



Guide for Music Parents & Music Students

American Music Institute

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Why do most people drop out of music lessons?

By Remus Badea

There is no doubt that music is one way that a select few can make a lot of money. However, that does not come that easily. In other words, you need to put in a lot of effort before you can start reaping in rewards from your music career. One such effort is studying in music lessons. But not everyone who enrolls in music lessons ends up achieving what they wanted. What prompts someone talented to leave the music lessons they need to develop?

“The best way for a student to get out of difficulty is to go through it” — Aristotle

As an art, music has to be formally learned to bring out the best of person’s musical talent. It is a journey and a long one that requires patience, practice, and perseverance. Not many, sorry to say, soldier on consistently to the ultimate goal they had in mind of becoming a musician, simply because they prematurely ended their studies. Why do so many people drop out of music lessons?

Absence of love and passion for the music theory

Yes, you may be talented, but those that don’t have enough enthusiasm or enough passion towards music end up dropping out. Passion is the music engine propeller.

Too high expectations

High expectations are important for success in anything, however, too much of it will nose dive your talent. If you go into music lessons expecting it to be easy to learn you will tend to drop out of the lessons, never to be seen again.

Ego

Whenever you walk into a music class, there is a tendency to rank yourself too highly in comparison to other student musicians. To your surprise the roomful of students has guys more talented than you. This creates a complete reversal of your personal expectations graph, then discouragement sets in and some students drop out. You have to be humble to succeed as a student of music (or anything, for that matter).

“Most of us have very clear memories of the self-critical internal conversation running on in our heads while we were playing poorly, and yet it often seems that we hardly remember noticing it at all while we were playing well.” — Barry Green, *Green, Barry., The Inner Game of Music*

Practice makes perfect, but not to some

The music theory taught in class is not enough to put you at the top of the game. This calls for dedication in practicing to perfect what has been learned in your lessons. Students who rely on these lessons only, end up having hoarse voices, uncoordinated chords and so on.

Wavered Focus

You may wonder how focus may lead one to quit music lessons. Focus means the attention that is paid to something. Usually music lessons dropouts have very poor concentration and attention levels both in class and at home while practicing. Distractions like phones, friends and multitasking messes with one's progress and understanding. With these misses, their progress slows and their interest in learning music stalls, leading them to drop out.

Deficiency in moral support

For any adult or children taking music lessons, moral support from teachers, parents and friends is paramount to guarantee the success. This inspiration from family and friends, however small, can be enough to motivate the student to success.

Teaching mode

The student may dislike the teaching technique of the teacher and this may lead them to quit lessons, since the flow of knowledge from teacher to student has been derailed. Unfortunately, the student may quit lessons rather than change teachers.

Tight Schedules

Music lessons require a lot of work and dedication for talent to shine. It takes a lot of assignments and practice, i.e., doing one thing over and over again in a week. Some students find these routines very boring and tiresome and they end up exiting lessons.

To avoid drop outs, teachers should teach professionally. Students should be passionate about the art of music and dedicate time and resources to get most out of their lessons. Parents and the friends should offer moral support and much-needed inspiration to students. Finding a place for practicing in the student's schedule of work/school, family, friends, sports, etc., is the key to preventing burn-out.

Did you know that those who attend music lessons and finish them diligently are found to be sharper in other fields? This becomes a win- win for music students. Press on till the end!

Remus Badea is Concertmaster of Southwest Symphony Orchestra, adjunct professor at Elmhurst College, and Executive Director of American Music Institute.

What is the best way to learn music theory systematically?

By Remus Badea

If you are looking forward to learning music theory or taking music classes, it is important to know that there are many ways to go. However, it is equally important to remember that not all methods will work for everyone. Every student has to find the best way for them.

Before I describe the different ways to systematically learn music theory, I will first define what I mean by the term: music theory. It is the study of practices and possibilities of music. It is derived from the observations of how musicians and composers make music and it also includes hypothetical speculation.

It describes the academic study and analysis of fundamental elements of music such as pitch, rhythm, harmony and form but also refers to the descriptions, concepts and beliefs related to music.

A course in music theory will introduce you to the theory of music, provide you with the skills needed to read and write musical notation, as well as to understand how to analyze, and listen from this critical perspective. It will provide the basis for the further study of music both from a theoretical and practical point of view: musicology, pastiche and free composition, analysis, performance, and aural skills.

The study of music has been made easier by the availability of apps, websites, blogs and social media. These media are helpful in the learning process.

Basic methods for learning music theory

There are different ways to learn music theory and it is essential to know them, particularly if you really have a passion for music. Let us discuss some of them below. It will certainly go a long way in helping you understand what music is all about.

Learning the basic elements that make up music theory:

- The musical alphabet - The musical alphabet goes to the letter G of the English alphabet. One has to learn all of the alphabets and where the half steps are and are not.
- Scales - Learning the scale is equivalent to having mastered the song. Every song is based off a scale. The scale helps in figuring out what notes belong where when playing a song. For a guitarist, for example, they are necessary when playing a solo performance.

- Intervals - The creation of moods and feelings in a song or with music is done by combining, isolating and switching combinations of notes. A change in intervals will most certainly alter the mood of the song drastically.

