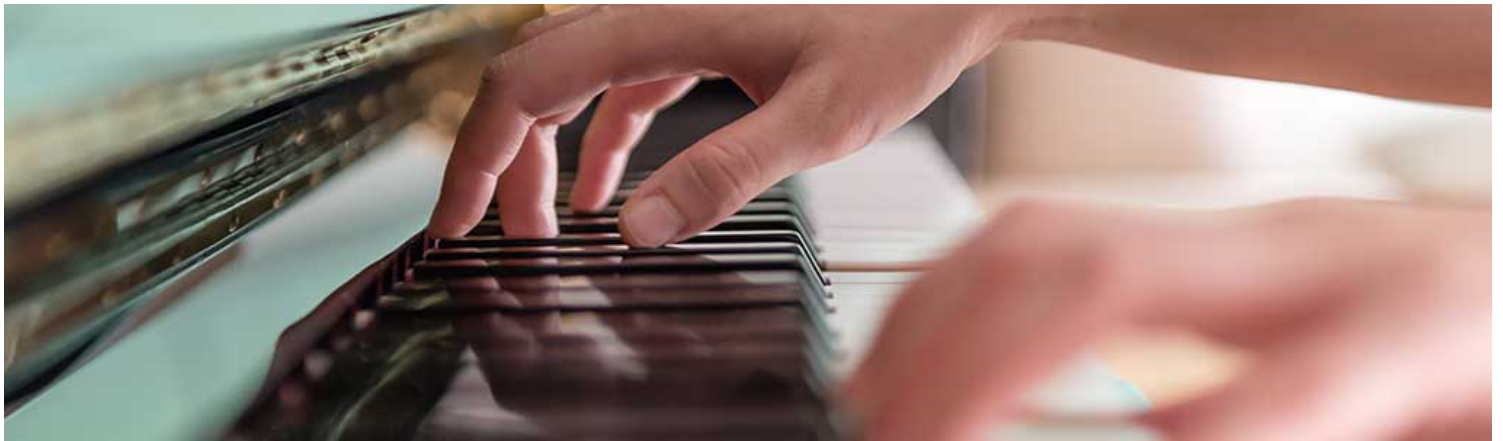


KEEP YOUR MUSICAL SKILLS SHARP: MAKING MUSIC FOR LIFE ALL YEAR LONG!

by Brandon Yahn



Practice Creates Proficiency

When someone asks me what it takes to become a successful musician, my answer is simple: Practice. Students who practice and play outside of class or lessons typically outperform those who simply practice in class or lessons.

Successful musicians don't simply read and play music, they make it their own, putting a creative spin on each piece as a reflection of their own personality. My best students don't stop playing once their band classes end for the summer, they make "Music For Life" throughout the calendar year!

Many parents and students are well aware of the concept of the "summer slide" where academic skills developed over the school year backslide a bit over summer vacation. This phenomenon occurs with all depreciating skill sets. Many student athletes now practice year round to maintain and improve their skill and technique. This same idea holds true to musical skills as well.

Playing music requires fine motor skills that are developed through repetition. Trombone slides, fingerings, and holding a mallet properly are examples of processes that require strong muscle memory.

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How Much Practice Is Necessary?

In my experience as both a music teacher and band director, I have found it takes up to a month for students to "shake off the rust" and catch up to their peers who have practiced over the summer. While it's easy to see the difference between students who have practiced over the summer and those who have not, the question of recommended summer practice frequency and duration still remains.

Younger students typically require less time practicing than High School students. I normally recommend five weekly practice sessions to avoid the "summer slide," with no more than 20 minutes spent in each session.

The added complexity of technique and increased level of competition experienced by High School students often requires additional practice time to maintain proficiency. Normally, I recommend longer session durations of about 30 minutes in length, taking place about five to six days a week.

Students striving to achieve mastery of their instruments typically practice about one to one and a half hours daily, six to seven times a week. One particular student of mine who planned on making a career in music spent as much as three hours daily in the practice room. That's some dedication!

While repetition breeds familiarity, it can be difficult to achieve with short attention spans and busy summer schedules. There are a few things your student can do to keep interested and engaged in their practice sessions

Find Someone to Play With

Practicing by yourself can grow stagnant after awhile. Making practice a social exercise can help mix things up a bit! Occasionally playing a few pieces with friends, neighbors, or siblings can keep things interesting and help students learn from each other.

Attend a Live Performance

There are no shortage of music venues and performances scheduled throughout the summer season. Each opportunity to watch a professional musician as they play helps students learn through observation. Arriving early offers students an excellent opportunity to see how musicians conduct themselves on stage.

Things to look for while observing professional musicians include their warm-up process, warm-up song selection, level of focus, developed sense of confidence, where they're looking, and their display of sensory perception (professional musicians are influenced by feel, touch, visual cues, and auditory

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stimuli). This level of focus and appearance of "acting like you've been there before" are intangible qualities that often take students some time to adopt, so it helps to provide them with exposure to these experiences early on.

Find Fun Pieces To Practice

Band class is out for the summer, so it's time for students to have some fun with their practice selection! There is no shortage of sheet music dedicated to popular music that kids immediately recognize. Practicing tunes from Star Wars or Harry Potter help students stay engaged in their music, and keep them coming back for more!

While each of these suggestions may help keep students engaged in their musical pursuits throughout the summer, it's easy to lose track of these activities during the busy summer months. It's important to remember that even a little playing is still much better than no playing at all. Just because Band is over, doesn't mean music is. That's why we recommend "Making Music for Life"!

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