

Common App: Imperfection as the Solution to Perfectionism

Two years ago, I hit “play” on a randomly-generated Apple Music playlist and heard a song that ignited a love for music which has occupied my day-to-day life ever since. I had been teaching myself guitar for about six months, since I found my dad’s old classical guitar in the basement, and a friend showed me how to play The Beatles’ “Blackbird.” However, it was not until sheer chance brought me John Fahey’s “Requiem for John Hurt” that my sporadic, half-hour practice sessions turned serious, driven by a desire to create newfound melodies.

Setting aside a few hours whenever possible to explore guitar allows me to take a break from any difficulties I may be having, and doing so reorganizes my thoughts in a way that often provides a clearer picture of how these problems should be handled. I have pieced together a solid foundation of the complex language that is music theory, discovered new genres of music, and gotten over a lifelong fear of performing. However, the most fundamental takeaway from my experience has been learning to appreciate where I am right now, and enjoying improvement as it comes.

While my love of the instrument never falters, I face a challenge common to all aspiring musicians. I find myself frustrated by the lack of instantaneous progress being made and wish to be magically gifted the ability of a musician whose vast experience allows them to play anything without hours spent repeating a single piece of music. I wish to skip the toil so making music can be a purely creative exercise. I do not aim for a technically perfect recreation of someone else’s already-beautiful work, but rather wish to adapt it to fit my own musical preferences. While I am

not yet advanced enough to have a unique style, my own method is developing with every spontaneous idea that arises during practice, every mistake that ends up sounding better than the original, and every familiar element I use in a new way.

In my pursuit of playing as well as I can, I tend to focus on faults in my work so I can resolve them. This problem also used to affect my passion for cooking, which I have had since I was an infant who loved to pull out every pot and pan to form my own miniature kitchen. I have learned, however, to enjoy the act of creating as much as the final product by seeing the joy food can bring despite what I may see as its shortcomings. By acknowledging how the simple act of sharing a meal will make my friends and family happy even if the outcome is not exactly as I had hoped, I am able to worry less about how the meal will come out and have more fun while cooking, which in turn leads to better and more creative food. Similarly, I have realized the limitations on my ability to play guitar are in fact another way to develop my own style, as they force me to find a new way - my own - to express the same emotion.

In recent months, I have tried to adapt this lesson to all areas of life by learning to be content with - better yet, enjoy - the place I am at right now. I have overcome a feeling of failure to achieve some vague and impossible goal, for the goal of any pursuit is not mastery, but continuous exploration. By applying myself to this consistent challenge, I will continue to learn for the rest of my life, and my curiosity and love for the craft will only grow with time. A journey without end should not cause bitter distaste, but lift you from a place of burden, bringing constant energy and inspiration.