For example, a chord progression that goes from the 1 chord to the 2 chord sounds different when the 2 chord is played on its own.

This approach of learning the music theory should be used while the learner is focusing on his/her goals.

Learning for an individual who knows the notes, names and values involves the following:

- Learning the key signatures: this involves the major key, the minor key, and the scales.
- Basic triads – on this the learner should learn how to deal with the triads in the lead sheet.
- Functions of chords – the tonic, dominant, and predominant chords are the most common and useful. They help when one goes to the chord progressions.
- Common chord progressions – these are the commonly used chord progressions.

Another recommended skill to ensure that the above method is effective is getting the aural skills (ear training). These help in identifying the structural elements in the music you listen to.

The procedure involves:

- Interval identification – this is mostly up to the learner.
- Melodic dictation - this involves the learner listening to a simple piece of music and writing it down.
- Bass line dictation – this involves listening to any type of music and writing the bass line.
- Harmonic dictation – this involves listening to music with multiple voices. The learner can write down all of the voices or write the melody/bass and the chord progressions.

It is recommended that to learn well, the learner should focus on listening to a lot of music and studying different books and reading music theory blogs and websites to understand the various approaches to music theory.

To understand music theory, one should also study ear training. In this case, the learner chooses what procedure to use when doing music theory.

These are the topics a learner should consider in learning music theory. Please note the order in which they are written.

- Basics of musical notation: these are the symbols a student must learn to read music. They include the staff, clefs, and notes.
- Advanced notations include key signatures, time signatures, advanced clefs, dynamics, and combinations of notes to create chords and complex rhythms.
- Ear training and dictation: this involves jotting down written music as you listen.
- More advanced harmonic theory: these include non-harmonic tones, borrowed chords, and secondary dominants.
- Scales and their relationships to melody and key.
- Musical form (the overall structure of a piece of music) and its relationship to harmonic areas.
- Counterpoint – this is the relationship between voices that are interdependent harmonically yet independent in rhythm and contour.

Music theory is not a modular course when studying. Since it is speculative, it is recommended that an individual uses what works for them. The above-mentioned methods of study are just some of those that have worked for other people and they may or may not work for the student. However, if they don't the learner should not give up. Continuous study and research from the internet and books can produce a way that would better coincide with their goals.

The student should utilize all avenues until the best, simplest and most effective way is found. Listening to music is a very appropriate way to practice.

“Young people can learn from my example that something can come from nothing. What I have become is the result of my hard efforts.” – Franz Joseph Haydn

Is it possible for a person without any inherent musical talent to become skilled at playing an instrument?

By Remus Badea

In questions such as this, the major discussion falls on the debate of nature versus nurture. Those individuals supporting the nurture version are of the opinion that individuals are born without built in knowledge or perception and individuals learn through the socialization process. Those supporting the nature theory purport that individuals possess certain knowledge.

Individuals termed as having inherent musical talent are those individuals who easily identify the off key notes, the pitch and understand music concepts more easily than individuals termed not to possess musical talent.

In my view, a person without any inherent musical talent can become a skilled musical instrument player. It may take more time and effort, but the potential to become a skilled and expressive musician is there.

A person who is termed as lacking music talent is said to have the following characteristics:

- They lack a sense of rhythm – difficulty in coordinating beats.
- They are tone deaf – they cannot notice off pitch melody or whether a melody is off tone.
- They are poor at collaborating with other instrumentalists.

A person who does not possess musical talent can play the musical instrument of their choice if they possess the following attributes:

Dedication – most individuals who want to excel to being skilled instrumentalists should be dedicated to putting much effort into achieving the goal: this includes putting more hours into practice and getting a talented teacher. A lot of time should be reserved on practice. A person who is not a talented instrumentalist but dedicates a considerable amount of time to practicing will end up being a skilled instrumentalist or musician.

Passion - this is another attribute that plays a great part in developing a musician. I can define passion as a great love for the instrument or music studied.

Imagine an individual who is forced to take up music by a parent, guardian or teacher. The decision to practice was imposed; therefore, the passion to pursue the practice is not in them. The student will tend to skip practice or even drop out entirely. Passion for the instrumentalist-to-be is paramount for them to be successful.

Hard work is another factor that influences whether a non-talented individual can be a skilled instrumentalist. Hard work involves the resilience and the effort the student has to put to be good at what he/she is learning. This ranges from going out of their way to do extra studies to ensuring that no lessons are missed.

Determination is another attribute that should be present. Every path one takes, there are very many critics and skeptics. Living past all these skepticism, means nothing can hold him/her back.

NB: These attributes must be inherent to the individual who wants to be a skilled instrumentalist. I have to insist that they all have to be present.

Further like any other behavior, becoming a skilled instrumentalist has to be accompanied by a favorable environment:

A person who is nurtured in an environment where music is a part of life, despite the absence of talent, may tend to learn to be and become a skilled instrumentalist since he/she has been nurtured in a musical culture. For example, in a family where the parents are musicians and the elder siblings have studied music, the individual, as a result of being socialized in music, may tend to be interested and thus pursue music even if they do not possess talent.

Supportive teachers and families can also play a part in influencing whether a not-so-talented individual becomes a skilled instrumentalist or whether they drop out.

