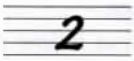
Chapter 2, from: "The Musician's Way: A Guide to Practice, Performance, and Wellness" by Gerald Klickstein, Oxford University Press, 2009.



2

Practicing Deeply, I

In this chapter:

- Habits of excellence
- Essentials of artistic interpretation
- Mental imaging
- Guidelines for warming up

Practicing Deeply

That inner voice has both gentleness and clarity. So to get to authenticity, you really keep going down to the bone, to the honesty and the inevitability of something.

—Meredith Monk, singer and composer

As chapter 1 points out, practice is both a many-sided task and a quest for boundless artistic growth. Despite the wonders and the intricacies, however, the inner workings of practice have much in common with other avenues to learning and self-improvement. Simply put, certain ways to practice music or study academic topics lead to profound understanding, whereas others cause material to be shaky and easily forgotten.

For instance, on the shaky side, if you do a cursory job of preparing an ensemble part, your performance will be uninspired, if not edgy, and you'll be unlikely to extract any musical benefit. Correspondingly, if you cram for a math test, you might be able to pass, but the formulas you studied will soon vanish from your mind if you don't use them again. Such shallow learning doesn't yield tangible changes in your knowledge or skills, whatever the subject.

Deep learning occurs when knowledge transforms you—when you don't just study a math problem for a test but also apply it, perhaps to designing a sculpture. Then a math principle comes alive and persists in your memory longer than any exam. Deep practice involves an even more comprehensive process. When you practice deeply, you explore multiple aspects of a piece

or exercise, and every element draws your interest. You work until you reach the authentic place that Meredith Monk alludes to above. At that point, you can be secure and artistic on stage.

This chapter and the three that follow plumb the components of deep practice. Here you'll read about general concepts. The ensuing chapters then describe strategies tailored to the five practice zones that chapter 1 introduced. You'll see that deep practice entails achieving mastery, integration, and transcendence with everything that you play or sing. That is, you start from a mastery-oriented perspective and strive to attain the utmost clarity with your music: You divide a piece into sections, assimilate the ingredients, and then merge the parts. At the same time, deep practice integrates all that you are—your body, mind, and spirit. Third, deep practice is transcendent. No pitch is merely a pitch; each one has a living quality. The humble exercise and the glorious composition alike present opportunities for you to make music and assert your style.

The Foundations of Deep Practice

- Mastery
- Integration
- Transcendence

As you read the upcoming suggestions for deepening your practice, remember that there is no one "correct" way to absorb a piece or become a better artist. Capable musicians employ related principles of learning, but individual systems of practice necessarily include customization. What's more, profound learning isn't the sole attribute of deep practice; there's also the efficiency angle. It's not enough to know how to master repertoire and refine skills; you additionally need the know-how to accomplish your goals as swiftly as possible. To quote David Soyer, longtime cellist with the Guarneri String Quartet, "Practicing well is virtually an art in itself—the art of achieving economy of time and means."[1] With that in mind, the information here, beyond offering practice strategies, is intended to promote your artistic independence and equip you to shape your own creative yet efficient approach to musical development.

Habits of Excellence

We first make our habits and then our habits make us.

—John Dryden, poet

Your habits in the practice room make you the musician that you are. And given that the foremost goal of practice is to prepare performances, your work should instill the habits needed on stage. This section highlights seven indispensable habits that are elaborated on throughout this book—five deal with musical execution; two speak to states of mind. When you emphasize

all seven in each moment that you practice, excellence becomes your "default setting" both in rehearsal and under the spotlights.

Habits of Excellence

1. Ease
2. Expressiveness
3. Accuracy
4. Rhythmic vitality
5. Beautiful tone
6. Focused attention
7. Positive attitude

1. Ease

Masterful performers exhibit ease in all that they do on stage. Their performances appear easy because they *are* easy for them, thanks to the fact that, in practice, such artists invariably execute with a minimum of effort. Student musicians might believe that they can struggle in practice and, over time, will garner similar fluency. But experts know otherwise. Ease is a habit that has to be fortified at every turn.

Although ease includes many physical features, such as supple movement, facility originates in the mind. It arises from building awareness of your material and of your playing or singing actions. Nonetheless, the amount of brainpower that you can expend to be aware is finite. The more attention you use up supervising technical elements, the less you have available for artistry and coperformer communication. The key to easeful performance is the ability to command your music making in an integrated manner without exhausting your capacity.

To foster easeful habits, choose manageable material, and practice with your effort meter far out of the struggle zone. Establish a standard for easefulness whereby you make the quality of your experience while playing or singing as significant as the quality of the music you produce. In the words of violinist Kato Havas, "Playing is never difficult; it is either easy, or it is impossible."[2]

2. Expressiveness

The only way that you can become an expressive performer is to be an expressive practicer. Still, transcendent musicianship isn't based on arbitrary emoting. Gripping interpretations result when musicians respond to the expressive grammar embedded in their music. If, instead, musicians perform contrived renditions—swelling the volume, for example, irrespective of a composition's energy—their expression sounds meaningless at best and bizarre at worst.

To permeate your practice with eloquence, as the next section shows, bring out the peaks of phrases and taper your sound as phrases repose. Also make strong beats strong and weak beats weak rather than thumping along with undifferentiated pulses. Crank up your imagination, too, even with the plainest of materials: Put some punch into scales and exercises such that

you're always creating shapes. "Treat everything you play on your instrument as an important piece of music," urges trumpeter Wynton Marsalis, "even if you are just warming up."[3]

3. Accuracy

Many students begin working on new pieces by doing heaps of sketchy run-throughs and sloppy repetitions. Then, after forming error-ridden habits, they're obliged to spend countless hours trying to overwrite their flawed programming.

