More than Just Music Lessons: Enriching Your Life Through the Study of Music

By Inja Stanic
and Brannon Hungness
This book is dedicated to my loving parents, my brother, Brette and my husband John, for their endless support, love, encouragement, inspiration, guidance and for helping me believe that anything is possible; and to you, the reader... I hope this book inspires you to dive deeply into the exciting world of music!

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About the Authors

Inja Stanic is the founder and CEO of the International School of Music (ISM) in Bethesda, MD. Established in 2004, ISM serves over 1,500 students annually, and features an international faculty of over 120 world-renowned teachers and guest artists. ISM currently has two locations just outside of Washington, DC.

ISM was originally created to offer private music instruction in all instruments, theory and voice. Under the leadership of Ms. Stanic, ISM's music programs have expanded to include after-school programs, performances, a concert series, summer music camps, ensembles, year-round classes, and community outreach events. In her daily work, Ms. Stanic brings strong leadership and management capabilities, with an unwavering commitment to musical excellence and community service.

By forming partnerships with local schools, neighborhood programs, and industry professionals, the International School of Music has forged a strong community presence. ISM is an active member of the National Guild of Community School of the Arts, and a center for National Piano Guild Auditions. For several consecutive years, ISM has been the recipient of “the Best of Bethesda in Music Lessons,” awarded by Washington Parent, Washington Families, and the US Commerce Association.


Prior to opening ISM, Ms. Stanic graduated with a Bachelor’s in Music from the University of Maryland, and earned a Masters in Arts from the American University, where she was awarded a two-year fellowship as an accompanist. Ms. Stanic coordinated several youth music programs in the Washington DC area, while also teaching piano, theory and chamber music to students of all ages.

She has served as a faculty member at the American University and the Holton-Arms School.

Ms. Stanic is an internationally acclaimed pianist whose teaching reflects her experience as both a performer and instructor. Her recordings—“Memories of Yugoslavia,” and “Tengo Nostalgia de Ti”—were warmly received by international audiences. By promoting works of contemporary Balkan composers in numerous lecture recitals, Ms. Stanic has expanded the repertoire of piano and chamber literature. Her published writings for The International Journal of Musicology, and Perspectives of New Music have furthered her academic influence.

Ms. Stanic's philanthropic experience includes performing at fundraising concerts sponsored by The Balkan Express, Women for Women, and the Latin American Cultural Heritage Foundation.

Ms. Stanic is passionate about providing the highest quality music education. Her goal is to nurture the talent and creativity found in students of every age, background and level of ability.

Brannon Hungness is a professional musician who has performed throughout the US, Europe, and Canada, sharing the stage with Elvis Costello, Philip Glass, Iggy Pop, and many others. He has recorded with musicians from the Paul McCartney Band, Pink Floyd, Peter Gabriel Band, The Fixx, and many others.

Mr. Hungness is known as Rochester NY’s most sought-after music education authority. He founded the Rochester Academy of Music & Arts in 2007, realizing a life-long dream to create an institute famous for its dazzling creativity and attention to the interests and goals of each individual student.
Preface

We all love music. Whether we listen, sing, learn to play an instrument, or perform, music lifts the spirit and brings joy to life. Music can enhance our understanding of art and of the world, allowing us to think and express ourselves more creatively. Music also gives us a better understanding of ourselves, inspiring us to reach for higher goals and seek greater satisfaction in life.

I started my musical journey when I received a piano from my grandma at age 6. After seeing my excitement, my parents enrolled me in a music program at a state music school in my former country of Yugoslavia. Though the school was free, admission was talent-based, so each child needed to keep up with rigorous requirements. Very soon, I realized it was not all fun and games, since there was a lot of pressure to practice and keep up with high expectations!

After spending a couple years merely “getting by,” I realized that my enrollment would be jeopardized if I did not step up and improve my playing skills. I remember thinking to myself, “I cannot imagine my life without music.” That was a turning point for me. I decided that I was going to do anything possible to keep my place in the school. I began practicing for hours a day and taking part in competitions. The more I practiced, the more I became hooked on music. And that was that. My life’s journey as a musician had officially begun. Music was always the first thing on my list, my passion, my calling, and my life!
After endless hours of practicing, I won several competitions and, as a teenager, was invited to perform in numerous concerts. Just as I completed high school, my father received a diplomatic posting in Washington D.C., and I started college in the United States. I quickly discovered that music pedagogy is very different in the States. I already had great discipline, which was helpful when practicing. Discovering different teaching philosophies was freeing— the open-mindedness and encouragement I found in my college studies in the U.S. helped me to become a better performer, musician and teacher. I learned that the key to becoming a successful musician was combining razor focus and discipline with encouragement, patience, and determination.

I performed as a soloist with the Montgomery County Orchestra, and my performances were broadcast throughout Europe and America by National Public Radio and The Voice of America. I performed at The National Theater, the Polish, Finnish, Austrian, and Yugoslav Embassies, and at fundraisers sponsored by The Balkan Express, Women for Women, and the Latin American Cultural Heritage Foundation. During my graduate studies at the American University, a civil war broke out in my home country of Yugoslavia. This led me to devote my master’s thesis and research to exploring Balkan composers. While many libraries back home were being burned and destroyed, I was fortunate to obtain access to many resources from my professors and friends. My hope was to preserve as much of our musical tradition and culture as possible and share them with the rest of the world. Some of my research was published in The International Journal of Musicology and Perspectives of New Music. I recorded a CD titled “Memories of Yugoslavia”.