To consider a case of an untalented individual who has found a love for playing guitar. This individual has even started taking classes. Imagine the father tells this person that he has no talent and that no one in the family has ever played any instrument. This discouragement may affect the individual negatively and may lead to them giving up their musical studies.

Becoming a skilled instrumentalist is easier for a talented individual than for an untalented individual. This is because the untalented individual has to practice long hours to make the same progress a talented individual can make in a shorter time. The concepts are easy for him/her and they don't have to struggle to be good at it.

Practice does not make you a talented musician but bridges the talent gap between the untalented and the talented musician. However, practice makes the untalented instrumentalist a skilled and fine instrumentalist. He can notice off note music, variant pitches, and also has acquired skills to collaborate with other musicians.

In a nutshell, the ride for the untalented instrumentalist is not as easy as that of the talented instrumentalist.

“Talent is cheaper than table salt. What separates the talented individual from the successful one is a lot of hard work.” –Stephen King

A good example of a music composer who was deemed untalented was Erik Satie. He was labeled untalented by his professor of piano at Paris Conservatoire who defined his piano technique as “insignificant and laborious” and “worthless.” Satie joined the army as he did not make a very good impression at the school.

Satie is a good example of a person with determination, dedication, and passion who became a very good musician or, as he prefers to be called, a composer. Therefore, we can say, the lack of talent can't be taken to be a reason why individuals are not skilled instrumentalists. However, a determined individual, hardworking, dedicated and passionate can make a skilled instrumentalist.

“Every artist was first an amateur.” – Ralph Waldo Emerson

Talent, on the other hand, is overrated. The sentiment that its lack thereof is good reason why an individual cannot be a skilled musician or instrumentalist is misguided. The downside of not having the talent is that the individual takes a longer time to get to the position of being skilled than the talented individual.

In my view, any individual who picks up a musical instrument and dreams of playing a sweet melody has already set forth on the journey to being a skilled instrumentalist as long as dedication, hard work, passion, determination and a conducive environment are present.

There are other reasons why learning music is important beyond issues of talent. Adults who play an instrument — even if it's just for fun — are able to reduce their stress and use the activity as an emotional outlet. Working adults reduce their chances of job “burnout.” Seniors who engage in music making can better manage diseases such as Alzheimer's and Parkinson, and increase their self-esteem.

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Can music lessons boost a child's study skills at school?

By Remus Badea

There are growing numbers of studies that show how music engages many areas of the brain involved in language processing, memory, and other critical thinking skills essential for academic success. The studies also show that music benefits children socially and emotionally. Therefore, music education helps children in education and development, which are key areas in a child's school life.

In my opinion, music lessons improve a child's intelligence and social and emotional development. Here are different ways in which music helps children study at school;

- Language processing - studies show that the brain processes music and language in the same way. Therefore, learning music can have a positive impact by improving language-related skills. A study also shows that mastering a musical instrument improves the way the human brain processes parts of spoken language. This is corroborated by another study which shows that music increases the physical development of the left side of the brain.
- Spatial knowledge – this is the ability to perceive the world accurately and to form mental pictures of things. There is a causal link between music and spatial knowledge. This knowledge is necessary for the kids pursuing mathematics as it is the kind of thinking that is critical in solving mathematical problems. A Researcher in Canada has showed that music students perform well in mathematical tests of computation and estimation.
- Memory - Research shows that children with musical training show better verbal memory than peers who don't practice music. Memorizing music pieces led to improvements in non-musical memory. This can help when it comes to activities such a class presentations.
- Self-awareness – Dr. Frank Wilson, a specialist in human cognitive development explains that the study of music teaches children to self-assess rather than rely on external rewards. Music can foster self-motivation. He says that the attention required to play an instrument encourages self-surveillance which leads to the child being his/her own work critic.
- Social skills – participating in group music classes brings about a bonding experience. This is because the experience brings about shared memories and develops teamwork and discipline. For example, for an orchestra to sound good, all the players must play their parts harmoniously to produce that final piece. The discipline is gained by the fact that these individuals have to attend rehearsals and practice.
- Self-esteem – self-esteem is boosted by music. A child who uses music to express him or herself tends to have increased self-esteem. The self-expression that produces this growth in self-esteem enables the student to reach a higher stage of personal development. Everyone has a need to be in touch with his/her core, that is, what he is or feels inside.

- Music also provides children with work place skills - the diversity and flexibility acquired by children pursuing music are immeasurable. Musical culture focuses on “doing” rather than observing and teaches students how to perform literally anywhere in the world. As earlier discussed on the contribution of music to language development and its impact on team work, these are skills that will help the individuals in the work place; they will communicate and cooperate more effectively with other employees in a job environment.

Music performance teaches young people to conquer fear and takes risks. With continuous stage performances, children learn to deal with anxiety early in life. This enables a child to be confident enough to take initiative when it comes to their goals. Risk taking is necessary for a child to develop to their full potential.

Music education improves the quality of work by the child both in class and during other activities, for example, their extra-curricular activities. Students learn craftsmanship and they learn what constitutes good work and mediocre work. Children learn creative thinking skills through music which help them in their daily problems and encounters. Music students are able to think of new solutions to problems and ignoring outdated solutions and assumptions.