A more masterful strategy is to start with accuracy and continue being exact at each phase of ripening a piece. To instill accuracy, however, you have to not only select material that fits your level but also work in ways that make slip-ups rare. Some of those ways, explained later on, involve splitting pieces into digestible portions and learning them systematically. Of course, to discover interpretive ideas you might experiment freely. When you repeat material, though, you must uphold precision of thought and action. Then your performances will be likely to contain few mistakes because your practice didn't introduce muddled habits.

4. Rhythmic vitality

Music exists in time, so musicians must become connoisseurs of timing. But artistic timing isn't only about maintaining a steady pulse and precisely subdividing beats. Vitality in rhythm results when you also create forward motion that propels a phrase toward its summit and brings it firmly to a conclusion.

As discussed in the coming pages, one device for transmitting motion is to lock onto a baseline pulse and then drive from upbeats to downbeats—for example, when appropriate, to group four notes as 2 3 4 | **1** instead of | **1** 2 3 4 |. Another constituent of rhythmic vitality, as with expressiveness, is to adjust the strength of beats to fashion a diverse ecosystem of accents. "Always try to find variety," said cellist Pablo Casals; "it is the secret of music."[4]

5. Beautiful tone

The quality of your tone will probably have a more immediate impact on listeners than any other feature of your execution. And each tonal shade that you create will cast an emotional spell either for better or for worse. If you emit a harsh tone, let's say, then even when you craft your timing with care, your phrases will leave listeners grimacing. To entice an audience, your tone has to beguile, and you should have on hand a palette of tonal hues to complement any composition.

Whenever you practice, ensure that your normative tone is full and rich. If you perform acoustically, develop a tone that will project to the back of a hall even at your quietest levels. Also search out ways to tint your sound so that every piece you perform comes with brushstrokes of color, as tenor Plácido Domingo has explained: "I then realized that I could never be satisfied again with the mere natural charm of my voice," Domingo recalled, "that I had to constantly paint when singing, melting all the colors, expressing reds and blacks that had to be less primary but bursting with subtly colored combinations."

6. Focused attention

Imagine being on stage, about to begin a performance. Are your thoughts typically focused, or does your mind race? If you feel jittery, do you know how to attain a centered presence? Disciplined mental habits in practice will lay the groundwork for you to direct your thoughts under pressure. In contrast, if you routinely let your attention drift as you practice, then it's questionable whether your mind will be steady when your stress level climbs.

To cultivate focused mental habits, set explicit practice goals, and then keep up a calm, alert disposition as you work. If your attention wanes, take a break. Permanently shun mindless repetition.

7. Positive attitude

In your quest to upgrade your proficiency, some artistic and technical problems will be easy for you to figure out; others will challenge you severely. You won't get far as a musician, though, unless you meet problems head-on.

Accrue reservoirs of optimism by regarding difficulties not as personal failures but as opportunities for learning. If a passage baffles you, use the problem-solving tactics in chapter 3, get help if you need it, and proceed confidently, knowing that the route you take to unravel an impasse, no matter how convoluted, will lift you to new heights of competence.

Essentials of Artistic Interpretation

There must always be a sense of progression or movement towards definite landmarks.

—Tobias Matthay, pianist

Many years ago I had lunch with two music teachers who advocated what I call the "notes first" practice method. In their estimation, students should

practice new repertoire mechanically—that is, students should "get the notes"—and pursue interpretation afterward. I knew that numerous teachers shared that opinion, but I argued for the reverse approach. I still do.

Whatever music you play or sing, your aim is to express musical ideas, not spew out notes. Without interpretive notions at the forefront, what part of you will be in the lead as you practice? Not the artistic part. And what habits will you implant if you ignore the emotional soul of a composition? Not musical habits. Besides, "notes first" practice is woefully inefficient. At the outset of learning a piece, a performer's technical decisions have to be rooted in an interpretive blueprint. Otherwise, randomly chosen breath locations, fingerings, and so forth will largely conflict with a piece's phrase structure. "Notes first" practicers don't just ingrain mechanical habits; they're also burdened with reworking their habits later on—after they've deciphered what a composition is about.

In sum, when learning a new piece, your objectives are to master the music efficiently and then perform artistically, so artistic expression should be front and center at each stage of the mastering process. Therefore, before we dive into practice procedures, let's look at seven essentials of artistic interpretation to apply whenever you practice or perform. By integrating all seven, your every phrase will shimmer with life.

Essentials of Artistic Interpretation

1. Capture the mood, style, and tempo
2. Shape the dynamics
3. Color the tone
4. Mold the articulation
5. Contour the meter
6. Drive the rhythm
7. Express the form

1. Capture the mood, style, and tempo

Suppose that you're an actor who has been hired to perform in a play. When you receive the script, what will you do first? Will you sound out your opening word, then the second? Hardly. You'll begin by getting an overview of both the story and your character. After you've studied the entire script, then you can infuse your lines with fitting emotions.

