

Title:

Play Piano - There is No Substitute for Practice

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Summary:

There is no substitute for practice. By spending a couple of hours with your instrument every day you develop a special relationship with it.

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Article Body:

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There is no substitute for practice. By spending a couple of hours with your instrument every day you develop a special relationship with it.

You need to have a regular practice routine that contains certain constant elements (such as warm-up exercises) as well as variable elements that address your current avenue of study. And performing doesn't count as practice. Although playing gigs, performing in Church or for your personal enjoyment is an essential part of your musical development, it won't replace time in the practice room.

There are times, however, when you just can't maintain a regular practice routine. All the other elements of your life crowd in and you find you have to grab a spare hour of practice wherever you can. It seems futile to embark on any long-range practice projects that will require weeks or months of steady work, because you know it won't happen.

So should you give up?

Must you put off the idea of improving your musicianship until you have more time (and are you sure that time will come)? Here's an alternative - I call it "target bombing."

You have an hour to practice. Find something to practice that is not currently in your arsenal. It could be a lick, a scale, a set of chord voicings, a

section of a tune, a transcribed solo, anything. But this is important: it must be small. Don't set a general goal (e.g., mastering the McCoy Tyner style of pentatonic scale improvisation). Instead, select a little piece of business (such as a particular pentatonic lick to be learned in 12 keys). Assume that this is the only opportunity you'll have to learn this particular item. Tomorrow you'll move on to something else.

Approach the hour's practice with this attitude: "What can I do within the next hour to permanently improve my musicianship in one very small but measurable way?"

More specifically, "What can I do to master this one item so that it will be self-reinforcing, so that it will immediately begin to show up in my actual performances?"

Your plan is to devour this one small thing so completely that it can't slip away.

If it's a lick, make it a short one and learn it in several keys. Work out the fingering.

Play it over random ii-V progressions.

Solo over a few tunes and work that lick in wherever you can.

If it's a chord voicing, practice it in 12 keys, work it into tunes, and make sure you can make smooth transitions to and from other voicings.

If you don't get it by the end of the hour, you lose it forever. But if you ingest it fully enough, then it will immediately begin to show up in your performances. It will become a small element of your style and you'll never lose it.

This is target bombing. It's intense, focused, and can be tremendously effective and satisfying. Although at first it may be a method that you use because you can't find time for the more traditional, routine-oriented practice, you may find it so successful and fun that you make it your primary approach.

After all, you climb a mountain with thousands of small steps. Take each step so well that you never have to take it again.

I've seen this approach work wonders for many students, and I use it all the time myself. I've also seen it fail miserably for others. It requires a type

of tunnel vision, a willingness to gnaw on one thing for one hour without letting other concerns intrude.

You might feel as if you are playing when you should be working or that focusing on a tiny area is not productive when there are so many major areas to be covered. But once you successfully target bomb a few small items, you'll realize the needlessness of your concerns.

Anyway, try this method on - see if it fits your style