

About “Practicing”

I ask my students to play the bass every day of the week but one. One day should be a day off to allow the muscles to recuperate from the effort required to play the bass correctly. These practice sessions should be at least the length of the lesson time and modeled after the lesson.

Tone Research This is the search for the most beautiful tone that can be made on that day by that bass, that bow and that bass player. (Actually the tuning procedure is also tone research because it is impossible to tune the bass correctly without using one’s best bow technique.) Tone research in its simplest manifestation is playing one note, say four strokes on open D or a harmonic, listening to what comes out and searching for a way to make the tone more beautiful. When I cannot think of a way to beautify the note further, I play some other note and try to make it as beautiful as the first one. For instance, I will make a stopped note have the same quality as the open note.

The tone research phase of the practice session lasts for as long as the student remains interested in the subject, probably a few minutes. After tone research I suggest playing scales.

Scales I have the impression that nobody is born liking to play scales. It’s an acquired taste, so it might be sensible to do it early in the practice session. It is certainly nice to carry over sensations from tone research into the scales.

I introduce the idea of working on technique in the abstract, the habit of playing scales, to my students when they arrive at the second piece in Book 2 of the repertoire, “Music Box.” More or less about the time the student begins Book 3 he acquire my volume of scales and exercises, *Vade Mecum for the Double Bass*.

The scale player's routine is this: Each scale is repeated five times without pause. On each repetition the student focuses his attention on something specific, alternating between the left hand and the right hand. Half the time allotted for scale playing is spent on fingerings, and half on bowing variations. The scales are played without stopping in order to develop mental and physical stamina but it is important to know when to quit. Fatigue and boredom are both excellent reasons to stop. A student can use this procedure for three consecutive days, then take a day off (from scale playing).

Playing Review Pieces with the Reference Recording After the scales it is time to review pieces already learned and play along with the reference recording. Dr. Suzuki said that our ability grows by playing the review pieces. We only study the new piece so that it will become a review piece.

Studying a New Piece I recommend studying new material at the end of the session. That way, if there is an interruption or energy lags, the crucial work has been done.

Practice Pointers

Practice at the correct tempo. In any passage we need to establish the correct relation among movement, space and time in the left hand and weight, speed and placement for the bow. But the coordination of these six factors is dependent on the tempo. So when we practice slowly, we are doing something, but not studying the passage in question. If the tempo seems too fast, employ the procedure “Stop-Think-Play” as outlined in the Book 2 preparatory exercise for “The Happy Farmer” and in *Vade Mecum*, the preparatory exercise for the universal fingering of the one-octave scale.

In a similar vein it is very discouraging to hear a student stop to replay notes each time an accident occurs. It is much more efficient to notice the accident and correct it on the next pass. If there is a problem that cannot be corrected just by being noticed (e.g., “I went too far; I will go less far next time.”) one can rejoice because an interesting opportunity has presented itself for examination. The problematical passage is isolated and the student searches for its resolution.

It is at moments like these that the student can make real discoveries. One of my favorite examples is “the third solution.” There is this way and that way, and then there is also a third way that didn’t occur to me at first. We see that in life as well as music all the time. The proper solution turns out to be the one that didn’t fit our preconceptions.

Life is short and we have physical limitations about how long we can play in one day. But when we practice we must behave as if there is all the time in the world to take an interest in the smallest detail. If you are really in a hurry to make progress, discover what lies beyond logging hours by the clock.

Bad Days? Some days we “don’t feel like” practicing. If one refuses at first to give in to these feelings and goes ahead with the work even on the bad days, they gradually stop happening. The student has to experience this waning of off days for himself to believe the foregoing statement is true.

ESSENTIAL POINTS FOR DEVELOPMENT OF ABILITY

1. The student should listen to the reference recording every day to develop musical sensitivity.
2. Parents and teachers must constantly remind the student to produce a ringing tone.
3. Correct posture, relaxed bow hold, and accurate intonation are minimum requirements at all stages of development.
4. Parents and teachers should develop the student's motivation to practice correctly by encouraging the love of music.
5. The student should master the technical point of each piece before proceeding to the next piece.
6. Old pieces should be reviewed constantly.
7. The student should perform frequently in group lessons and recitals.