Although performing and recording were always fun, my real passion was teaching. There is nothing more rewarding than seeing a child’s face light up with excitement when he or she learns a favorite song, and is able to play it for loved ones. I began teaching at a few colleges and music schools, and I ended up with a very long waiting list of students.

That is when I decided to open The International School of Music. From the beginning, since 2004, our teaching has sought to instill strong musical and technical fundamentals, and our goal is to foster a true appreciation for the arts. This approach has resonated with students, parents and the community. After 5 years, we opened a second location in order to accommodate the demand for more music lessons. Our teaching style creates a positive atmosphere for learning and growth, while also making music fun for our students. We take special care to cater to each student’s individual needs and goals. Our students develop technical, aural, rhythmic and reading skills, and we encourage them to analyze, interpret, compose and sight-read. In older and more advanced students, we teach musical clarity and power, technical facility, the production of a wide range of beautiful sounds, and an understanding of musical structure. We help students develop as complete and versatile musicians.

With a diverse selection of instructors, we are able to assist students of all levels and ages, which has produced astonishing results—our students have received superior ratings in music festivals, auditions and competitions, and have been accepted as music majors in some of the best music colleges and conservatories around the world. And there are many students who take lessons just to enjoy the challenge, embarking on a life-long journey of discovery and experiencing everything that music has to offer!

The information you find in this book springs from my many years of teaching experience. But it also reflects my dedication
**Preface**

to music education, which started at a very young age.

Just as I was inspired by my first piano teachers back home, I hope that our school and this book inspire you to pursue your dreams and share the magic and beauty of music with your family, with your community and with the whole world.

To your musical success!

Inja Stanic  
October, 2015  
Washington, D.C.
Introduction

This book provides information to help you and your family enrich your lives through the study of music. The guidelines in this book were created to help you and your family have a successful and rewarding experience studying music.

Once you decide to learn music, many questions may arise:

What instrument should I play?

What makes a great music school?

How much will I have to practice?

How can I help my child practice?

What is the value of music lessons?

This book tries to answer these questions, and explores what it takes to succeed. It emphasizes the importance of the parents' involvement in their child's learning process, and provides practical tips that can significantly increase your enjoyment of music lessons.

With focus and determination, music lessons can be a wonderful learning experience for the entire family. So, let's look at what it means to become a musician!
Chapter 1

Ten benefits of learning to play a musical instrument

Wow! Did you know that playing a musical instrument can change the structure of your brain? This may sound like something out of a sci-fi movie, but it is actually a scientifically proven phenomenon that these particular changes have positive benefits for you brain.

Let’s explore some of these in detail. There are plenty of ways you can benefit from studying music, but these ten are some of the most important.
Chapter 1

1. Improved thought processes

Musically-trained people typically perform better on cognitive tasks. Music students also show a marked improvement in non-verbal memory and cognitive flexibility. All that is to say: “Brains work better on music”. Other results show that playing an instrument can even increase your IQ by as many as seven points!

2. Time management and organizational skills become stronger

Music, by nature, is related to time, so students must learn to organize their thoughts in terms of time structures. For instance, when learning a new piece of music, a good student will dissect the composition, perhaps focusing on the difficult passages first. A strategy like this is extremely efficient, and allows the student to progress more quickly. In my experience, when a student sees the quick improvement that results from an organized mind, it creates even more motivation!

Music students gradually train their brains to process all new information in terms of time and structure. This helps them manage and organize tasks, which can extend far beyond the playing of their instruments.

3. Enhanced coordination

The parts of your brain that control motor skills actually grow larger and become more active when you learn to play a musical instrument.

In order to create great music, your brain must translate the composer’s thoughts and notation into specific motor patterns. For most instruments, you need to be able to have your fingers, arms, and sometimes even your legs each performing different tasks at the same time. As a result, your brain learns to simultaneously master finger placement, rhythm patterns, and even breath control. This enhanced coordination helps students in everything from sports to typing and more!

4. Music relieves stress

Playing music, or even just listening to it, is a great way to relieve stress. It doesn’t matter if the music is soothing or exciting; when you are totally immersed in a sea of sound, it’s much easier to relax! When playing an instrument, your body also releases a special chemical called “endorphins” which naturally reduce stress.
5. Increased memory capacity

Playing a musical instrument helps the mind to be alert and active which eventually improves memory. It also requires you to recognize sounds and tones, which increases your ability to store aural information. With a better aural memory, you’ll find things like learning a foreign language will become easier and you may become more proficient in your own language as well!

6. Our aptitude for math skyrockets

Playing music is all about counting notes and rhythms. The great thing is that this helps reinforce and improve your math skills. The ideas involved in music composition and theory have always been heavily influenced by mathematical concepts. So, students of music have a much easier time understanding fractions, percentages, and even geometry, because often they’ve already experienced similar things in the music they play.

7. Our confidence and self-expression become ignited!

Music is a great outlet for your emotions. When you reach a certain point in your musical education, you’ll be able to express yourself by playing whatever kind
of music you want. You might even write your own music! By playing music that is true to who you are, you’ll build self-esteem and a strong sense of identity.