The academic results of students who have taken music are higher than those of students who haven't had any experience in music. This is not surprising considering that children who take music have increased memory, increased ability to do mathematics, and improved language memory. They have higher academic success than those who did not pursue music.

Music has a strong and positive impact on a child's school performance

Music contributes to a child's stability and health and their ability to be independent. Enrolling your child in a music class will make parenting easier and, better yet, your child will be mentally healthier and more mature.

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Pros and cons: group lessons versus private music lessons

By Remus Badea

Thinking of taking music lessons? That's a great idea, but you have to choose the right format if you want to get the most out of them. You can go for group lessons or private lessons. For those thinking of group lessons, below is a detailed explanation of both the negative and positive sides to help you make an informed decision.

Pros

- The students will gain from the social development involved. They will be able to make new friends with their classmates whom they can play with as well as share their ideas and thoughts on the classes they take. Additionally, the learners will be able to learn how to relate well with people from all walks of life in a learning environment. Learning becomes fun; a great delight as well as an invaluable experience helping them to build confidence for a lifetime. All these are not possible in private lessons.
- Unlike in private lessons, students in group lessons are able to learn playing different parts of a song to make a whole. Moreover, the students develop better sight reading, following instructions, rhyme, and coordination as well.
- Motivation is a great asset when learning music, especially for children. It is what gives them the will to go on and be the best they can be. Motivation, in this case, will come from observing what other students are doing and the desire to play like them or better. They inspire each other to do better as well as discover new things.
- Pressure is not good for learning, especially for kids. The pressure, in this case, is less for the group than it would be for one student. This is because the teacher's attention is divided among all other students which gives them time to relax and enjoy free time. Pressure would create a non-conducive learning environment for the learners.
- Since the students are already used to playing various music instruments in front of their classmates, they will also have the courage to play even when the audience is different. This is a way of nurturing their talent and building their self-confidence. A student who learns all by themselves may be shy playing in front of people. This confidence gained will not only be useful when the students are playing music but also in other areas such as public speaking.
- When in a group, there is positive competition which helps students strive to do their best in the class. It is also an opportunity to learn from others as well as give and receive positive criticism which helps them in the learning process. A competitive environment helps them learn more and faster.
- Singing is also part of music, a very important part. Most people will find themselves more comfortable singing in a group than they would while alone. Therefore, groups can foster this part of music education.

- Team spirit is also greatly developed in groups. There are many activities such as singing and playing various musical instruments which the students have to do together. They can learn to support each other during class performances, at festivals, as well as during exams.

Cons

- The teacher is not able to give each student their full attention. He/she has to divide his attention among all his/her students and at times it is not enough. Therefore the slower learners or shy students might end up not benefiting as much from group classes. Some people argue that they are cheaper, but the quality of these classes is wanting at times. In some cases, taking private music lessons would be more expensive, but the student will be able to grasp every detail taught.
- Group lessons are not easy to schedule. There are many students involved and finding the right time that will be convenient for all of them might be difficult. The class time may not be convenient for all of them. On the other hand, private classes can be scheduled when it is convenient for both the teacher and the student.
- Music lessons involve note reading. You cannot claim to know your instrument if you are not good at reading. Most group lessons do not go through this thoroughly as in private lessons as the teacher has too many students for him/her to teach this section well. Private students have more time to pay close attention to learning note reading; hence private students will do better at sight reading than those in groups.
- Some students may take socializing and making friends in a group setting a bit too far. They may see class time as entirely about socializing, forgetting that they have classes to take. Group classes can become some sort of a distraction instead of allowing them to concentrate more fully on learning music.
- Finally, some students may pursue competition negatively. They may make group classes all about winning which may demoralize some of the group. Those who are not very good in class will end up feeling left behind, and with low self-esteem. This would not be the case if they were in a private setting.
- In conclusion, music classes are a very sensitive topic that has to be handled in the right way, by the right teacher, and in the right state of mind. Choosing the right learning format is very important if you want a student to do the best they can.

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How to play a song by ear

By Remus Badea

There are many ways to approach learning music. While many individuals choose to learn to read music notation and play on the basis of sight reading, the world has also seen a plethora of musicians who play instruments only on the basis of hearing notes. Learning music by ear is done by repeatedly listening to other musicians and then attempting to recreate what one hears. In addition to mentally hearing rhythms and pitches the skill of reproducing those sounds involves melody, harmony and bass line. This technique of being able to recognize music by ear requires training and is something that needs to be developed with practice.

Beginning steps for learning to play a song by ear

Understanding the importance of ear training

While learning how to play a song by ear definitely provides a wonderful feeling of achievement and a whole lot of fun, there are many other benefits that ear training can offer. Ear training allows individuals to understand patterns that are commonly used in music and allows for a better understanding of musical expression.

By learning music using ear training, an individual will have better ability to improvise and will also have more freedom in directly expressing music that they hear in their minds.

1. Listen to a piece of music repeatedly

When learning a piece of music by ear, it is important to listen carefully and to try and remember the structure and the changes in musical patterns. This should be done to the extent that an individual can recall the music later on, while remembering all the notes, subtleties and nuances contained in the song.

