

Music Practice as Meditation

BY MARK NAUSEEF

Music practice as a form of meditation is not a new idea, and much has been written about cultures relating to music in this way, such as India with its raga/meditation connection. Any musician, regardless of degree of ability or experience, can use music practice as meditation, and meditation as a means of deepening music practice.

The key is focused concentration with complete (but relaxed) attention to the situation, whether it is with composed (notated, graphic, verbal, etc.) or completely free improvised music. This is not meditation in the sense of a transcendent state of “no mind” but a meditation of

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completely absorbed concentration. This intense but relaxed concentration should have the music you are practicing as the single object of the awareness.

As well as increasing your ability on your instrument through the benefits of focused/concentrated practice, you are also designing a sanctuary within yourself that is away from or outside your normal state of active mind. Over time, the periods of concentration should become longer and deeper and easier to access.

Of course, access to a state of deep, concentrated awareness is also very valuable in live performance situations as well as in practice, not only to reap the riches deep within the sound but also to cut-off/exclude the many other distractions that go along with live performance. These distractions could include certain acoustics, sound systems, lights, air (or lack of), audience (or lack of), etc.

It does not matter if it's in your practice studio or in concert, the key is to develop a way of easy access into this sharp, clear, relaxed, awake, peaceful, and concentrated state of mind.

Here are a few ideas that may help.

Relaxed posture—making sure there are no obstacles affecting the flow of energy, such as having the shoulders raised unnecessarily, a bent neck, or any other forms of body tension.

Start practice before you actually begin to play by being clear and focused on what you are about to do. Know exactly what material you are about to work on. The exception to this would be free/spontaneous improvising, although any form of improvising also requires an alert state of mind.

Prepare the area where you are to practice or perform so that you are comfortably situated for clear and focused work.

Take a moment before beginning to play to do some deep breathing and release any tension in the body. Also release the mind from any thoughts not

pertaining to the work you are about to do.

When learning new material, start at a slow tempo so that the material can be well understood through clear execution, and repeat the idea enough times so that the brain-muscle connection can be well trained and the idea/material can be burned into your being.

Have respect for your instrument, as it is not just a pile of wood, metal, strings,

skin, etc., but is a vehicle that can bring you to an exceptional state of awareness and peace.

It's yoga with music as the object/point of awareness. Make music practice not just something you do to improve your ability with your instrument, but approach music practice as a destination—a focused, relaxed and concentrated state of awareness inside the music. This cultivation of attention makes music a place to create within as well as the product of creation itself.

Mark Nauseef has performed and/or recorded with such artists as Jack Bruce, Trilok Gurtu, Steve Swallow, L. Shankar, Hamza El Din, Tony Oxley, Rabih Abou-Khalil and Lou Harrison. Nauseef studied Javanese Gamelan with K.R.T. Wasitodiningrat, Balinese Gamelan with I. Nyoman Wenten, North Indian Pakhawaj drumming and theory with Pandit Taranath Rao and Pandit Amiya Dasgupta, Ghanaian drumming and dance with Kobla and Alfred Ladzekpo, Dzidzogbe Lawulvi and C.K. Ganyo, and 20th Century Western percussion techniques and hand drumming with John Bergamo and Glen Velez. **PN**