Interpreting a piece of music entails making similar connections. As chapter 3 portrays, when you pick up a new piece, rather than first being concerned with execution, it's best to capture the mood, style, and tempo by listening to recordings, studying the score, and researching background information. Cellist Yo-Yo Ma says, "Only after I have become familiar with the style and character of the work can I start shaping an interpretation."[5]

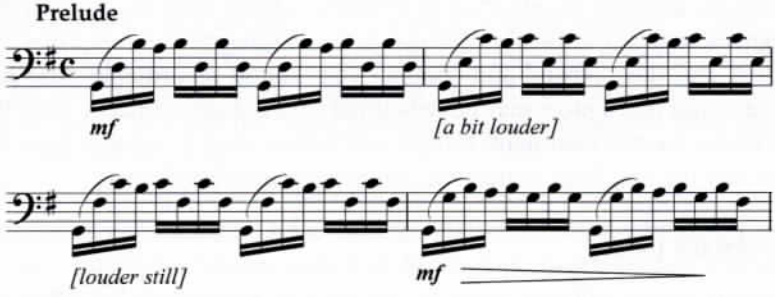
2. Shape the dynamics

On a primary level, musical interpretation conveys fluctuations in emotional intensity, and one of the principal means to communicate changes in intensity is to vary volume. More volume equals more emotional power, so you can set out to create an interpretation by increasing and decreasing volume to complement the gradations of intensity you perceive.

For instance, when melodies ascend, they often grow in vigor; upon descent, they might repose. As a rudimentary strategy, therefore, you could raise and lower the dynamic levels along with the melodic arc. In example 2.1, the dynamic markings were specified by the composer. Repeatedly play or sing the example and enjoy shaping the dynamics.

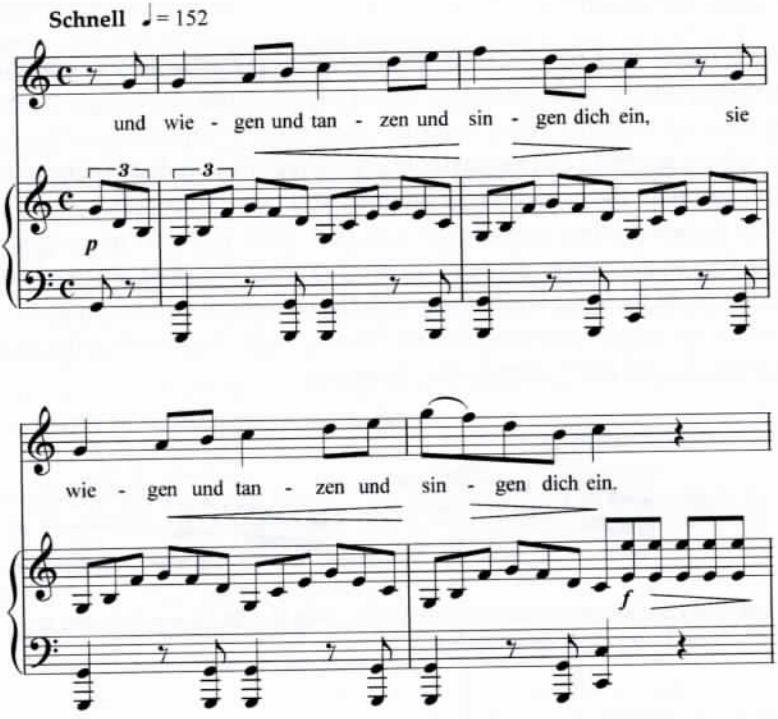
Example 2.1. From Mario Castelnuovo-Tedesco, Sonatina for Flute and Guitar, op. 205, second movement, measures 5–8.

Musical intensity, however, isn't generated from melodic layout alone. As chords depart from the tonic harmony, intensity rises dramatically, so you should adjust your volume in response to harmonic energy, too. Play example 2.2 on a keyboard or cello and sense how the harmonies call out for dynamic shading as they progress away from and then return to the tonic chord.



Example 2.2. From J. S. Bach, Suite BWV 1007 for unaccompanied cello, measures 1–4.

With vocal music, the text guides the shifts in melodic and harmonic power. In example 2.3, the melody, harmony, and text align such that, as the melody and text rise and fall in intensity, the harmony moves in step.

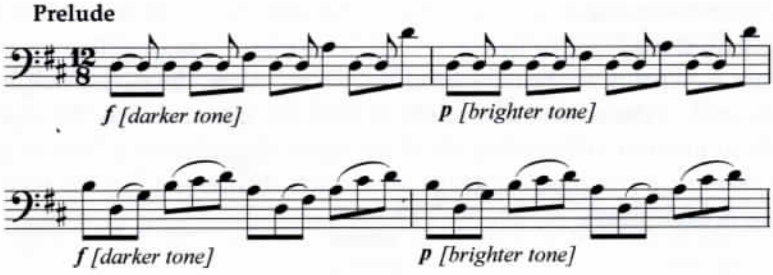


Example 2.3. From Franz Schubert, Erlkönig D. 328 for voice and piano, measures 93–96.

What if a melody descends and the harmony becomes more potent? Harmonic intensity usually trumps melodic outline. Even so, use your best judgment with any musical situation—make an interpretive choice that feels honest, and then expand and contract your sound accordingly. Also take into account that a piece may be structured with a single climactic peak that merits the loudest treatment. Hence, you'll often want to regulate your volume over the long haul so that you arrive at *fortissimo* only once.