### 8. Playing music provides health benefits

Playing music can have a soothing effect on the mind and body. Studies suggest that music therapy helps children and teens with attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), insomnia, and depression. Playing music has been found to reduce blood pressure levels in musicians of all ages. Not to mention the physical benefits of drumming or rocking out some other instrument, which can burn as many as 500 calories during one session.

### 9. Music lessons teach discipline, responsibility and perseverance

It takes effort to learn how to play a musical instrument. It’s ultimately up to the student to put in the work. When you start getting good at your new skill, you get to see just how much that effort has paid off.

Maintaining a consistent practice schedule is important, as it trains the student to be disciplined. The lessons and skills learned from consistent practice build commitment and aid in many other aspects of life. Soon you’ll realize that with dedication, the sky is the limit!
10. It’s just plain fun!!!

Playing music is a blast! There’s nothing better than getting swept away by the song blaring through your headphones, raucously rocking out with friends, or finding just the right touch to squeeze the emotion out of a piano sonata. Even when you’re just getting started, playing basic songs is super fun! No matter how simple, there’s nothing better than being able to say “I just made music”!
Chapter 2
Choosing an Instrument

When choosing an instrument, there are some factors to consider: age, size (height and physical development of the student), and personal preferences. Of course, the cost of renting or buying an instrument is something to figure out with your local music store, but your teacher will probably have some good advice also. If you have not yet chosen an instrument to play, here are a few general pieces of advice for you to consider.
Personal preference

First off, desire is important! It should be an instrument you love hearing and really want to play. If you are excited and attracted to a particular instrument, you will be more motivated to practice. If you are not sure what to study, you may want to arrange a few trial lessons in different instruments to give you a hands-on experience.

It’s okay if you start with one instrument and change your mind later

Some students start with an instrument and eventually switch to a different one. Just as students change & grow, so do their tastes and interests. The great thing is that a lot of what you learn on one instrument is directly transferable to other instruments.

What’s your favorite music?

If you love jazz music, perhaps a better choice may be saxophone or piano versus cello; or if you love rock music it may be best to pick up a guitar, or bass. Regardless, it is often recommended to start with classical training since that will provide the student with a great foundation from which he/she can develop any particular style down the road.

The size of the instrument matters

While most instruments can be sized to fit the player, there are some instruments such as string bass, saxophone or tuba that can be much more difficult for small beginners. Think about whether it will be difficult to carry the instrument around (instruments such as the cello or harp can be awkward and heavy), and maybe find an opportunity to hold different instruments. Often a school music teacher or music school will have instrument “petting zoos” where potential students can try different instruments.
Chapter 2

Now let’s take a look at a few more specifics to consider regarding the most popular instruments.

Voice

In a way, you’re already set for vocal lessons; you don’t need to go out and buy anything! You’ll probably need to pick up some books on vocal instruction, but your teacher can recommend what will work best for you after having a lesson or two to get acquainted with your tastes and your vocal range.

Even though you don’t have to hit keys or pluck strings when you sing, the voice is still a specific instrument, albeit one that is internal. Warm-ups and breathing techniques are fundamental to properly using your voice. Visualization and acting techniques will help you to learn how to express yourself when singing.

I also recommend that singers learn to play guitar or piano. Not only will you be able to provide your own accompaniment, it will help you build a stronger musical foundation. Even just learning the basics will significantly increase the range of what you can do with your voice and your music. Singing along with recordings is also a good way to practice, and it’s fun to find backing tracks (karaoke) for you favorite songs on internet sites like YouTube.

While some teachers recommend starting formal voice lessons after a child’s voice changes, students as young as six can start with general singing lessons that do not involve strenuous vocal technique. Since the younger body is generally not yet ready for the rigors of vocal technique due to the physical nature of voice lessons (proper breathing techniques, development of the vocal chords and lung capacity), singing lessons with a younger student should be limited to learning to sing on pitch, and understanding the basics of breathing, rhythm, notation, and dynamics.
Chapter 2

Piano

Many people are concerned that they will need a piano at home in order to take piano lessons. This is not the case! It is perfectly fine to start out on a keyboard. For the first couple of years of learning, you will be familiarizing yourself with the layout of the keys and understanding music notation. Generally speaking, the order and sounds of the keys remain the same, regardless of the brand or cost.

If you do decide to start on a keyboard, it is important to use one with touch sensitive, full size, weighted keys so it feels like playing a real piano. Since the standard acoustic piano has eighty-eight keys, ideally your keyboard would have that many as well; definitely don’t buy a keyboard with less than sixty-six keys. This will ensure you do not get confused later on when you play other pianos.

Lastly, real pianos have pedals as well as keys. If you start on keyboard, make sure it comes with a damper pedal either built in or that you can plug in and use.
Chapter 2

Violin, Viola or Cello

First off, it’s extremely important to have a violin, viola or cello that’s the right size for you. Because people of all ages like playing string instruments, instrument makers produce them in many sizes. If you are an adult, a full size (4/4) violin is a good fit, but a pre-school student, will find a smaller instrument (1/4 or ½ size) works the best. The best way to ensure that you have the proper size is to visit a store that specializes in stringed instruments. The professionals there will be able to measure you and determine the size of the instrument that will best fit your body.