While this is certainly a laborious process, it offers many benefits as well. Being able to recreate tunes mentally offers an internalized understanding of melody, rhythm and structures commonly used in music.

2. Use software

Often individuals may find it tough to grasp all of the notes played in a piece of music. This may be due to the music being played fast or it may be due to too many instruments playing together. Fortunately, with the use of software, music can be slowed down or equalized, which allow listeners to easily determine what is going on within the music. Software is available both in free and paid versions.

3. Develop a power of visualization

Finally, students who want to learn music by ear will need to develop an internal power of visualization. When recreating a tune in the mind, it is to try and visualize the notes being played on an instrument. The speed at which individuals develop this power varies, but all musicians who play by ear rely on understanding music through a well thought out power of internal visualization.

While learning how to play music by ear certainly is a meticulous task which requires a lot of time and effort, the benefits are unparalleled. There is also an unmatched level of joy and a feeling of achievement when one is able to recreate music simply by hearing it.

Practical Tips for Learning to Play a Song by Ear

1. Listen to the song again and again

Identify the number of different parts and if any of them repeat. This makes up the song structure. The song structure is important because some songs can actually just have one riff or chord progression played throughout.

2. To learn the chords, figure out the bass line

This is helpful because you can easily see what key the song is in. Once that's done, you can apply some theory to help get the right chords.

3. Learn the rhythm

Don't pay any attention to the notes or chords (even though you have already learned them). Figure out the rhythm by tapping your foot to the beat or tapping your fingers on something to get the rhythm.

4. Save solos for last

If you have already figured out everything else, then you know what key the song is in and should be able to do the solo work pretty easily. If the song does not have any solo parts, you can just add them using some simple scales. You should try to play the solo part using pentatonic scales first. Be sure your solo is based on the main melody of the song.

“I learned to play by ear before I learned music theory. For me, that makes sense. After all, children learn to speak before they read and write. The more you understand of music - how harmony and time signatures work, and what chords and inversions are - the more you'll enjoy it.” -Jools Holland

Parents: Why Your Child Should Study Music

By Remus Badea

Music teaches your child to express him/herself while at the same time it enhances their learning abilities. Although there are a wide number of activities to develop the overall personality of your child at the same time it is important to understand that music has its own benefits. To begin, here are two:

-Children who study music tend to have larger vocabularies and more advanced reading skills than their peers who do not participate in music lessons.

-Children who study a musical instrument are more likely to excel in all of their studies, work better in teams, have enhanced critical thinking skills, stay in school, and pursue further education.

Here we will discuss some of the important benefits that would help you take a decision why your child should study music.

It's not just music

It has been proven with research that music is more than just expression. It helps your child to increase his or her concentration level. The music lessons that your child goes to will help him to concentrate equally on more than one task at the same time.

While singing or playing any musical instrument, a child does many things at one go, like tapping the instrument, matching the breath, remembering what comes next and focusing on their performance. In the studies conducted over years, it has been shown that a child who attends music classes has a better level of concentration as compared to other students.

-A Stanford study shows that music engages areas of the brain which are involved with paying attention, making predictions and updating events in our memory.

Music helps in language enhancement

Many experts agree that sound, in the form of music, is the first language a child can understand. Music education could help your child to have enhanced vocabulary or language abilities as learning through music comes naturally to a child. Let us take an example, do you remember how you started learning the alphabets? It was in the form of a poem or rhyme which has musicality built in. This learning method has been validated by research. It also helps

your child to learn to add, plus self-correct their speech intonation, giving a boost to their speech abilities.

-Regardless of socioeconomic status or school district, students (3rd graders) who participate in high-quality music programs score higher on reading and spelling tests.

-Young children who take music lessons show different brain development and improved memory over the course of a year, compared to children who do not receive musical training.

Music exercises the brain

Another reason why your child should go for music lessons is seen in the findings of research on a group of music learning and non- music learning children. Young children who take music lessons show different brain development and improved memory over the course of a year, compared to children who do not receive musical training.

-Much like expert technical skills, mastery in arts and humanities is closely correlated to a greater understanding of language components.

-Children with learning disabilities or dyslexia who tend to lose focus with more noise could benefit greatly from music lessons.

Most musical instruments training has a systematic logic behind their methods. In order to use these instruments properly the same is taught to the child. This directly or indirectly helps a child's brain start thinking logically. As a result the brain of a child studying music will function more effectively and efficiently than that of a child who doesn't study music.

Controlled expression

Music is an ancient way to explore human emotion. This is one of the reasons you feel connected to a song or instrumental music. If you let your child's take music lessons, he or she will develop better control of their emotional expression.

In today's world, where it doesn't take long for things to go out of hand, music lessons can help your child maintain composure and stay calm. Most music schools teach impart the knowledge of how to maintain control over expression. It is one of the most valuable behavioral qualities among today's kids.

-Children who study a musical instrument are more likely to excel in all of their studies, work better in teams, have enhanced critical thinking skills, stay in school, and pursue further education.

-In the past, secondary students who participated in a music group at school reported the lowest lifetime and current use of all substances (tobacco, alcohol, and illicit drugs).

Music teaches patience and discipline

If your child is receiving a musical education, then he or she should show a greater level of patience and discipline. These two are considered the foundation of learning any style of music, be it song or instrumental music.