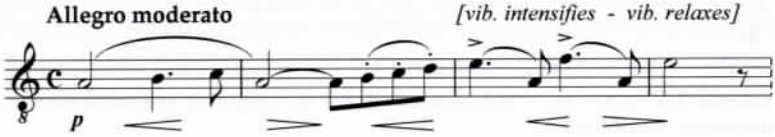
3. Color the tone

Dynamic shapes will give your phrases surging dimensions, but when you also modify tone color, an expressive gesture gains even more clout. As an illustration, in example 2.4, the composer suggests abrupt dynamic changes. Leaving the tone color the same for both volume levels would make for a drab effect, but darkening the tone for the *forte* and brightening it for the *piano* dramatizes the contrast, drenching it with character.



Example 2.4. From J. S. Bach, Suite BWV 1012 for unaccompanied cello, measures 1–4.

Vibrato is another component of tone coloration that's linked with dynamics. In example 2.5, the melody blooms in the third measure when the soloist intensifies and then relaxes vibrato in tandem with the dynamics.



Example 2.5. From Franz Schubert, Sonata D. 821 for arpeggione and piano, first movement, measures 10–13.

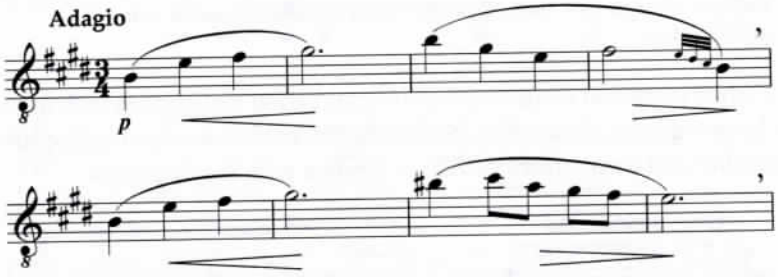
4. Mold the articulation

For many styles of music, the prevailing articulation for instrumental melodies is legato. But merely connecting one note to another doesn't make for a flowing line; multiple features combine to knead a legato phrase into a creamy texture. Take vibrato, for instance. If a soloist playing example 2.5 halts the vibrato before the end of the B (si) in the first measure, then the dulling of the B's conclusion will create a sag in the line, and the impression of legato will be lost. When vibrato comes into play, legato articulation often hinges on continuity of vibrato.

Many other aspects also contribute to producing a legato effect, among them tone color, accent, and, for vocalists, diction. Listen closely as you practice, and meld your legatos such that the seams between pitches disappear within the arc of a line.

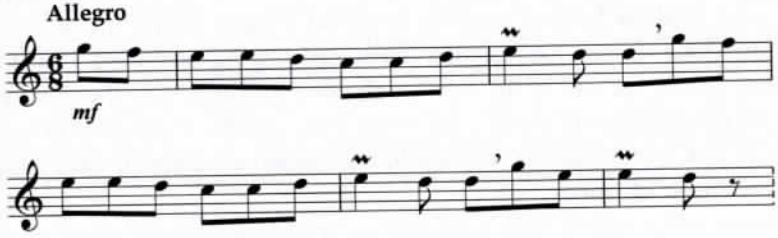
The ability to deliver a liquid legato is crucial, but silence is the ingredient that punctuates musical ideas. In example 2.6, I've inserted apostrophes—or "breath marks"—to indicate where expressive silences fit in the melody. Such silences, though, don't add time to a measure. Instead, the duration of the pitch preceding the silence is reduced.

For instance, the quarter note that concludes the fourth measure of example 2.6 could be performed as an eighth note or a dotted eighth note, with silence occupying the remainder of the pitch's value. The dotted half note at the end of the second line might be held for approximately five eighth notes in duration followed by about an eighth note of silence. Play or sing the example a few times to gauge how much silence you feel the melody needs at each breath.



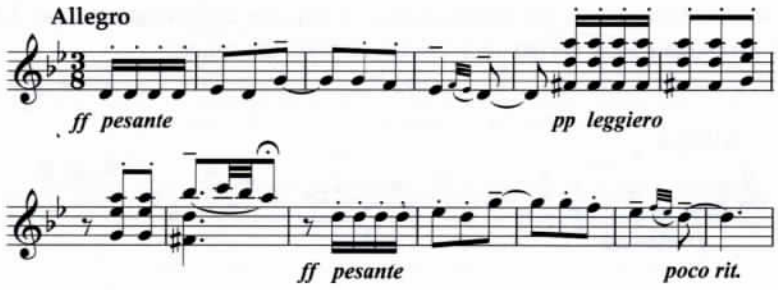
Example 2.6. From Franz Schubert, Sonata D. 821 for arpeggione and piano, second movement, measures 4–11.

Here's another application of the same articulation principle. Execute the breaths in example 2.7 by playing or singing the eighth note before each apostrophe as a sixteenth note followed by a sixteenth-note rest.



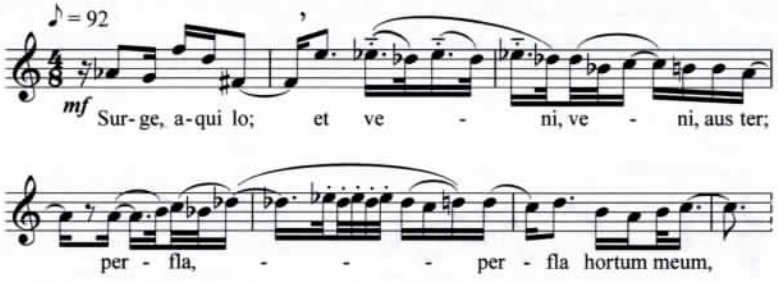
Example 2.7. From Domenico Scarlatti, Sonata K. 159 for harpsichord, measures 1–5.

