

MATT'S TOP TIPS

FOR MUSICIANS OF ALL AGES

- **DON'T MAKE MUSIC HARD WHEN IT'S EASY.** Whether it's excess tension, leaning back so we lack support, or hunching forward so we've collapsed our cores, many of us find little ways to make playing our instrument harder than it needs to be. Sit up tall and open, relax, and enjoy what you're doing!

- **BREATHE IN THE WAY YOU WANT TO PLAY.** This isn't just for wind players, either! String players, pianists, and all other musicians need to breathe just as well. Counting yourself in and breathing with the beat will help focus the mind and bring your whole body into the act of music-making, and the result will feel more successful and natural.

- **MOVE FORWARD THROUGH THE NOTES.** Music isn't a vertical act, where each note exists on its own. Music is a horizontal act, where each note moves forward into the next one. Whether that means continuous moving air, moving a bow, smoothly connecting your fingers, or however your instrument accomplishes it, keep momentum going forwards.

- **IF YOU CAN SAY IT, YOU CAN PLAY IT.** Tricky rhythms and intervals can often be solved by putting your instrument down and vocalizing it. Try speaking or clapping your way through a rhythm, or singing the interval. Once you can hear it away from the instrument, applying it to the instrument will be much easier!

- **METRONOMES NEVER LIE. TUNERS NEVER LIE.** Be sure to use the tools and technology we have available! A metronome will not forgive if we take extra long to breathe or turn a page. A tuner will always tell you when your pitch strays from equal temperament. Many of these are free for smart phones as well, so use them!

(Note for more advanced vocalists, wind and string players: usually pieces sound better in just intonation, in which case certain notes won't be quite the same as what your tuner says. You can still use a tuner so long as you know where it needs to point. Ask your teacher for more information)

- **SOUNDING GOOD AND BEING IN TUNE ARE LINKED.** If you're not playing in tune, you can't be playing with a good sound. If you're not supporting and making a good sound, you'll never be able to play in tune. Work on your intonation, and listen to the sound you're making, and they will improve alongside each other.

- **INTERNALIZE THE PULSE AND MOVE CRISPLY.** You won't have a metronome on stage with you, so make sure you can keep a steady beat in your mind as you play. And no matter how fast or slow you're playing, your fingers should be quick and crisp so you don't smear between the notes. Remember: MOVE FORWARD THROUGH THE NOTES!

- **FIND JOY AND PASSION IN EVERYTHING YOU PLAY.** Yes, everything. Even scales. Music is first and foremost about expression. Every note is played with love, whether it's a heartfelt ballad, a sombre melody, a technical etude, or even a simple scale. You must put emotion in everything you do.

- **LOOK FOR MORE OPPORTUNITIES TO MAKE MUSIC.** The best way to learn is by doing, so the eager learner should look for as many opportunities to play as possible. Join a new band, seek out new venues, and even try a new style. You will learn something from every experience, even if that thing is sometimes learning what not to do.

- **LISTEN TO NEW MUSIC BY GOOD MUSICIANS.** Everyone has their favourite albums and artists, but we can't limit ourselves! Seek out music and genres you've never heard before, artists similar to or different from those you like. Don't settle for low quality recordings: seek out top performers and internalize the sound.

- **PRACTICE YOUR EAR LIKE AN INSTRUMENT.** Being able to hear what we want to play is an important skill. Sadly solfege is taught less and less these days, but learning your "do-re-mi"s will improve intonation, accuracy, and sightreading ability.

- **PRESENT YOURSELF WELL WITH CONFIDENCE.** Though you'd think it wouldn't affect the sound, it will change what people think of you! If you make sure you're looking your best, and moving, talking, and standing with confidence, you'll go a long way in influencing what people think of you.

- **AND ABOVE ALL ELSE: PRACTICE.**

Focused, invested practice.

Every day if you are able.

With goals in mind.

FOCUSED PRACTICE MAKES PERFECT.

