

Practising Technique

Before starting with this one, it might be useful to define what technique is or could be.

Almost everybody has a certain idea about what technique is. Most of the time musicians think of technique in terms of that which you need to be able to play difficult passages properly. Of course this is right, but this way of thinking may have the consequence that you think of practising technique as something you 'must' do.

The 'must' could become a problem. Technique could get a negative aftertaste, which doesn't help. So I would like to redefine it: ***Practising technique is everything you do to express yourself and the music in a better way.*** With this definition technique isn't emphasized anymore, but the expression of personality and of music is. Technique becomes something very 'subjective', not an objective pressure or demand. You don't think of all the things you can't play anymore but you think about the music.

The musicians we admire often have a very 'subjective' technique, like incredibly good fiddlers from Hungary, Ireland, India or drummers from Africa....

Many musicians think that they have to practise technique a lot before they can play. I would say: turn it around, ***play and if there's anything in your playing you don't like and want to improve, try to find out what the problem is, invent some exercises*** or look them up in books or ask your teacher for advice. Try to improve this particular aspect of your playing.

There's only one good reason to practise technique and that is that you want to play something you can't play yet.

When you practise technique, don't concentrate on technique, concentrate on the sound you want to hear. Then use your arms and fingers (or mouth) to bring it out to the listener.

Sometimes you'll feel that too many muscles are involved or that your muscles are involved too much. Try to avoid any unnecessary tension.

When you practise technique, again - try to be the listener, imagine that somebody else is playing.

As soon as it becomes difficult, try not to be involved.

Don't try too hard, don't want too much to be good, let your body do the work.

If practising technique is supposed to help you play a certain part of your music easily, ***it's better to practise as easily as possible*** too (see Kenny Werner's book 'Effortless Mastery' in the appendix)

What if you've tried very hard to play a difficult passage and still can't do it?

1 - Don't try hard.

2 - Choose another way of practising, for example: work on several difficult passages, tunes or problems at the same time. By focussing on more than just one problem, you create the opportunity to succeed in at least one of the things you're working on.

3 - You might be practising something which actually isn't possible for you to play because it doesn't suit you.