefit from using it. In this short description the amount of record-keeping required might sound formidable, but it's not. It can be done little by little, and it all works toward a better understanding one's own relationship to practice. That's what counts.”

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