

Loving Every Note You Play

By Matthew Herman

Why do we play music? What is the purpose of us doing a job that makes us hustle hard for little money? We devote our entire lives to this craft and for what? At 21 years old, I've put in WAY more time into my studies than any lawyer or doctor fresh out of trade school, yet at a gig, I still get treated like "the help". No one gives us the respect we deserve for the time we put in.

So why do we do it?

If you're reading this, chances are you are a dedicated musician and you have answer to these questions. Everyone's answer is unique but it all stems from loving the craft. But really, when you think about it, what is love? You say you love the craft, but have you stopped to think about what that really means? Does it mean deep admiration for music/playing? Does it refer to your connection with the instrument? Is loving something a reference to having fun or general enjoyment? Does it translate to a physical feeling?

In my time on Earth, and it hasn't been too long, I've been asking myself these questions. What does it mean to love someone or something? I love my mom, but it's a different kind of love than I have for my dog, which is different than my love for a significant other. What I have figured out *for myself* is what I consider to be the purest and direct form of love. For me, it comes with a physical sensation in my heart. That sensation is caused by what I believe is a release of dopamine and adrenaline. It is my body literally telling me that I feel what I interpret as love. This feeling is also present in joy.

This is probably a good place to talk about the differences between happiness and joy. My life has been a pursuit of figuring this out and every day I learn more and more. My views on this are personal to me and my purpose for sharing it is to hopefully ignite the drive for you to figure this out for yourself. For me at this point, I feel that happiness is a temporary goal that is derivative of a thing. I get happiness from cleaning my room; however, I get joy from holding my dog in my arms. Joy is a deeper form of happiness that also is derivative of an action, however the feeling is inexplicable and incomprehensible. The best way that I can describe it is to express it in the word "ughhh". It is a deep feeling in my heart, most likely caused by hormones. That feeling is short lived but the after effect is a brightness that follows me everywhere I go. In that state, I am joyous.

How does any of this relate to music, you may ask?

This explanation starts with an exercise that I learned from the novel "The Celestine Prophecy". The goal of the exercise is to open up your heart and feel unconditional love. Please try this with

an open mind because some of you reading this may think I'm nuts. Maybe I am, and it is good to be critical. Just experience this first before you make your judgments. Here is step by step what I want you to do. I also have an audio guide to this that you can check out on YouTube.

Steps.

1. Go outside and find a tree. Find the biggest, oldest, wisest tree that you can find although this exercise is equally effective on any tree. I just find it easier to do this when the tree is beautify large.
2. Look at the tree. Pay attention to the tree. Look at the ridges that it has in the bark. Pay attention to the leaves. Look closely at things you never really look closely to. Imagine you are *observing* a tree of the first time and you want to see everything! Down to the little bugs crawling and the cell like structure of the shapes on the leaves.
3. Now, realize that all of that is natural. It is so pattern like. What does that say about the world? About the universe? Isn't it super amazing and intriguing? This tree is alive!!! We share our planet with it. There are roots spanning far underneath the ground. Those roots are connected to *Mycelia* (look it up) under the ground which are connected to neighboring trees and bushes. The tree is connected to all the plant life around it. It is another being that communicates with others of its kind. It is breathing. It is alive.
4. How beautiful is that? Isn't the tree gorgeous? Observe its beauty like you never have before. Every aspect about the tree is beautiful. Allow that beauty to fill your heart.
5. Everything in this world has a vibration. Go up to the tree and put your hands on it. Feel its vibration. Feel its energy. Keep breathing and experiencing this. Allow that feeling in to your heart and your soul. Stay with it. Feel the energy.
6. Allow yourself to feel unconditional love for this tree. What does that feel like? There is an energy to that and an energy to you. With your hands still on the tree, share your energy with it. You can feel the transfer of energy. You can feel the life in that tree. You can feel the love in your heart.

I'm not saying everyone will have this experience. This exercise may present itself in tons of different ways so be open to anything and try not to have specific expectations. This is just how I perceived the experience, and I am relaying the information to you.

For those that felt something, wasn't that amazing? It is a beyond special experience.

"How does this relate to music" you may ask!

What if that feeling of unconditional love was present in your heart with every note you play? Wouldn't that change your musical experience? That's what im currently working on in my practicing and I feel that I slip into that feeling more and more without thinking about it.

Start by playing a single note. Treat that note like you treated the tree. Observe it like you never have before. Feel it's vibrations! That note is perfect and beautiful. Open your heart the same way as you did to the tree, but to the sound that you're hearing. Keep on playing the note once it decays. Experience its full decay. Know in your heart that your instrument is alive and its sound is it speaking.

I would have never come to this realization without the teachings of Kenny Werner and Effortless Mastery. His teachings opened the way for me to use the heart as a part of my playing. If you haven't read his book, seen his videos, or taken his courses, I suggest you go down the rabbit hole. One of the goals of EM (Effortless Mastery) is for the instrument to play itself without your intervention. You become a passenger to your playing rather than an active part in it. This also becomes present when you incorporate the heart into your musicianship. I have found (and again this may just be true to me) that using unconditional love in your playing allows for another way for your instrument to play itself.

I have found that incorporating the heart into my playing improves my general feeling of love. After doing these exercises, I am a much more grateful for everyone and everything. My mindset is one of love and thankfulness, rather than feeling generally indifferent or stress. This is how improving your musicianship improves your personality and your mindset of living. Everything has an energy. Everything has a story. The seat you're sitting on was either crafted by a person or by a machine engineered by and operated by people. It was the efforts of others that allows you to be where you are right now. Be thankful and never forget that.