Beware of buying low-cost “economy” instruments from magazines or general stores that may be a bad investment. In the last decade, the market has been flooded with a great deal of inexpensive instruments. These instruments are often poorly made with cheap materials; your repair costs may be more than what you paid for the instrument in the first place!

Also, it’s always good to ask your teacher before you pick an instrument. Teachers have a wealth of experience and can make recommendation on the appropriate size, best brands, and quality instrument stores.

In lessons, string players will learn to coordinate their left and right hands for fingering and bowing. Another challenge is that the violin, viola or cello don’t have frets or markings on the neck of the instrument. As a result, a beginner generally doesn’t produce the most pleasant tones right away! Don’t be dismayed if you or your student sounds a bit squawky at first. This is a natural part of the process; your tone will improve greatly over time.
Drums

Most students want to start off playing the actual drum set. If that’s where your desire is, then that’s the direction to take. Do what makes you happy!

However, it’s also OK (and very common) to start off with just sticks and what’s called a practice pad. A practice pad is a piece of hard rubber that mimics in shape and response an actual drum head. This is an easy and inexpensive way to start learning basic rhythms. If you choose to go in this direction, it’s a good idea to start looking into purchasing a real drum set within the next 3 to 4 months. While drum pads are great, it’s a way more exciting to play the real thing; it’ll sound better and keep your interest strong!

Electronic drums are another option. These come in all sizes and configurations to imitate everything from a single drum to an entire drum set. The sound can be fed through speakers or fed through headphones. Depending on your living situation (or your desire to preserve your relationship with neighbors!) it’s nice to be able to turn the volume up or down.

By nature, drums are loud! Irreversible damage to your ears can occur after only an hour of practice. I recommend using earplugs when playing for long periods of time.

Woodwind and Brass Instruments

The wind family contains an exciting variety of instruments. From woodwinds like piccolo, flute, clarinet, saxophone, oboe, bassoon, and recorder to brass instruments including trumpet, trombone, tuba, cornet, flugelhorn, euphonium/baritone, and French horn, there is a voice for everyone.

Students of wind instruments usually begin at the age of 9 (or older) since they need to have developed enough lung capacity and, in the case of the tuba, to be big enough to hold the instrument.

Everything that we’ve discussed regarding instrument purchase and rental in the section on strings is true with wind instruments as well. Always consult a professional instructor before making any purchases.
Chapter 3

Twelve things to look for in a provider of music lessons.

Not all music lessons are the same. It’s important to find a music teacher who will fulfill your needs as an individual. Here are some guidelines that I recommend...
Chapter 3

1. Take lessons with a teacher who is fun

Having a teacher who has a fun, positive attitude makes learning easier. You will feel inspired and encouraged, like you can take on the world!

2. Take lessons at a school designed for private lessons

In-home lessons or lessons at a teacher’s house are riddled with distractions. Phone calls, texting, household tasks, cooking smells, pets, television, and other disruptions can lead to non-productive lesson time. Plus, many students end up feeling too comfortable at home, which can lead to a more lax attitude during lessons.

Often, teachers providing in-home lessons lack structure in their lesson plans. A school designed for private lessons should have an office staff who take care of all the scheduling, so the teacher is free to focus all of his or her attention on you. When teachers are distracted by things like scheduling and client phone calls, it can be difficult for them to focus on their priorities. A teacher’s #1 priority should always be to give you the best lesson experience possible.

Additionally, students who study music in a music school are motivated by listening to their peers and developing camaraderie with other students. They may also benefit from being exposed to a variety of musical instruments in the school.

3. Take lessons at a school run by an experienced music institution

There are many factors involved in teaching private music lessons. When a school is run by people who have many years of teaching experience (not just a business person), they know specifically what to look for in teachers they hire at their school. Additionally, a reputable music school interviews teachers, conducts background checks, and makes sure that instructors are well-qualified and experienced.

4. Take lessons at a school that has multiple teachers for each instrument

Schools generally have several teachers in each instrument, so it allows you to find just the right teacher for your needs. Ideally you want the teacher to be able to relate his/her teaching to your individual learning style and personality.

Additionally, music teachers come and go. Like all of us, they sometimes have to move or experience unavoidable family commitments. When you take
lessons at a school with multiple teachers, changing teachers is not difficult.

Since all the teachers are hired by the same music lesson authority, it is easy for the administration to facilitate the change of teachers by communicating with a former and the new teacher what students covered in lessons and what students’ needs are. Often a school can schedule a new teacher to observe the current teacher’s lessons, so students have an opportunity to meet the new teacher before formally transferring into their studio. Additionally, since schools have several instructors per each instrument on the faculty, students always have an option to try different instructors, if needed.

5. Take Lessons at a school that has a curriculum

A specific curriculum helps you and the teacher set goals, plan the lesson time and use it more efficiently. Lessons can include several activities such as technique, reading, learning new concepts and new repertoire, and reviewing and polishing older pieces to bring them to performance level. When you see a clear plan and you understand the gradual, step-by-step process, you can see the results, stay motivated and eventually accomplish more and reach higher levels of accomplishment. Additionally, the curriculum can guide you and prepare you for performance evaluations with constructive feedback on your studies and progress.

6. Take lessons at a school that offers convenience and flexibility

Extensive teaching hours and flexible scheduling can be a huge help to busy families. Simple things such as scheduling all siblings, or a parent and a child, at the same time can be a great convenience for parents, and allow them to reduce hours of waiting and driving to several different classes each month.