Music takes weeks, months, sometimes even years to gain the required level of perfection. Almost all music schools make sure that their students are aware of this fact and are ready to face any challenges that can come in their way.

As a music student you need to practice daily. It cultivates the habit of discipline in your child, as in setting and following schedules, meeting deadlines, and consistently practicing for better results. All these traits will help your child to be successful in his or her life.

-Schools with music programs have an estimated 90.2% graduation rate and 93.9% attendance rate compared to schools without music education, which average 72.9% graduation and 84.9% attendance.

-Schools that have music programs have an attendance rate of 93.3% compared to 84.9% in schools without music programs.

Self-evaluation

While your child is taking music lessons, he or she will develop the self-critical skills. This will not only benefit your child to perform better in music, it will also help him or her to improve in other fields of life.

Your child will become open to take any type of criticism or appreciation in a more positive and constructive manner. Another quality that your child will develop is in presentation skills. It is one of the most important qualities required in today's world to be successful.

Openness to learning

Music is not limited to a country or region, so when your child is opting to take music education he or she is also opening the doors of learning more about the world.

Most music schools also teach their students about the history and origin of the music they are about to learn. This exposes your child's brain to learning about the other societies and cultures that prevail in the world.

It would not be wrong to say that music not only makes your child's life more beautiful, but at the same time makes him or her more competent to face the world's tough challenges. Help your child believe in the power of music and how it could bring a positive and constructive change in his/her life.

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Tips on Purchasing a Woodwind Instrument

By Matt Ramel, AMI Woodwinds Faculty

When purchasing a woodwind instrument there are a variety of choices to choose from. The best place to purchase or rent a woodwind instrument is at your local music store. Most music stores will help provide the basic necessities for your woodwind instrument with possibly a pre-made kit when purchasing or renting one.

Tips for beginners

For beginning students renting an instrument is the most effective way to start learning. This choice is the most effective one because it does not leave you with an unused instrument if your student decides not to continue. If you see that your student is going to enjoy the instrument and stick with it throughout their musical career, the rent of the instrument can be paid off and with most music stores you will be able to keep the instrument.

Popular beginner's brands

Yamaha

Vito

Leblanc

Tips for intermediate and advanced students

Intermediate and advanced woodwind instruments have much more quality in the way they are built and sound. These instruments are for students who have some prior experience and plan on continuing further.

The best types of clarinets, at this level, are made out of grenadillia wood. The fact that it is made out of wood compared to a beginning clarinet, that is most commonly made out of a resin or plastic, helps create a more pure and resonant sound.

Intermediate and professional saxophones will also be made out of more quality metals and materials that will last longer as well as give the instrument a more desirable sound quality.

When trying new instruments you want to make sure that you try a variety of different quality brands such as Buffet, Selmer, or Yamaha. You also want to make sure that you try instruments within your price range as well as different model instruments. Each instrument model and brand has its own unique quality since they are made out of living materials.

Once you find an instrument that feels comfortable in your hands and sounds the way you want it, you then need to try more instruments of that exact brand and model. Even though they may look exactly same, each instrument will most likely will play differently. By trying a few instruments of the same brand and model you will then be able to pinpoint exactly which instrument is right for you.

These same steps can also be taken if purchasing a mouthpiece as well.

Top intermediate and advanced clarinets

Buffet

Selmer

Yamaha

Top intermediate and advance saxes

Selmer

Tips on Purchasing a Piano

When purchasing a piano or keyboard, there are many factors to consider when making your decision. While many string, woodwind, and brass instrumentalists may start out with a “beginner” model of the instrument, a piano is a very expensive purchase and will often be the one that the student will play on for the rest of his or her life. Space and money are two of the primary factors when deciding what kind of keyboard or piano to purchase.

Keyboards

Digital keyboards are becoming a more popular choice to purchase for beginner students. There are many reasons why this is. These instruments do not have to be tuned, they can be easily moved, and the student can often wear headphones while practicing. However, keyboards lack the feel and the nuances that can be produced when using a real piano. If a family does purchase a keyboard, it is important to make sure it has weighted keys and all of the pedals so that the student can practice what he or she is learning in lessons: not just the notes, but the musicality as well. Personally, I have had the best experiences with Yamaha digital keyboards, but there are other options out there that fit the needs listed above.

Upright Pianos

Upright pianos were once standard in almost every home, but these pianos have lost their popularity due to digital keyboards. When purchasing an upright piano, there are many factors to look for. It is important to check for tone consistency throughout the keyboard. In other words, do all of the notes sound relatively the same, or do some notes tend to stick out? If all of the notes are consistent, you will also want to check that the hammers and strings on the inside of the piano are all intact, and that the pedals are all working properly. A good upright piano generally starts around \$3,000 and goes up from there in price. Yamaha and Steinway generally have the best upright pianos, but there are many other models out there that are respected as well.

Grand Pianos

When purchasing a grand piano, it can be easy to want to make a decision based simply off of looks. However, the same general rules when buying an upright piano apply when looking at a grand. The piano that looks the best may not sound the best. The size of the grand can vary greatly, and a larger piano will generally produce a better sound. A grand piano can cost anywhere from \$5,000 to upwards of \$100,000. Once again, Steinway and Yamaha pianos tend to be the best models for these instruments, but there are many other options for a lesser price.