Silences not only punctuate phrases but animate staccato pitches as well. And the amount that you detach your staccatos will alter the character of the music you create. Play or sing the melody in example 2.8, and toy with varying the staccato articulations: Fine-tune the duration of each silence; polish the way you attack and release every pitch.



Example 2.8. From Joaquín Rodrigo, En los trigales for guitar, measures 1–12.

Example 2.9 demonstrates a more modern use of articulation. Here the text implores the north and south winds to blow, and the composer uses articulation, rhythm, and melody to create a capricious, windlike effect in the line—an effect that a performer would want to put across. Also notice the serial composition technique: The first three measures form a phrase that contains twelve different pitches; the pitches in next phrase start off in the reverse order.



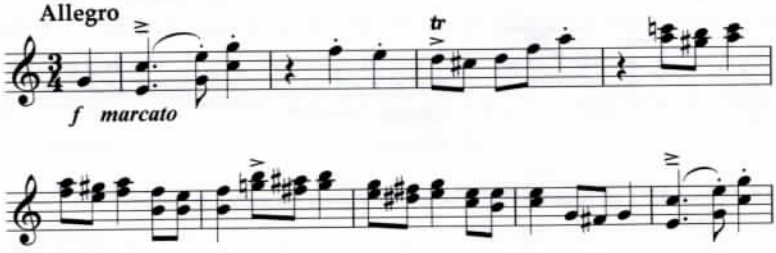
Example 2.9. From Igor Stravinsky, Canticum Sacrum for voices and instruments, measures 47–53.

5. Contour the meter

In the hands of an artistic performer, meter translates into a voluptuous topography of stronger and weaker beats. For you to create a stirring metric terrain, however, and not a mechanical-sounding one, you have to cunningly vary the weight of the beats, first, in keeping with the time signature and, second, in relation to the music itself.

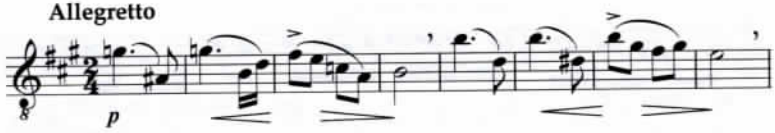
To form a smooth metric contour, as would be apt with example 2.6, the onsets of beats must never be angular or hard hit. Conversely, to generate a punchier line, some downbeats need to be palpable, and other beats will call

for assorted emphasis. For instance, play or sing the melody in example 2.10, and investigate how varied accentuation affects the music.



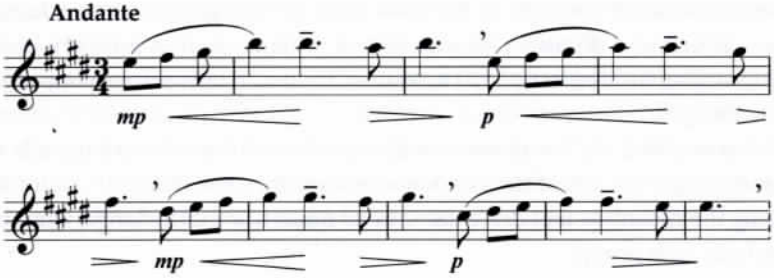
Example 2.10. From Fritz Kreisler, Liebesfreud for violin and piano, measures 1–9.

When deciding how much to accentuate pitches, in addition to assessing their metric positions and surveying any expressive notation in a score, consider where pitches lie in an arching phrase. If a phrase tapers into a downbeat, that downbeat will characteristically be softened, even though a downbeat is normally the strongest beat of a measure. In example 2.11, the four-measure phrases conclude with diminuendos: The final pitch of each phrase would probably be the quietest one, whereas the preceding downbeat would be the strongest.



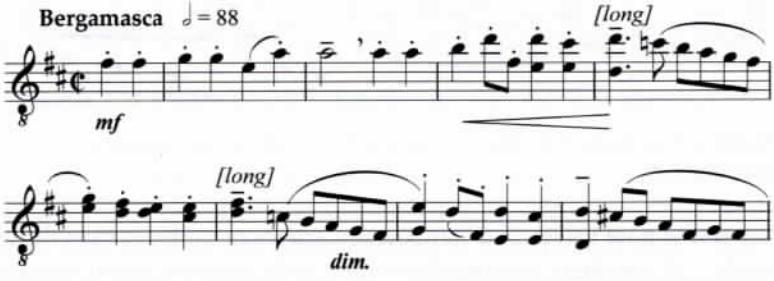
Example 2.11. From Franz Schubert, Sonata D. 821 for arpeggione and piano, third movement, measures 17–24.

Long notes or dissonances that fall on weak beats are ordinarily stressed, thereby overriding their subordinate metric positions. Play or sing example 2.12, and experiment with adding emphasis to the pitches that I've marked *tenuto.*



Example 2.12. From Enrique Granados, Danza española no. 5 for piano, measures 48–55.

To produce accentuation, on top of sounding strong beats louder, you can enhance metric stress through subtly stretching the duration of weightier pitches. In example 2.13, the notes marked "long" could be sustained slightly beyond their notated values, and then the ensuing eighth notes would be tumbled forward in a sly *accelerando* to land, in time, on the subsequent downbeats.



Example 2.13. From Bernardo Gianoncelli, Bergamasca for lute, measures 1–8.

