

# HOW TO MAKE THE MOST OF YOUR PRACTICE TIME

## The Practice Session

- Learn back to front (or at most difficult part first). (Reid Nibley)
- There is a tempo at which you can play at 100% accuracy. Find it! Start there! (Norene Emerson)
- Resist the temptation to dive in and play. First mark repeats, phrases, fingering, pedaling; then work 1 voice, 2 voices, 3 voices. (Richard Elliott)
- Practice each hand alone, feet alone, 2 units together, 3 together. (Parley Belnap)
- Do the hardest parts first as exercises; then with rhythms.
- Write in pedaling and fingering (then follow them) to put habit in your favor.
- If you don't like a printed fingering or pedaling, change it. Don't just ignore it.
- Use isolation and augmentation for problem spots.
- Use a metronome; it keeps you honest.
- Work on a piece slowly, one phrase or section at a time; don't reinforce errors with repetition.
- If you make a mistake twice, do something to prevent it next time.
- Don't sit on the bench for more than 45-50 minutes without a break.
- Don't stay on one piece too long.
- Incorporate all elements as you learn (within reason).
- Do not always start at the beginning; be able to start anywhere.
- Separate rhythm from music to get it right.
- Use a consistent counting system (e.g. French count).
- Start counting the measure(s) before the places where you have rhythmic problems.
- Mark everything: YOU WILL NOT REMEMBER, especially when stressed.

## Preparing for performance

- Remember that you will perform exactly as you practice, except worse; do not expect some miraculous transformation in performance.
- Learn the difference between the two modes: practice and performance.
- Do not stop at mistakes in performance mode.
- Practice "the first time through."
- Aim for 115% accuracy in practice. Then when you lose 20% in performance (conservative estimate), you will be at 95%, not 75%.
- Do not practice in a vacuum; you won't be that lucky in performance.
- Do not make significant changes (including corrections) close to performance time.
- Use slow practice (half time, quarter time), especially just before performances.
- Practice everything: walking out, getting on the bench, setting up the music, hitting pistons, turning pages, getting off the bench, etc.
- Choose clothes carefully – not too tight, not too slippery, not too much friction, not restrictive (cuffs, skirt length and width, SLIPS).
- Practice performing the whole thing in your mind (imagery).

## In Performance

- Be sensible: get enough sleep and exercise; avoid caffeine and medication if possible.
- Try not to get tight and tense or hunch your shoulders. Practice relaxation and deep breathing.
- Find ways to get back on track when things go wrong: sing along, zero in, count.
- When necessary, reduce demands. (Do the double instead of the triple.)

## Final Advice

- Put time in your favor! All practice time is not equal. Five hours at 30 minutes a day for ten days will make more difference than five hours in one sitting.
- Remember that playing for yourself (or anybody else) is NOT practicing.