

Growth Pt.1

Practicing is all about improving your skills, but It can be more nuanced than just “getting better”. Most of the time when we think about skill acquisition we will describe learning new repertoire, increasing tempo thresholds, assimilating a new technical approach, etc. This all falls under the umbrella of “deliberate practice” which we described as working at the edge of your abilities. The value of this type of practice cannot be overstated, but we have to acknowledge that there is more to being a professional level performer than solely increasing the outer limits of our skills. A hallmark of a pro is the ability to not just play well, but to play CONSISTENTLY well at all times and in a variety of conditions and circumstances. In order to achieve this we must examine both extremes of our capabilities: our best, AND our worst.



Expectations vs. Reality

We have all had the experience performing below our maximum potential in pressure situations such as auditions, concerts, lessons, masterclasses, etc., but is this really what is happening? Most people have an unrealistic assessment of their current abilities. Our fragile egos cause us to edit together a “highlight reel” of all of our best moments from practicing throughout the day. We then identify with this idealized and unrealistic fantasy version of ourselves and set our expectations to that level. When we inevitably fail to perform up to these expectations, we may feel that we caved under pressure (not necessarily true), despite the fact that we were well prepared (we weren't). In reality, we have never actually played at

the level of this “best of” collage. We need to learn to identify with how we play something the first time through with little or no warm up. This can initially be a bit of a psychological gut punch as this version of ourselves will likely be far inferior to the idealized version. Hopefully you will find that this new-and-not-so-improved version is much closer to how we perform in pressure situations. It is important to build and hone this feeling of the ability to play at a consistent, expected level, even if the level is lower than where you thought you were. Consistency builds confidence. Once we have recovered our pride, it’s time to get to work.

Floors and Ceilings

No one (well, maybe your Mom) cares what you are capable of: all that matters is what you are actually ABLE to do on a consistent basis. I think of this in terms of the “Performer’s Attic”. This is the space that houses your ability, and the idea is have as little headroom as possible. You want your Ceiling (best playing) and your Floor (worst playing) to be as close as possible. It is vital to spend dedicated time working on BOTH extremes. Everyone works on improving their best playing, but there are many ways of working on raising your floor. The value is twofold: you will hone your expectation of consistency and highlight the areas that need the most attention.

Here are a few strategies:

Play cold

- Pick up your instrument, tune, and play.
- Choose something that you would likely play first in an audition or performance (e.g. Bach, or Concerto movement).
- Use this as the basis for establishing your priorities in your practice
- Proceed with caution: cold, tight muscles are prone to stress and injury. This should not be a marathon session! The exposition of a concerto or first half of a movement of Bach is plenty. The idea is to establish your “floor” and adapt to the feeling of being unsettled at the beginning of a performance.

Record first and last

- Record your run-throughs at the beginning of your practice sessions.
- Listen immediately to set practice priorities.

- Record again at the end.
- Sometimes in practice we record for “vanity”. Make sure your intent is to put a proverbial “black light” to the schmutz of your performance. This is not about being overly harsh or judgmental. It’s about honesty.

Unfamiliar locations

- Perform in a variety of locations (pandemic permitting...)
- If possible, warm up in a different space, and have the first notes of your performance be in the new space.
- Combine with “play cold”. I had the opportunity on several occasions to watch Edgar Meyer at the beginning of master classes use this strategy when preparing Bach. He rolled into the venue, unpacked his bass, and launched straight into the suite.

Confidence is often more reliant on consistency at first than on an actual level of performance. As your expectations and performance start to sync, you will gain the confidence that as your “floor” rises, so can your expectations. Set your sights on “Minimum Headroom”.



FRACTAL FRIDAY TOPICS!

Please submit comments or suggestions for future topics to
davidallenmoore@fractalbassist.com

FRACTAL FORUM: Friday Forums are on “pause” for the moment

NEXT FORUM:

2/14 @ 10AM PT

Fractal Fingering “deep dive” continues...

MORE SPECIAL GUESTS!

Hal Robinson FEBRUARY 21!

Paul Ellison (date TBD)

FRACTAL BASSIST Channel on YouTube (Coming Soon!)

This invite-only YouTube channel will be a continuation, development and place to share these ideas and principles. Although the entire Fractal Fingering course and samples are available online and at DiscoverDoubleBass.com, this channel will provide a forum for more in-depth content and to address questions on a more individual basis.

If you have any questions, comments, ideas you'd like explored, or inspiration you'd like to share please email: davidallenmoore@fractalbassist.com.

With Love,

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