

Molly Gebrian Presentation Summaries

What Musicians Can Learn About Practicing From Current Brain Research

This presentation will focus on what neuroscientists have discovered about how our brains learn and how to apply these insights to practicing and teaching so that practicing becomes more efficient and effective, leading to enhanced performance ability, enjoyment, and confidence. Topics include: how to get rid of bad habits, how to make things automatic/reliable on stage, the role of sleep in learning, the power of mental practicing, how to use the metronome to greatest effect, and the benefits of random practice for enhanced performance.

Length: Ideally 90 minutes (75 min. presentation + 15 for questions), although it can easily fit into one hour.

Performing from Memory Doesn't Have to be Terrifying: How Understanding the Science of Memory Can Help

Performing from memory is something all musicians will have to do at some point in their careers. For some, this prospect can be terrifying, whereas others seem to embrace the challenge with ease. This presentation will approach this topic from the view of neuroscience, looking at the neuroscience of memory in general, strategies for memorization, and specifically how musicians can improve their comfort with and mastery of performing from memory.

Length: Ideally 90 minutes (75 min. presentation + 15 for questions), although it can easily fit into one hour.

The Secret to Learning Music Faster: Take More Breaks

It may be counterintuitive, but it's been known since the 1880s that taking more and longer breaks between study or practice sessions results in more learning, better memory for the information, and longer and more stable retention. This presentation will discuss this research and explain exactly why taking breaks results in better, faster learning by exploring the changes that must happen in the brain for learning to occur. Finally, practical strategies will be offered for ways to apply this research to the classroom and the practice room.

Length: Ideally 90 minutes (75 min. presentation + 15 for questions), although it can easily fit into one hour.

The Best Practicing Method According to Science: Interleaved Practice

Interleaved practice is a method of skill improvement that has been studied for more than 40 years in the realm of sports coaching, but it has only recently come to the attention of musicians. It flies in the face of what many of us have been taught about good practicing, but it has strong scientific support that shows it to be the best method for reliable, confident performing. Among other things, interleaved practice gets rid of the "but I could play it perfectly in the practice room!" phenomenon all teachers and students are well acquainted with. This session will present the most compelling evidence from recent scientific studies and then discuss practical ways musicians can apply this knowledge to their own practice and performance preparation.

Length: Ideally 90 minutes (75 min. presentation + 15 for questions), although it can easily fit into one hour.

The Power of Attentional Focus

Where we focus our attention when we play has an enormous impact on our ability to learn and perform both new and well-practiced skills. Something as simple as a pianist changing their attention from the movement of their fingers to the movement of the keys or hammers can have a significant positive effect on performance. In a nutshell, thinking about how to move and use the body is less effective than thinking about the effect the movements should have. This presentation looks at this body of research and gives practical ideas to players and teachers on how to best utilize this knowledge to enhance learning and increase performance confidence and reliability.

Length: Ideally 90 minutes (75 min. presentation + 15 for questions), although it can easily fit into one hour.

Variable Practice

Most musicians understand that repetition is an important part of practicing to solidify skills and reinforce the desired way of playing. But should we be aiming for exact repetitions or is it better to be more varied in our repetitions? The answer depends somewhat on ability level. This presentation will look at the research on variable practice and explain when and why it's useful, including many examples of how to use this in the practice room. An interactive, playing component is also a possibility with this presentation.

Length: 60 minutes without the interactive component. Ideally 90 minutes if playing is included.