7. Take lessons with a school that is going to help you find the right music teacher for you
Finding a teacher who meets your expectations and needs is very important. Ideally, you want to take lessons at a school that is committed to matching every student with a teacher according to that student’s learning style, level, goals, and interests. Prospective students should discuss with a teacher their practice expectations, placement level, the course of study and their goals.

Some teachers specialize in working with a specific age group, or with advanced students, or with a specific style of music, such as jazz improvisation. Find someone who resonates with you and who can help you on your unique musical journey.

Students should have the option to try different teachers in order to find a teacher whose personality they like, and whose judgment they trust, so they can follow his/her instructions and recommendations. This will increase the opportunities for a long-lasting and healthy student/teacher relationship.

8. Take lessons at a place with a pleasant atmosphere and a community of like-minded students

When you see others around you taking lessons and having fun, it inspires you to stick with it and become truly amazing!

9. Take lessons from a provider who offers at least two recitals a year

Every student deserves the opportunity to perform in recitals. After all, they are your chance to show off all that talent and hard work! Many students feel nervous before their first recital. Nervousness is normal, and can even be seen as a positive—it shows that you care about what you are doing! The truth is, you will gain so much confidence after having performed. Recitals can really help students move forward, as they are a great way to set concrete goals. Also, it’s fun and inspiring to see what the other students do! Despite the benefits, recitals should never be mandatory. Students should choose to participate when they are ready. Sometimes it builds confidence to just come and watch.
Chapter 3

10. Take lessons at a place clients rave about

Does your lessons provider have testimonials on its website? And what do they say? When you find a place where the clients’ words really resonate with you, that’s where you should go.

11. Take lessons at a school that hosts community events throughout the year

Participating in community events is important, because they help a student build relationships. Often, you will get the chance to hear your teacher perform, and you are likely to meet fellow students who have similar interests to yours. When you become an active part of something larger, you no longer feel like you’re doing it on your own. You will have a new support system. Getting more involved creates enthusiasm, because it’s simply much more exciting!

12. Did I mention that you should take lessons from somewhere that’s fun?

I know I did, but I want to stress it one more time! Students who enjoy their lessons do so much better and progress so much faster. Lessons should have structure. Lessons should be informative. Lessons should be inspiring. And…Music lessons should be fun!
Chapter 4

The benefits of music lessons for children, teens, and adults

Not all music lessons are the same. It’s important to find a music teacher who will fulfill your needs as an individual. Here are some guidelines that I recommend...
Chapter 4

For children

Studying music provides benefits for all ages, but the benefits for younger children are particularly noteworthy. Here’s a list of my top eight:

1. Children who take music lessons often have larger vocabularies and better reading skills than children who do not take lessons.

2. Children who take music lessons are more likely to excel in various forms of study, work more effectively in teams, stay enrolled in school, graduate, and pursue higher education.

3. Recent studies have shown that children who start and continue with music lessons statistically have lower reports of substance abuse (tobacco, alcohol, and illicit drugs).

4. Children who play music typically spend less time watching TV.

5. Children who play music display higher self-esteem and are more optimistic.

6. Music lessons help children develop listening skills, a sense of rhythm, a mode of self-expression, and creativity. This leads to a lifelong appreciation for music.

7. Music students develop communication and expressive abilities, problem-solving, and logical reasoning.

8. Learning to play an instrument improves fine motor skills and coordination, intelligence, focus and concentration. Additionally, studying music may also improve a child’s study habits, as the self-discipline needed to commit to a daily practice routine can carry over into how a child handles homework from school.
Music appreciation tends to blossom in the teen years. Most teenagers identify with popular singers or bands which can lead them to study their favorite performers’ musical styles. Solid musical instruction can help to channel a teenager’s interest into a love for the depth and varieties of music. Musical instruction can benefit teens in the following ways:

1. Students who start taking music lessons during their teen or childhood years score higher on the SAT.

2. Teens who play music form closer social bonds with other like-minded teens.

3. Teens who study music are typically more apt at expressing themselves and their ideas to teachers, parents, and their peers.

4. Studies have shown that teens who study music are not only more creative, but also more open-minded and accepting of different cultures and ways of thinking.

5. Mastery in music and arts is closely correlated to higher earnings in the future.
For adults

It is never too late to start learning a musical instrument. Many adults have found that learning to play a musical instrument is a stimulating, rewarding way to relieve stress. Professional adults often enjoy being involved in a creative and self-expressive recreational activity that can take their minds off of work. Music can also provide mature students with an opportunity to make new friends outside of the office. Good schools provide adult students with optional classes, ensembles, workshops, performances, and recitals.

Most accomplished teachers will tailor lessons to suit each adult’s learning style and personality. Whether it’s a Beethoven Sonata or a popular tune they’ve been humming for years, they find music that their student wants to learn. I find it’s best to study a repertoire based on a variety of musical styles in order to enhance enjoyment and keep your interest. Older adults tend to absorb knowledge at a more leisurely pace; if that’s you, it is important to look for a supportive and patient instructor who loves teaching. A teacher’s encouragement helps adult students develop the necessary basics in a respectful and enjoyable way.

