

## Alchemy in the Practice Room - Turning Time into Gold

*Faculty Panel*

*IIMIF 2020 - July 6*

### **Professor Cecylia Barczyk**

- Practicing is the act of rehearsing certain behavior over and over.
- Remember and follow certain rules. Then you can modify them and be creative!
- Observe what your teacher does.
- Observe new skills, and then build/maintain new skills.
- Remember to always warm-up before practicing!
- Think of practicing as a positive process, and practice a positive mindset.
- If you think about the complexity of your music, then you can already congratulate yourself that you are able to do this complex activity. Feel proud and fascinated by your mind, body, and soul.
- Observe as if you are a twin of yourself. As if someone is listening critically and giving you advice.
- Record yourself every day and listen critically.
- Divide your practice into sections.
- Intonation with the instrument and without it so you hear things in the whole context of the piece, not just your melody
- Utilize all sources of inspiration (art, books, etc.) Find a connection between your music and your life

### **Dr. Audrey Andrist**

- Be open to new methods and ideas of practicing.
- Always be curious about what works best for you personally.
- When learning a new piece, first focus on the following steps to progress as quickly as possible.
  - Seek out the best possible fingerings and make sure they work well at the final tempo.
  - Practice very very slowly, incorporating everything you plan to be in the final product (relaxation, posture, flexibility, intonation, articulation, etc.) Every detail. Practice slowly so you're not overloaded with all of the details.
  - The only thing slow is the tempo. Your mind is going very fast thinking of everything
  - Inch the tempo up slowly, never going faster than you can play correctly.
- Once you have the piece 'in your fingers', you are freer to explore your interpretation.
- Don't practice wrong notes! Hold yourself accountable.

- Control what you can control. You can't control a cell phone going off during a performance, but you can always control how you prepare.
- The journey of a thousand miles begins with one step! Take it one step at a time.

### Dr. James Stern

- The Double Run-Through: Perform something for yourself, then perform it again
  - Applies to pieces you know very well
  - Something very magical can happen between the first time and the second time you play it
  - A lot of the working process between run-throughs is mental
- Our psychological relationship with risk:
  - As we go through life, we periodically experience a possibility of great gain or great loss, and we usually don't take the risk because of loss/risk aversion.
  - During the first run-through, you're more likely to see the risk of each individual challenging section. You're not playing to express yourself, you're avoiding a catastrophe.
  - During the second run-through, you see the risky spots in sequence and treat them as part of the whole piece. The risk of messing up doesn't seem as bad within the big picture.

### Professor Brian Ganz

- *The Romantic Generation: "It is equally fatal to have a system, than to not have a system. One must try to combine them."*
- Combine a systematic/methodical type of practicing with a spontaneous/non-structured type

#### Structured practicing...

- The HATT trick: Hands Alone Then Together (used for memorization and learning)
  - 5 step process:
    - 1) Practice the left hand alone, 2) then add the other hand and only focus on the left hand (let the right hand do it itself)
    - 3) Practice the right hand alone, 4) then add the other hand but only focus on the left hand (let the left hand do its own thing)
    - 5) Then hands together with equal focus!
- Documentation: keep track of what you've done in your practicing
- Patience: Things can take months to learn. Grow in tempo very gradually.
  - Ex: 3 days at quarter note=100, then 3 days at quarter note=101, and so on
- Mindful: stay aware of what you are practicing

Non-structured practicing...

- Creativity, imagination, listening as an art, responding, spontaneity
- Practice performing, recording yourself, giving yourself a lesson
- We are three people when we are listening: A) The person deciding what we want to hear, B) The person executing that plan, and C) the person assessing the execution
- There is no right proportion of structured and unstructured practicing. You need to find what works best for you.
- Determine what works best for you.

### Questions & Answers:

- Is there a HATT Trick for strings?
  - Right hand: play on open strings, reverse the bowing to find what works best
  - Left hand: tap on the strings
  - When the LH is in search mode, it ceases to be a rhythmic expressive entity. Playing the LH without the bow can be freeing because it can express its own character without the inhibition of the bow and without hearing it.
  - Bring what is somewhat unconscious/muscle memory to being an intentional action (to focus on detail and not solely rely on muscle memory)
  - Play the piece in a different key to test if you actually know a piece really well
  - Hands-free practicing: Can you think your way through the whole piece?
- What is your warm-up process before starting your hefty practice?
  - Dr. Andrist
    - Upper and lower body stretches, sometimes while sitting at the piano
    - Scales and arpeggios at various tempos, starting slowly. Play at top speed at the end of the warm-up.
  - Professor Ganz
    - Hannon exercises! Four measures up and down in several keys, then zoom through all the keys
  - Dr. Stern
    - No set material for warm-ups
    - The Double Run-Through! Any material (scales, pieces, etc.)
    - Ten-minute scale routine that takes you through three-octave major/minor scale, thirds, sixths, four-octave scale
  - Professor Barczyk
    - C major scale and improvisation, listening to the cello's response and acoustics of the room

-Warm-up has to be something that you're looking forward to and enjoy doing

- How do you practice for large amounts of time without hurting yourself?
  - It is common for musicians to be in the mindset of “no pain no gain,” but taking care of yourself is important
  - Utilize mental practice as well as physical practice
  - Listen to your teachers, peers, etc. and take care of yourself
  - Too much practice can make things more difficult
  - Really listen to your body
  - The majority of musicians do NOT practice 9+ hours a day...it is only possible for some to maintain that focus and not seriously hurt themselves
  - It is also really difficult to keep up your mental focus. Quality is more important than quantity
  - On a performance day, sometimes it is okay to step away from practicing and find peace elsewhere
  - Ask yourself how much practice is optimal?
  - When a string player practices more than they should, they risk maintaining a good sound/tone