These are just a few tips on how to purchase a piano! It is always a good idea to take an instructor or piano technician with you to inspect the piano. Especially if you are purchasing an upright or a grand.

How to pick a bow for stringed instruments

By Danielle Giulini

The best place for a beginner to buy is a music store. Normally when renting a violin, it comes with a bow. A beginner does not need a fine, expensive bow since sensitivity in “bow arm” is not high. Remember, every bow is different! And sounds different! It is best to ask an knowledgeable employee at a music store for help.

Bow sticks can be built of 3 different materials:

1. Brazilwood: Most inexpensive and appropriate for beginners (anywhere from \$30-\$200).
2. Pernambuco: Better quality wood used by top bow makers such as Tourte and Peccatte (famous old French bow makers). Price for the rarest ones can reach six figures.
3. Carbon-fiber: Gaining popularity due to shortage in Pernambuco wood. Price and quality varies widely. There are some great Carbon-fiber bows in the medium price range.

Things to pay attention to when picking a beginners bow:

1. Right Length
2. Straight stick (besides the natural slight arch)
3. Appropriate weight (not too heavy/light)
4. Does not bend too easily (to the left or right)

The more advanced a player becomes the more sensitive one gets to appropriate needs and develops better feeling for a good bow. Very advanced or professional players will purchase a bow that compliments their instrument. Some bows work better with certain violins and worse with others. To find the right fit for a mid-high level player, it can take a considerable amount of time trying different bows at many different music stores or bow maker shops.

Danielle Giulini is an AMI violin and viola instructor. She graduated with distinction from Northern Illinois University (BA) and DePaul University (MA). Currently she is a member of Camerata Chicago and the Civic Orchestra of Chicago where she gets to collaborate with world renowned conductors and musicians such as Yo-Yo Ma.

Tips on Purchasing a Flute (Advice for all levels of flute lessons)

By Michael Hoover

Of all the wind instruments, the flute perhaps has the most variety in terms of make, model, and materials. These instruments are often crafted of precious metals, so they are expensive and can last a lifetime. It is highly recommended that any flutist consult with a private instructor or professional colleague before ultimately making a decision to purchase an instrument, but here is some advice that can get you started in your search for a new instrument as you pursue flute lessons.

For the Beginning Flutist

Highly recommended that you rent your flute (most local stores have very reasonable rates). If you stick with it, you will probably want to upgrade to an open-hole flute within a year or two, but if you don't, you can stop renting at any time.

Beginners' flutes should be closed-hole (as opposed to open-hole). This means that the keys do not have holes that need be covered (in addition to the keys being pressed down) in order to create sound. If you are a beginner and find yourself using an open-hole flute, I suggest purchasing plugs for the key holes.

Offset G vs. Inline G – This refers to whether the keys played by the left-hand ring-finger are in line with other keys or slightly more forward on the tubing. There is no right or wrong for this. Usually younger players will be more comfortable with an offset G.

Most beginners' flutes will be made of nickel or will be silver-plated. It's unnecessary to invest in "fancier" metals at this point. Avoid plastic flutes. They may come in fun colors to entice young players, but they will not sound as good as the metal flutes.

There are many brands of flutes for this level. The most common brands include Yamaha, Gemeinhardt, Armstrong and Selmer. It is my own personal experience that Selmer is most likely brand to have problems.

When you first look at your flute, check to make sure that the keys close all the way without being forced and that the pieces of the flute (headjoint, body, and footjoint) fit together snugly. Nothing should be loose, but it should also not be too difficult to gently twist the pieces together. If you notice any problems, point them out to the dealer immediately so that they do not try to hold you responsible for any repair costs.

For the Intermediate Flutist

Intermediate flutes are going to be similar in quality and price to beginners' instruments, but will usually have open-hole keys and a B foot joint. At this point it is recommended that you strongly consider purchasing the instrument (or look into rent-to-own possibilities). A quality intermediate flute can take even the most ambitious student through their entire middle school and high school careers.

Consider an in-line versus offset G, especially now that there will also be a hole on that key which will need to be covered. Particularly for younger players, an in-line G might cause discomfort.

There are, again, several brands available for the intermediate flutist. Many beginners' flute brands manufacture intermediate flutes (again, Gemeinhardt, Yamaha, Armstrong and Selmer). Jupiter flutes by Altus are a particularly excellent intermediate flute option. Again, it is my own experience that Selmer flutes are the most likely of any of these brands to have mechanical problems.

It is a good idea to try playing a few different intermediate flutes before you purchase. Think about the quality of the sound and check both the high and low register to make sure that the flute has a good response.

The most expensive intermediate flute is not necessarily the best. Do not be fooled by a higher price-point or fancy add-ons, such as a gold lip plate or engravings, as these are only cosmetic differences.

Note: It is always advisable to consult with a private teacher before purchasing an instrument! Ask your teacher for advice at your next flute lesson.

Professional Flutists

Professional flutes are high quality instruments designed for musicians intending to pursue a career in playing and/or teaching the flute. The price-range varies greatly depending on the brand and the material (from \$2,000 to over \$30,000). Whether you are a high school or college student looking to purchasing your first high-quality instrument or a professional looking for an upgrade (or something different), it is important to be a well-informed buyer.