Some of the benefits of musical study for adults include:

1. It’s not too late to start! Some of my best students have been adults, including seniors in their 70’s and 80’s. Eighty-two percent of adults say they wish they had learned to play a musical instrument as a child.

2. Adults who play music are typically more focused at work. Communication with their co-workers, family, and friends becomes more effective.

3. Playing music helps to release tension and reduce stress.

4. Playing music is a great way to have fun with friends and meet new people with similar interests.

5. Music lessons help adults stay mentally focused, active, and vibrant.

6. Older parents whose children have moved out (“empty-nesters”) often find playing an instrument as a new hobby very fulfilling.
Chapter 4

For the whole family

Quite often, when a child or teen student begins taking music lessons, a sibling or parent will start taking lessons as well. Although such family support is not absolutely necessary, it's still a great idea! Here are some of the benefits:

1. It's easier to maintain a practice schedule when there's more than one person participating. It's practice time, and the whole family knows it!

2. Healthy competition can push multiple family members to strive for their best.

3. Family members with advanced abilities can help the others out. Teaching family members can be a great way to practice!

4. It can be fun to play together as a family.

5. Have mini-recitals in your living room! These can be used to celebrate your child's progress, and the positive feedback can provide a great incentive to practice even more.
Chapter 5

Practical practicing tips

It’s very important to maintain a consistent practice routine. When you practice your instrument daily, it becomes a more important part of your life. Consistency helps you retain what you have learned and helps you to see your progress.
Practice every day

Everyone has other things they want to do, so it’s okay to skip a day or two here and there. If this happens, try to catch up with two practice sessions the day after.

When starting, practice for about 10 to 15 minutes each day

Don’t over-practice and turn it into a chore. Keep your practice sessions simple, this will help you keep a positive attitude about practicing.

The key is to do this every day making it a part of your regular routine. We don’t think twice about brushing our teeth every night, it can be the same for practicing! After a while, you’ll be ready to practice more because you will really want to practice more. For a beginner, instead of setting a time frame, it is often better to set goals of repetitions. For example, practicing a piece of music correctly five times a day seems easier than saying you have to practice for 15 minutes.

Structure your practice time

Divide each piece into smaller sections so you can become comfortable bit by bit. Then mark the hard measures so you can remember to practice them first. Afterwards, you can go on to playing longer phrases, then passages, and finally the entire piece.

Leave your instrument out where you can see it

If your instrument has a case, take it out once you get home from your lesson and put it in a noticeable place. Singers should leave out books and CDs with backing tracks. Having your musical materials out will remind you to practice every day. It will also remind you that music is a part of your life and that you are becoming a real musician!

Plus, if you have friends over, they will probably think it’s pretty cool that you have an instrument. And guess what? IT IS COOL!

Put up posters or pictures of your favorite musicians in your practice area

Whatever room you decide to make your designated practicing area, consider decorating at least part of it with images of your favorite performers. Any kind of music-related imagery can work. You can even clip photos from old books and magazines. You can also find clocks, lamps, and many other items that are
shaped like your instrument. Defining your musical space (similar to leaving your instrument out) reinforces the fact that you are a musician. Personal decorations can really shift your mindset; it's all about making it personal!

**Practice at the same time each day**

Find a time that you usually have free for practice time, then stick with that schedule every day. This way it becomes a natural part of your daily routine. When practicing is a part of your regular schedule it is hard to forget to do it!

When you think about that time of the day, form a picture of it in your mind and get excited about it! Your practice session is a big step toward becoming the musician of your dreams.

**A good attitude will take you far!**

When you are learning to play a musical instrument, some things will be fun right away and some things will take a little more time. Keep in mind that it is normal to take more time to master certain lessons. Don’t assume that something being hard means you’re doing badly; if you put in the effort, nothing can stop you. Always keep that attitude that you will be AWESOME.
Parents need to tell their kids to practice

Often, kids will not practice on their own. Actually, that’s an understatement. Most children will almost never practice without serious prompting. It’s ultimately up to parents to urge their kids to practice.

My advice is to make a weekly or monthly practice chart. Place stickers on the chart for each day your child practices. It’s a great incentive.

You can also take it one step further – once your child attains a certain number of stickers you can treat them to ice cream, a movie, trip to the museum, or whatever they love. Once your kids have been practicing for a while it will become a habit, and they will start taking initiative on their own. Someday they will thank you for pushing them!

Practice slowly to master quickly

When they are first starting out, most students want to rush. It’s great to be eager, but in this case slow and steady definitely wins. It’s always important to practice very slowly when you are starting something new. Do it as slowly as you need to be able to play it right, even if it is really, really slow.

If you go too fast for yourself, you’ll make mistakes that your brain will start to think are your fault. When you slow it down enough to succeed, your brain says, “Hey, I can do this!” Since you may have a natural tendency to slow down during difficult sections, using a device called a “metronome” (which is an automatic pulse generating machine) can really help maintain the same speed. Eventually, you’ll develop an internal sense of rhythm. Once you perfect music at a slow pace, gradually work on getting faster.

Watch other musicians and pretend you are them when you practice

It’s always helpful to look at someone who really knows how to play. You can find clips on the internet, watch TV, a DVD, or go see someone play live. Observe what they are doing and how they look while they are playing. Then, when you are playing a song or practicing, imagine you are that musician! This technique, called modeling, can be very effective for learning and building confidence. You can also use your teacher as someone to model.