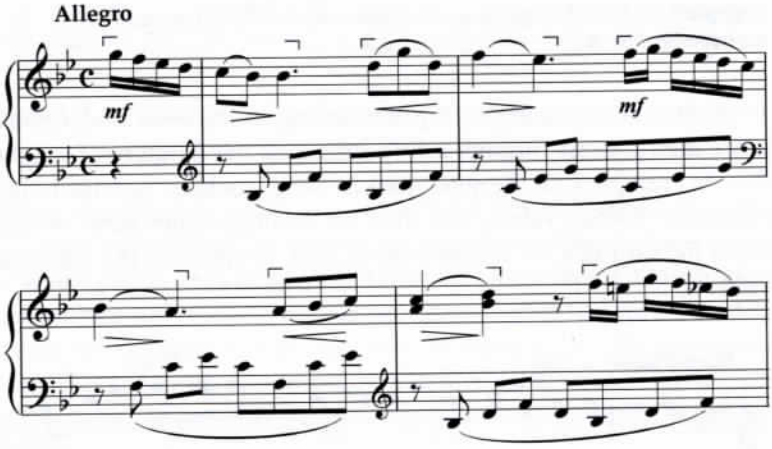
Overall, to bring your meter to life, flavor each beat in proportion to its rank in the musical hierarchy. Tweak your accentuation with both volume and duration such that, depending on the music's mood, you create sonic landscapes that undulate, flow, or spike in dramatic peaks.

6. Drive the rhythm

Rhythm comes alive when it propels a listener forward through a phrase. Aside from choosing a tempo that fits a piece's nature, two ways to create irresistible motion are to steer shorter notes into longer ones and to move from upbeats toward downbeats without halting at the bar lines. Cellist Diran Alexanian, in the preface to his edition of the Bach cello suites, termed this propulsion "rhythmic attraction,"[6] and numerous other musicians have put

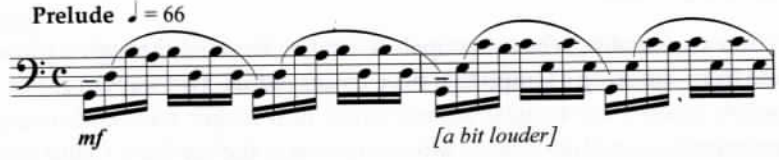
forward the same concept. In his book *Note Grouping,* for instance, hornist James Thurmond discusses how an upbeat initiates motion toward a downbeat just as an in-breath (upbeat) activates the need to release on an out-breath (downbeat).[7]

In example 2.14, the gravitational tug of rhythmic attraction pulls the melody notes in each of the bracketed groups forward. Play the example—or sing the melody—and drive the shorter notes toward the longer ones that conclude each group.



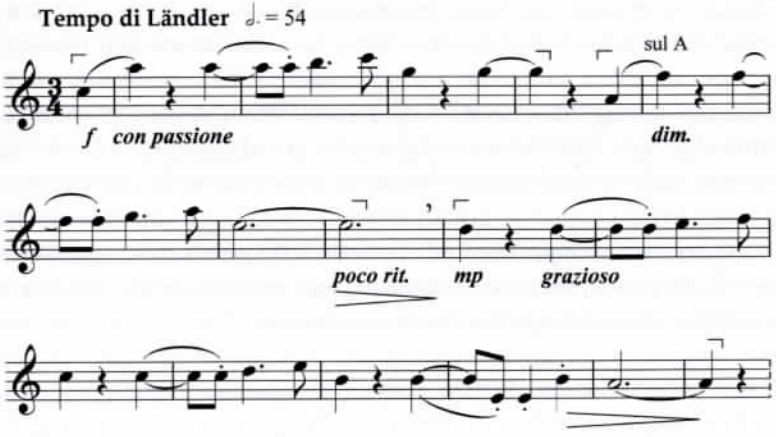
Example 2.14. From W. A. Mozart, Sonata K. 333 for piano, first movement, measures 1–4.

When the note values in a composition are more uniform than those in example 2.14, one tactic to express rhythmic attraction is to minutely extend the duration of prominent pitches and then push the subsequent pitches forward. Repeatedly play example 2.15 on a keyboard or cello and, as shown, propel the sixteenth notes following a strong beat toward the strong beat to come. Such note grouping, however, shouldn't distort the baseline pulse. As you play the example, ensure that the first and third beats in each measure coincide with the pulse of a metronome (the second and fourth beats might or might not line up with the metronome).



Example 2.15. From J. S. Bach, Suite BWV 1007 for unaccompanied cello, measures 1–2.

Although music needs forward motion, your rhythmic propulsion shouldn't be relentless. Example 2.16 presents a melody in which a performer could seductively manipulate the motion in each of the bracketed phrases. Play or sing the example, and try this: In the first two phrases, after lingering a tad on the upbeats, move forward through the middles of the phrases and then relax the motion as the phrases end. Next, press onward through the eight-measure phrase, putting a slight delay before the closing pitch.



Example 2.16. From Fritz Kreisler, Liebesleid for violin and piano, measures 49–64.

If these rhythmic inflections seem subtle, they are. Yet expressive timing forms the backbone of artistic music making. Mozart wrote, "The most necessary, most difficult, and principal thing in music, that is time."[8] Continually try out ways to imbue your rhythm with motion and personality, and then run your rhythmic experiments by your teacher.