When looking at fine, hand-made instruments, there is not necessarily a correlation between price and quality. You are looking for a very individualized fit for your style of playing, your taste

in sound, and your personal performance needs (orchestral, solo, chamber, contemporary or versatile).

In my experience, the most important thing to consider is the brand. If you love a Powell that you play, chances are good you will love other Powells. If you hate Powell, you very may well hate the feel of most Powells. This goes for any brand. Because of this, it is important to be familiar with as many brands as possible and try as many as you can. Here is a list of some of the most popular professional flute brands: Altus, Arista, Brannen-Brothers, Burkhardt, Emmanuel, Haynes, Miyazawa, Muramatsu, Powell, Sankyo, Straubinger, Williams, & Yamaha.

Consider your metal options. The metal that your flute is made of will create subtle differences in the sound, but may create a not-so-subtle difference in price point. Each individual will have different opinions of what a metal does to their sound, but the same changes in the sound can often be made just by changing the metal of the headjoint (or even just the riser – the piece of metal that connects the lip-plate to the headjoint). Many manufacturers have also developed various alloys meant to combine qualities of different metals.

Never completely write-off a flute brand or metal. Every instrument is different, so maybe you played a dud. You may find very little difference when changing the metals on one brand, but find a huge difference when changing the metals on another. Additionally, manufacturers are always tweaking their designs and developing new models. Always keep your mind and ears open.

Every handmade instrument is different even when they are the same model, same metals, same price, and same manufacturer. If you think you have found the type of flute you like, get your hands on as many flutes with those same specs (brand, model, and material) as you can and pick your favorite.

Get other people to listen. Don't just be sold by a pretty sound. Play in every register. Consider the response when articulating and how easy it is to go between the octaves. Consider how flexible the sound is (different dynamics, different colors). Find out how it projects in a big room. Play in a live space. Play in a dead space. Consider the mechanism and weight (is it uncomfortable for you to hold?).

Check with a tuner. If you are always sharp or always flat, it might be you. Be wary if you are constantly jumping between being sharp and being flat. This could indicate a larger problem.

Consider a used instrument. A used flute is not bad and may even be desirable. It can be a good way to find a dream flute for much less money. If you find an instrument you like, look to see if there is a used one available for a trial.

Headjoints (for Professionals)

Buying a headjoint can be the most cost-effective way to make a dramatic change in your sound. Most flute makers will also sell just their headjoints, but there are also a number of manufacturers that only create headjoints. A few popular specialty headjoint makers include Mancke, Lafin, Jack Moore and Sheridan

ONE IMPORTANT FINAL NOTE

The flute will never compensate for problems in your playing. Sometimes people get so fixated on the problems with their instrument that they no longer improve on themselves as a player. I have heard wonderful musicians on “low-quality” flutes and not-so-wonderful musicians performing on some of the best instruments that money can buy. The flute is plumbing, but the music comes from you.

Michael Hoover is a Chicago-area flute and piano teacher and AMI faculty member. He has received numerous honors as a performer and has a Master of Music and Bachelor of Music in Flute Performance from DePaul University.

Tips on Buying a Classical String Instrument (Violin, Viola, Cello and Bass)

By Remus Badea

Here are some tips for players at all levels, though I recommend that you go through the process with the guidance of a trusted teacher. Here are some good things to keep in mind.

- Price does not always determine value and quality
- There is hierarchy in how value and price work on instruments over \$500 (fine instruments) that goes as follows: a) name, b) condition, c) rarity, d) historical context, e) quality of tone and how it plays.

Advice for beginners

This advice is meant for beginners (and their parents) who generally are choosing between two options: renting or buying.

- Rent: pros – you will get a better quality instrument plus insurance; cons – you have to pay monthly.
- Buy : pros – cheaper in the long run and at the beginner level quality is not a big factor; cons - quality not as good & you don't get instrument insurance.

Whether you rent or buy your instrument should come as a kit with everything you'll need (i.e., violin, bow, rosin, case and possibly shoulder rest).

Advice for the intermediate to advanced student

At this point the stringed instrument musician buys all of their musical equipment separately (i.e., violin, bow, rosin, case, possibly shoulder rest, etc.). My number one tip is to always keep your price range in mind. Don't be seduced by the sound of an instrument into making a purchase you can't afford. My other advice is:

- Research you options on where to buy: Internet sites, music stores, referrals, private individual sales, etc.
- If buying online, I wouldn't suggest buying an instrument above \$500. Playing instrument is too essential in the decision process.

- If possible, visit several shops and play many instruments in your price range.
- Do your research online on specific instrument makers and compare prices.
- Take several instruments home from different shops to try them at home. Music shops will generally let string instruments be taken out for a short period, typically a week or so.
- Have your teacher, other musicians, and friends look, play, and listen to instruments you are considering buying.

Remember, there is no need to rush the process. It takes time to find the right fit for a player in any given price range (months to years, depending on your level).

Remus Badea is Concertmaster of Southwest Symphony Orchestra, adjunct professor at Elmhurst College, and Executive Director of American Music Institute.

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