Set personal goals

Having specific goals and deadlines will help increase your motivation. When you are a new student, your teacher can help choose what goals will work best for
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you. Later on, you will have the experience to judge for yourself what you can accomplish.

Think of it like a game. A fun challenge! If you picture it in these terms, it’s a great incentive!

Be patient

We have to constantly remind ourselves that learning to play an instrument requires patience and determination. So try not to put unrealistic expectations on yourself to learn too quickly. Take it easy and have fun, and simply let the process happen naturally. Music should be something that you enjoy for a lifetime. Everyone learns at a different pace and the key is to be able to enjoy the journey.
Chapter 6
Frequently asked questions

When you take private lessons with an expert teacher, you have an opportunity to ask specific questions and receive information that only a seasoned instrumentalist would know. Best of all the teacher can adjust to your learning style and help you achieve your specific goals, help expand your repertoire and concentrate on music you want to study.
Chapter 6

Which setting to choose: group or private lessons?

When beginning your musical study, the first question to ask is whether to consider group classes or private lessons. While group classes work well for pre-school programs and for studying musical theory, private lessons are far superior when learning how to play a musical instrument. In private lessons, you can receive the benefit of one-on-one attention and a program of study that is tailored to your individual needs. A teacher can introduce new pieces and exercises according to your individual learning pace, and can go over your specific musical goals.

How do I know if I have a talent for music?

Every child is born with some talent. Children who are musically gifted usually show early signs such as singing a lot and having naturally good pitch, noticing off-key music, making up their own songs, desiring to play an instrument, enjoying listening to music, feeling the rhythm precisely, learning and remembering songs quickly, and trying to sing parts that are not the melody (harmony, bass line, etc.). However, talent is often deceptive. Some gifted students do not reveal their talents until after they have received proper training, or pick an instrument that works better for them.

For the beginner, musical talent will have little impact on early progress - what you first develop is hand-eye coordination. Having good hand, eye and ear coordination can take you pretty far, and, as with most other skills, it can be trained. A child’s sense of pitch and rhythm are usually developed over a period of time. Slow learners may become late bloomers; children who “can’t carry a tune” may develop vocal skills later; a beginner who is having rhythm problems because of hand coordination may become much more adept with practice.

By far the most important factors affecting musical success for the beginner are the student’s desire, motivation, interest, dedication, and hard work. We have seen over and over that if a child really loves studying music, he/she will work hard regardless of innate talent. It is possible to have talent and not love an instrument or fail to become musically accomplished because of the lack of practice.

Finally, all children can benefit from music instruction, and many of the children who enjoy it the most are not the ones who will become the next Mozart. Music education can have a profound impact on mental and physical health, social development, and appreciation of the arts.
What if I have lost interest and/or do not like the teacher?

Occasionally a student, for various reasons, may become frustrated with lessons because he/she expected that learning music would be easier. The problem may be solved by using a different method book, by switching to music that is more appealing to the student, or by providing more guidance from parents during practice time. Students will also go through phases as they grow and mature. Providing consistent encouragement (without excessive pressure) will allow the child a reasonable amount of time to work through the bumpy spots and personality phases.

Personal progress can become stagnant for many reasons: the student does not seem to respond well to the teacher, doesn’t seem to understand what or how to practice, feels unchallenged, dreads going to lessons, or maybe student goals do not match the teacher’s expectations.

In this case, a different teacher may suit his/her needs or personality better. Don’t be afraid to share your concerns with the school, and don’t be afraid to try a different teacher if the first one you choose is truly not working out. Parental support through this period is essential. Students and parents should seek guidance from a good music school. Often the staff can be helpful working through any problems that the student might have.

Good music school programs have a cohesive curriculum that makes moving to a new teacher a smooth process.

How do I stay motivated?

Often the best motivation comes from choosing to play the music that you love. First of all, there is so much music at our disposal that you should never feel narrowed or stifled in your choices. A good teacher can help present different options consistent with your musical tastes. Sometimes, a student may need to develop a certain set of skills in one mode of
music before progressing to his/her most desired style of music. While certain steps may need to be taken before undertaking a virtuosic piece of music, we can still find music that contains elements of the musical mountain we wish to climb.

Secondly, it is a great idea to set specific, realistic goals for ourselves. If we strive to meet a timeline of well-planned goals, we feel even more motivated as we achieve each milestone. Our goals don’t even have to include learning a specific piece of music by a certain date. The goal can be to have practiced a tricky passage for 10 minutes a day over the course of a week.

Also, keeping a journal can also be a great source of motivation. Not only does it assist in keeping a focused path, but it also helps to reflect upon a concept that may have been more difficult previously, but is much easier today. Hopefully, when we reach a challenging goal, we can recall how we have jumped a few hurdles on the athletic course of our musical study and move ahead with determination, confidence, and motivation.

Inspiring students is an important role for the teacher, but many outside resources are also available to further develop and encourage interest in the
Chapter 6

instrument the student studies. The Washington, DC metropolitan area hosts numerous concerts, performances, master-classes, and workshops that give students the opportunity to see professionals from around the world perform and teach. For advanced students, a number of competitions are held each year in the region, and participation in these competitions will allow students to experience the preparation and focus needed to pursue a career in music, if one is interested.

How does a good school evaluate and track a student’s progress?