7. Express the form

The word "form," as it's used in music, refers to a piece's structure. Many traditional dance forms, such as minuets and gigues, have binary designs: There are two halves, and each half might repeat; they're typically performed AABB. Folksong forms, by comparison, often comprise several verses with an intervening chorus. Rondo forms can incorporate any number of sections, but the main theme keeps coming back; some are structured ABACADA. Rondos tend to be entertaining because they mingle familiarity with freshness, so they customarily turn up as concluding movements of Classical-era sonatas.

But that's only the macroview of form. On a smaller level, form affects the way that groups of notes clump into phrases and phrases join to create sections. In microterms, form operates on the level where melodic, harmonic,

and rhythmic forces cause handfuls of notes to coalesce into figures or motives. Form equates with the way letters adhere into words, words group into phrases, phrases assemble into sentences, sentences constitute paragraphs, and so on. Extending that analogy to literature, large-scale compositions resemble novels. When you set about learning them, it takes time to grasp their designs, their many characters, and their emotional sweep. Binary forms are like short essays that make a single point; there's one prevailing mood, the storyline is more evident, and just a few characters are involved.

To express the form of a piece, you employ the preceding *essentials of artistic interpretation* to show listeners where the action crests and reposes, to communicate mood, and to let phrases breathe. Like a storyteller, you lead an audience through the narrative of a piece. Without appreciation for compositional design, a performer might overlay grandiose inflections that have little to do with a piece's syntax. "Vanity is indeed the archenemy of the interpreter," wrote conductor Erich Leinsdorf, "because it interferes with his ability to receive messages from other minds."[9] Become a more egoless interpreter: Build your aptitude at recognizing and responding to form. Consult your teacher if formal construction is new to you.

Although the framework here will help you flesh out your interpretative insights, its effectiveness rests on your musical and technical skills. That is, you have to be able to perceive compositional content and also execute expressive gestures with your instrument or voice. Both musicianship and technique receive attention in chapter 5, but you can heighten your perceptiveness right away through critical listening (p. 98). So, regularly peruse landmark recordings—with scores in hand—and scrutinize how performers exploit the seven *essentials*. Then, when you make music, live by the advice of cellist Pablo Casals: "Don't give notes," he once exhorted a student. "Give the meaning of the notes."[10]

Mental Imaging

> *When I sit in Paris in a café, surrounded by people, I don't sit casually—I go over a certain sonata in my head and discover new things all the time.*
>
> —Arthur Rubinstein, pianist

The upcoming practice methods incorporate the technique of mental imaging as a fundamental tool for learning, memorizing, and performing

music. This section describes mental imaging and provides an introductory exercise.

Like Arthur Rubinstein, myriad performers use imaging to rehearse compositions in their minds. They'll internally "hear" a piece of music, feel the sensations of executing it, and mentally hone their interpretations. However, imaging isn't a trick reserved solely for elite musicians; everyone uses imaging in daily life. For example, suppose that you're reading a book, and then you decide to exit the room you're in. What's the likelihood that you would accidentally walk into a wall? Nil, I hope. When you enter a room, you detect where you are with respect to the door. When you leave, you move in relation to your mental map of the space.

Just as people form mental maps to guide their walking, expert musicians depend on inner maps to steer their performances. While playing or singing, they know where they are in a composition, where they've been, and where they're going.

Performers construct their musical maps through shrewd practice. To learn a new piece, let's say, savvy practicers first get an overview of the music and then carve it into sections. Next, as chapter 3 explains, they progressively map the interpretive and technical elements. With clear mental maps established, musicians play or sing with abandon, knowing that they can't get lost. Unprepared performers rely on spotty maps that send them fishtailing out of control. The gaps in their awareness provoke one wrong turn after another.

By working with the practice methods to come, you'll discover how mental imaging can speed up the learning process and liberate your artistry. As a preface, try the following exercise—it calls for a metronome and a piano or electronic keyboard.

Mental Imaging Exercise

In this exercise, you image playing a simple passage on a keyboard, and then you actually play the passage. During your actual playing, you use imaging to lead your execution.

1. Imaging

   a. Sit in front of a piano keyboard, and locate the keys needed to play example 2.17 (p. 36). Play a G (sol) to get the pitch in your ear, and then switch on your metronome.

   b. Keeping your eyes on the music, repeatedly sing the example while you imagine playing it—vocalize note names, and playfully move your right-hand fingers in the air.

Example 2.17. Mental imaging exercise.

c. Create a vibrant, multisensory experience: Feel your fingers depress the imaginary keys, mentally hear the sound of a piano, perceive the spatial layout of the keyboard, and soak in the emotion of the dynamics.

d. Image the example at least three times. Aim to register fresh, more realistic sensations with each recap.

2. Imaging and executing

a. Place your right hand on the keyboard, and sense how you'll execute the first measure of the example. With your metronome ticking, prepare to play by counting aloud: "1 and 2 and."

b. As you begin to play, image one measure ahead of the one that you're playing. When executing the ascending scale, sense the descending scale; as you execute the descending scale, sense the last two notes; as you play the final notes, sense the ascending scale, and so on.

c. Execute unselfconsciously. Instead of micromanaging your movements, trust your mental map, be playful, and allow accuracy to occur without being obsessed with correctness.

d. Repeat several times. Sing along using note names during your first time through; thereafter, cease using your voice, and mentally sing note names. With each repeat, withdraw effort.

When you employ imaging to practice and perform music, you harness your mind in these two ways. First, to aid in learning and memorizing a piece, you simulate playing or singing to imprint a lucid mental map. Then, as you execute, you image ahead so that your music making is secure and spontaneous.

