



How To Play Any Instrument

A manifesto for music making

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The Piano Lesson

Sit at the piano. Lift the lid.

Press the white and black keys until you are pleased with the results.

Any questions?

What is it that makes learning to play an instrument such hard work?

What turns the exploration and discovery of organising sounds into the torture and drudgery of scale exercises and a scolding from an overbearing tutor?

Playing music is about playing. With music, with sound.

That means exploring, discovering, creating and inventing.

Some call it improvising.

To play music on a musical instrument, you must learn to play *with* it.

With an open-eyed wonder and engagement.

Learn through playing.

What Is Music Anyway?

Music is organised sound.

Too often we grapple with the technical difficulties of instruments, with the strings, keys, holes, and switches and we forget about organising sound.

Take your instrument. Make a sound.

Now...

How was that?

What will you change?

Try to make exactly the same sound again. The scratch, the squeak, the foghorn. They're all okay. Make it again.

Now refine it. Make it sweeter.

Blow less. Put less pressure. Slow down. Not so hard. One sound.

Listen to your instrument. Find out how to make it sing. Just that one sound.

Listen to it. Find the sweet spot. Just the right amount... There.

How is it sounding?

Put it down for 10 minutes. Then come back and try that sound again.

Ease into it. It's what it is. Do you like it yet?

Refine it, stretch it, make it sing slowly.

Our musical instruments are wonderful tools that take our gestures and convert them into expressive sound.

Our gestures become sound that we can organise into music.

Imagine being immersed in a energy field where every move and motion you made was converted into sound. You could make music by dancing, walking, jumping, spinning around, breathing...

Devices like this exist and help many people with physical restrictions access music making.

Instruments work in the same way. They just require a different set of physical gestures.

Sometimes more subtle, sometimes more focused.

Singing

To use your voice you don't require any further technical explanation.

You already figured it out by playing with it and copying others.

You can use your voice to make sounds... you can reach high and low.

You can make short sounds or long sounds, percussive or guttural.

You have a voice, you can sing.

Everyone can sing.

Make a sound.

Copy something you can hear.

Become an instrument with your voice.

Everyone Is Musical

Not everyone believes it.

Often I find students that have been told that they are not musical, that they can't sing, that they are tone deaf.

Music is expressive use of sound... If we express through sound we are being musical.

You are musical.

To be expressive using sound you can do the following:

- Long sounds
- Short sounds
- High sounds
- Low sounds
- Sounds in the middle
- Sounds you can barely hear
- Sounds that scream loudly
- Sounds that rise
- Sounds that fall
- Silence
- Space
- Nothing

- Sounds with pitch
- Sounds without pitch
- Sounds with more than one note
- Sounds with many frequencies - textures
- Repeated patterns
- Patterns that change slightly
- Patterns that go forwards then backwards
- Patterns that change speed
- Sounds that are random
- Sounds that are predictable
- Sounds that flow into one another
- Sounds that are spiky with gaps in between
- Notes from a scale
- Notes from many scales
- Notes from any scales
- One note
- One sound that says how you feel

Making music is organising sounds to express emotions.

An instrument helps you make the sounds and then you organise them.

You can make sounds with an instrument or without one, it's not important. What is important is what you want to express?

We can all be expressive. We can all tell our story of when we had a perfect day or when we feel like nothing good will ever happen again.

What sounds would you choose to express your story?

Sometimes people get caught up in what the instrument can do and how it makes its sound. Trouble is, they forget what it is they are trying to express.

Remember what you want to express before you come to the instrument.

Sometimes people become obsessed with their technical abilities and perform like acrobats on their instruments. The results can be empty and soulless.

Express Your Soul

Albert King was a self taught guitar player who learned to play on his one string 'diddly-bow'. When he got his first guitar he played it upside down and developed his own thing with the strings upside down.

Jimi Hendrix was self taught. He played an upside down guitar but changed the strings around.

Because his family didn't have any money for music lessons Ornette Coleman taught himself to play saxophone by playing along to the songs on the radio.

To play music, you just have to listen.

Teachers can give you short cuts and point out the nuts and bolts of how an instrument works, but only you know what you hear and what you want to express.

Only you can listen and then play.

Buy an instrument that you like the look of. Get any add-ons that you need for it. Buy the best you can afford if you want to.

Find out how to assemble it or set it up. Or get the shop to do it.

Buy from a shop. Talk to them.

Once your instrument is ready just hold it, or sit at it. Sit with it. Look at it closely.

Don't play it yet.

Just feel its mass, its presence, its possibility.

You could be playing this instrument for the rest of your life, so take your time. It's not a punishment learning to play it. It's there to help you express what you have to say.

Encore

To finish this lesson, you will require patience.

You can start playing your music straight away but your skills and technique will improve with time.

Take your time.

Make a commitment to making music and enjoy the small amount of progress you make each time you play.

And always remember to play.

Thanks for reading this manifesto, I hope it has made the possibility of playing more music in your life all the more likely. Please feel free to keep in touch and let me know how these ideas have helped you by emailing craig@craiccoggle.com. I read all of my emails and respond to every one personally, just as soon as I can.