Outside opinion and direction from a musical evaluation is critically important with private music study. Playing for another musician like an adjudicator can reinforce what the student’s teacher is saying and/or may help the student see another view of a musical interpretation or technical concept.

This kind of guidance provides an opportunity for a student to demonstrate his/her musical ability at the end of each year, and offers a tangible representation of his/her progress and accomplishment. A student’s skill level is usually evaluated based on playing accuracy, continuity, rhythm, phrasing, pedaling, dynamics, tempo, tone, production, interpretation, style, technique, memorization, bowing, vibrato, and more.

Ideally, a music school should have a sequential musicianship curriculum that defines each level of achievement in order to ensure that a student’s progress merits continuation in his or her program of study. A guided music curriculum prevents aimless drifting, gives definite direction and provides another way to measure the student’s progress.

In addition to the music school’s juries and curriculum, there are several local, national and international organizations that offer opportunities for outside evaluation of the student’s progress. For example, the ABRSM/Royal School of Music, the National Piano Guild Auditions/American College of Musicians, the American String Teachers Association, the Suzuki Association of America, and the National Association of Teachers of Singing, all offer such evaluations.

What are the advantages of music schools?

Learning music is not just a matter of having a qualified teacher, but also having an environment that is focused on music education. In a professional school environment, lessons are taught in a safe place, free from the many home distractions such as television, pets, ringing phones, siblings, etc. Avoiding
such distractions is especially important because most lessons only last 30 minutes to one hour per week.

Students in a music school environment are also motivated by hearing peers who are at different levels and by being exposed to a variety of musical instruments. They also have an opportunity to participate in school ensembles, performances, recitals, competitions, festivals, and community events. These group activities build lasting relationships with other musicians.

In a music school, the parent can be confident that the teacher is a professional and is not just teaching as a hobby. A music school provides an extra level of reassurance of professional responsibility and ensures that teachers are talented and well-trained musicians with teaching experience. The school can also conduct background checks on the teachers and check their references. Additionally the school's qualified and personable administration helps and assists with any scheduling and billing questions, as well as provides guidance to students on their music lesson education.

**Is it important to participate in performances while learning an instrument?**

No amount of study and preparation is effective without opportunities to perform. Performance is the most rewarding aspect of studying music, and recitals serve as great motivation and an opportunity to demonstrate progress. Recitals offer students a chance to see what skills are sticking, and what areas may need some more work. Additionally, the focus needed to prepare for a performance is an invaluable experience, as concerts give a sense of accomplishment, boost the student’s self-esteem and encourage the student to tackle challenges.

If a student is nervous about recitals, perhaps a good way to start is to ask him/her to attend a recital as a member of the audience prior to his/her own recital. Another way to reduce anxiety is to video-record the
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student’s performance. Although it can be difficult to watch oneself initially, the more the student observes the performance, the less awkward it will feel to perform self-analysis.

Video feedback provides the opportunity for a student to see what the audience will see; they may say to themselves “Oh, I like that!” and remember to do it again in the next performance. Or, a student may think “Oh, why is my hand doing that weird gesture when I sing?” which is very easy to fix after becoming aware of it.

Performance opportunities can be found in a place as familiar as the home for your family or friends, or perhaps in a school choir or ensemble. Your music school should also provide regular recital and other performance opportunities.
Chapter 7

Epilogue

It’s probably pretty obvious that I’m passionate about music and about private music lessons. I believe, based on both personal experience and what I’ve learned from others, that private music lessons have something very special to offer a student. It doesn’t matter if you’re doing it as a hobby, or if you have aspirations of becoming a professional musician. The benefits are numerous.
Chapter 7

It has been a true pleasure and honor to have worked with hundreds of students over my career. In teaching these students, I have learned how music brings us all together, how it is universal, and how it can touch the hearts of people from all walks of life.

I have learned that we are all individuals, that there are as many different ways to learn as there are people. There is no right or wrong way to learn. Talented teachers can work with students to find the methods that work best for each.

I have learned that music plants the seeds of optimism, and can help nurture happiness. But my favorite aspect of music education is the opportunity I've had to learn about each student's life. I'm continually amazed to see how music has affected each person in so many positive ways!

The school I founded, the International School of Music in Washington D.C., strives to make learning and playing music fun and enjoyable for the whole family! We provide the tools and guidance you need to bring music into your life. I staff the school with knowledgeable, trained professionals who take the time to help you find what you need or make suggestions.

If you would like more guidance about music lessons for children and adults by experienced and qualified instructors in one of the best music schools in Montgomery County, MD, we encourage you to contact us. Our current faculty consists of over 120 teachers, and our enrollment consists of over 1,500 motivated students and parents who, through learning and practice, are creating beautiful music in our region and around the world.

If you or a family member are thinking about starting music lessons, I highly encourage you to give it a try. Music has brought so much joy to my life; I know you'll love it, too!

All of the principles and philosophies outlined in this book have been applied at our music program at the International School of Music in Bethesda, Maryland.

If you live in the Washington D.C. area, visit the International School of Music in Bethesda at our two locations: ISM North: 10450 Auto Park Ave. Bethesda MD 20817 301-365-5888 ISM South: 4701 Sangamore Rd. Suite LL-03 Bethesda MD 20816 301-320-4400 or visit us online at www.ismw.org!