In *The Inner Game of Tennis,* Timothy Gallwey depicts two exercises that underscore the power of imaging coupled with unselfconscious execution.[11] In both exercises, a can is placed in the corner of a tennis court. Then, standing on the opposite baseline, a player attempts to hit the can with a ball. First, the player focuses on technique—she thinks about racket angle, swing, and so forth. She tries hard to do things "correctly." In the second instance, the

player gives up that sort of forced trying. She notes the location of the can, imagines the ball traveling from racket to target, and then swings the racket naturally—without self-judging. In which exercise do you envision yourself having more fun and being more accurate?

To perform music with abandon, you have to sense imminent phrases with the clarity of a tennis player who knows the location of that can. Still, your mastery must be such that it's as though the can is an arm's length away, and you can't miss it. You gain that degree of musical clarity by selecting accessible material and forging robust mental maps in practice. Nonetheless, keen imaging skills take time to develop. In due course, you'll image so easily that you'll be able to learn and rehearse music while riding a bus or sitting in a café. If you're on tour, for example, and spending hours in transit before an event, you'll use imaging to practice mentally, and your confidence will grow rather than fade. Then, when you step on stage, your awareness of your material will anchor your control and set your creativity free.

Warming Up

If you warm up in the right way, all your practicing and playing will have a sense of completeness and integration.

—William Pleeth, cellist

Like sensuous opening ceremonies, warm-ups prepare the body, mind, and spirit for making music. On the physical side, warm-ups increase blood flow to the muscles, encourage lubrication in the joints, and, for singers, limber up the vocal mechanism. Mentally, they focus the attention; spiritually, they inspire excitement for music. If you bypass warming up, though, you not only make playing or singing more difficult but also multiply your risk of injury because cold muscles are prone to fatigue and tearing. Added to that, a scattered mind can neither learn deeply nor create uplifting music. The guidelines here will help you devise warm-ups that nourish both your music making and your well-being.

Warm-Up Fundamentals

1. Breathe, move, and center
2. Specify goals
3. Mindfully set up and tune
4. Begin moderately
5. Mix it up
6. Finish in 10–15 minutes

1. Breathe, move, and center

To transition from your everyday existence to the lofty spheres of music, allocate a few minutes to do some breathing, moving, and centering before

you sing or play. For instance, in a standing position, you might circle your arms overhead as you inhale and then lower them as you exhale (p. 76). You could also roll your shoulders a number of times. While you move and breathe, achieve a centered presence: Affirm the significance of music in your life, let go of extraneous concerns, and restore inner balance.

Also, fit your movements to your circumstances. In cool settings, put on layers of clothing, and move vigorously enough to bump up your body temperature; when you feel sluggish, opt for energizers like jumping jacks. If you're unsure what sorts of movements might suit you, check with your teacher, an athletic trainer, or a physical therapist. Additional resources are available via *musiciansway.com.*

2. Specify goals

Next, turn your thoughts toward specific goals. When preparing for a practice session, clarify what items you'll work on, and organize your materials. Envision how you'll proceed; maybe jot down a plan. When getting ready for a performance, connect with the expressive substance of your repertoire along with your desire to commune with listeners—see *backstage techniques* (p. 162) for preparatory routines to use before a show.

3. Mindfully set up and tune

For most instrumentalists, the first act of playing revolves around unpacking an instrument, assuming playing position, and tuning. And how musicians do those things can bolster or weaken their creative mindsets. If you play an instrument that requires tuning, use a consistent tuning protocol, and make precise intonation central to your aesthetic. Whatever your musical specialty, though, carry out your preparatory regimen efficiently, easefully, and with a mindful reverence that reinforces your artistic aims.

4. Begin moderately

The physical aspect of your warm-up serves one main purpose: to draw blood to your music-making muscles and render them warm and supple. Therefore, begin to play or vocalize at moderate speed and intensity. Avoid any hard-driving material until your muscles are permeated with heat. (Singers: See *voice care,* p. 268, for added tips.)

Is there an ideal warm-up procedure? Probably not. You aren't the same each day, so you should adapt your warm-up patterns in response to how you feel. You can get going with material from any practice zone, including improvised material, as long as it's undemanding. "When warming up, what you play isn't as important as how you play it," writes violinist Julie Lyonn Lieberman.[12]

Whether you commence with an exercise or a favorite melody, image ahead, and embody the mastery, integration, and transcendence that underpin deep practice. Be open to whatever you experience and adjust as needed. Some days things will seem fluid and natural; other times, you'll need to select elementary material and steadily reintegrate your faculties. Either way, saturate your warm-up with *habits of excellence* (p. 20).

5. Mix it up

With any warm-up, mix in a range of techniques to reinstate broad-based control. You might review some scales, arpeggios, diction exercises, and part of a beloved piece at an easygoing tempo. Consult your teacher for warm-up strategies tailored to your individual needs, and continually look for creative ways to kick off your music making.

6. Finish in 10–15 minutes

Efficiency is vital to both practice and warming up. An efficient warm-up preserves practice time and promptly readies the musician. An overlong warm-up might drain energies such that a performer would tire partway through a rehearsal or concert.

By and large, once you start to play or sing, complete your warm-up in 10–15 minutes so that you're well prepared but unfatigued. Still, don't be too strict with time limits. Some musicians warm up more gradually than others. Plus, warm-ups should be more extended on tough days or prior to brief performances such as auditions. Be systematic, but also bring flexibility and inventiveness to any warm-up plan.