

# Forewords

'I find this an inspiring and, may I say, revolutionary approach to this tricky subject. Practice is such an important topic and you have drilled it to the core. Your approach is revolutionary but also a natural progression from your previous work and philosophy: your suggestions for practice really are innovative though in many ways quite obvious. Empowerment, motivation and independent learning are key principles – all of which provide a foundation for meaningful and profitable practice during the time each week that pupils are not with us. This book provides so many answers and gives so many ideas: you have not only introduced a new approach to practice but you have also shared so many tips and ideas to help teachers put practice into practice!'

*Brian Ley, former music adviser, inspector and consultant*

'It is so refreshing to read your books – I do so with a smile on my face as you just hit the spot. I do believe that your books should be compulsory reading for all those downtrodden teachers who don't have any connection with their peers or find any joy in their teaching.'

*Diane Widdison, Musicians' Union National Organiser, Education and Training*

'As a music teacher, *The Practise Process* has rejuvenated my teaching. My students have embraced the opportunity to be *empowered* to practise rather than pressed to do so. The 'to do' list is no more, replaced by a collaborative process, resulting in many students starting journeys of independent learning, creativity and critical thinking. It has been a joy to watch children blossom and develop in their musical learning with wonderful compositions written, improvisations played, composers discovered and scales actually learnt! The benefits are two way, I have learnt from my students. The 21st century child is more autonomous than ever, embracing the opportunity to be a 'partner' in their practice programmes. Bravo Paul: as always, you show us a way to walk around the side of the mountain instead of having to go over the top of it. My students and their parents are very grateful, as am I: you have expanded my thinking yet again!'

*Karen Marshall, teacher*

'...In *The Practice Process* you are right in the stream of research and thinking about effective formative assessment, next-step marking and enabling the child to own their learning journey – all disciplines from the classroom which you are translating, applying and extending into music teaching and learning. You do this in a way that feels intuitive rather than artificial and theoretical: 'Ah yes, of course, why aren't I doing that already?' In particular I love the practice map (visual!), the integration with life, the way you integrate the psychological with the technical and social, and the many ideas and suggestions you

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## What we actually do during that time we call practice

*'Practice is the search for ever greater joy in movement and expression.'*  
Yehudi Menuhin

Let me begin by asking you a surprisingly tricky question. Can you, in a short sentence, express what pupils should do when they practise? You don't have to grapple with it, of course, but I'd really like you to try before reading on. Here it is again:

### What should pupils do when they practise?

Here are a number of responses from teachers:

*'Think about what I taught them and then do their best to bring those ideas to life.'*

*'Have fun playing their instrument.'*

*'Go over what we did in the lesson, work at what they can't do and correct their mistakes.'*

*'A lot of thinking.'*

Some responses from parents:

*'Work for about half an hour a day and concentrate hard.'*

*'Practise a lot with a metronome and remember to do all the markings.'*

*'Whatever they want to play.'*

*'Work on the things they were taught in the lesson and try to perfect them.'*

*'Anything musical.'*

And some responses from pupils:

*'Go over the stuff from the lesson.'*

*'Try to get my scales right.'*

*'It's just something I have to do – I don't think about it really.'*

*'Repeat exercises until I can do them correctly.'*

*'Go over the things I can't do.'*

*'Play the bits I get stuck on.'*

*'Play through my favourite pieces.'*

*'Play my pieces until I get them fluent.'*

*'Get my instrument out and play it for twenty minutes.'*

*'I just grab my clarinet and start playing.'*

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## Different goals, different practice?

No two people have *exactly* the same musical aspirations. Some practise to become professional players or singers, for others it is a hobby. Some pupils are very committed and focused, others less so. Some just like to 'play for fun'.

In addition, practice content and the methods employed by a beginner would seem to be very different compared to someone who has been playing for one or two years. For those who have been playing for five or ten years they may seem significantly different again.

I've often had conversations with adults who express a certain resentment that their teachers were not always in tune with their particular musical aspirations. They didn't enjoy what they were told to practise. Too much of it seemed irrelevant to their musical ambitions. They felt that with more sympathetic understanding they may have got much more from their music and might still be playing now.

**So does this mean that we should prescribe different ways to practise? Are there different practice procedures for different practice-types?**

I know a trombonist who plays in a show band on a cruise ship. He desperately wanted to move into a symphony orchestra, and to this end he would practise for many hours a day. But he didn't know how to listen to himself sufficiently well; he didn't think deeply enough about his playing; he didn't make good connections. It wasn't *effective* practice, so he didn't improve as much as he needed to, and as a result remained much at the same level, and on that cruise ship.

**So are there different kinds of practice? I would suggest just two kinds: *effective practice* and *unproductive practice* (or to put it a bit more bluntly, *good practice* and *bad practice*).**

If we set up our beginners with a really effective approach, that approach will remain broadly the same as they develop. And as they develop even further, perhaps to expert levels (whether as an amateur or a professional), the overall approach *still* remains very much the same.

As musicians become more advanced there will obviously be developments in their practice *technique*: developing players and singers will become more analytical; they will learn to take more trouble over details; they will become increasingly self-reliant, but the fundamental approach (content and method) remains very similar. That's why it is so important to instil effective practice habits from the very beginning. And once a systematic approach has been established it should allow all pupils to develop, each in their own way, as much as they desire.