

Developing Musical Awareness through Pure Play

by Dennis Winge

Wouldn't it be great if we could always play music from the exact same vantage point of a little child, i.e. with total absorption, wonder, and amazement? In a separate article I talk about turning off the inner critic while practicing or playing. Now, let us go deeper. When there is no judgment, there is only space.

When you listen to a loved one when they have a problem, for example, and you listen wholeheartedly without judging or trying to jump in and offer solutions to their problem, (both of which I, and many people, do frequently), you are "holding space". It is a beautiful expression, because it points to a depth of view that is accessed just by the simple and pure awareness that we not only have, but that deep down, we actually are. (If you want to read more about this see Eckhart Tolle's "The Power of Now" or "Stillness Speaks".)

What if you could listen to your own playing with the same awareness? Your playing would be truly that: Pure Play. The essence of who you really are, i.e. a being of pure light and creativity, would permeate your music. When I first met the mother of my son, she would always sound great on the drums, and yet she never at that time would practice. I would ask her, how do you always manage to sound great with no practice? She would say, "first, I decide in advance that it's going to be great. Then, I only play what I can play."

Both of these concepts are talked about in Kenny Werner's "Effortless Mastery", and he gives practical suggestions on practicing in this space, and offers guided meditations. Playing music is a gift. When we play from a space of awareness, we are entering into the essence of that gift, which is pure vibration, which, as the quantum physicists tell us, is the ultimate basis of the whole Universe. When we play music without the mind getting in the way, it all flows, and then the music plays us, or rather plays through us, and takes on a life of its own, becoming more beautiful, adventurous, and meaningful than we could ever have contrived it to be from our own limited and narrow vantage point.

Have you ever experienced moments like this? I suppose this could be used as an example of how our whole lives could be: loving, not resisting whatever comes, and making the most of it. Understanding that on the deepest level, there are no wrong notes or circumstances, there is only music, or life. When we stop to evaluate whether our notes or circumstances are good or bad, then our real surrender to the deep peace of inner being can shine through.

The way to get into this non-judgmental space is to simply practice it. Can you play something very simple while remaining completely detached from how it sounds? Can you really believe the statement "Every note I play is the most beautiful sound I have ever heard" or, "I am a master." (Both of these are from the book "Effortless Mastery.")

If either of these are too much for you (which they are for most of us), what about just letting yourself completely play for a certain amount of time? It could be 5 minutes or an hour based on what you're comfortable with, but during that time you don't *try* to make good music. In fact, all you do is explore the instrument.

How many different ways are there to make a note 'sing'? What is the extreme upper and lower limits of your instrument's range? What unusual effects can you do with the instrument (such as, for guitar, picking between the nut and the tuning pegs or playing percussively on the body of the guitar, perhaps while holding down chords.)

What a wonderful thing making music is, that it can help point the way to grasp the highest truth that can't even be expressed without watering it down to fluffy new age words like deep peace, and inner being! What a great blessing listening to music is, as it immerses us immediately beyond words into a space of pure awareness! Here's to being able to listen to oneself play music from that space.