

What Regular Practicing Brings to Live Performances

by Dennis Winge

Everyone knows that practicing regularly makes you better at performing. It is possible to have a great gig when you haven't practiced, because your mind is stretched and not filled with the agenda of trying to get out the things that you have practiced. However, those experiences aren't that common, and they cannot last, because as the time increases that someone hasn't practiced, the less likely they are to pull off a great performance.

In this article I simply am going to compare the notes after a regular monthly gig that I have, comparing two different sessions; one where I hadn't practiced, and one where I had. I noted the differences in my own playing, and I hope they will be helpful to you, as inspiration to practice, and also as an invitation to you to reflect on your own benefits to practicing that you hear in your playing. Certainly knowing what they are can, in and of itself, be a great inspiration to practice. So yours may not be the same as mine, but I highly recommend doing that same exercise yourself and making your own list.

1. Relaxed Creativity. I have found that the ideas I came up with on the day that I did practice were a lot more effortless, and they flowed a lot more easily.

2. Appropriate Effects Selection on the fly. I have a large pedal board, and when I hadn't practiced, I barely used any effects, because I was so busy trying to prove that I could play to myself, I guess, and to other people as well. On the day that I did practice a lot, I was able to effortlessly dial in and push the appropriate pedals for the perfect sound for the perfect moment, and I was able to achieve quite a variety of sounds without having prepared these in advance.

3. Effortless Motivic Development. A motive is a short musical idea that can be stretched, compressed, varied, repeated, and otherwise messed with for great musical results. Major composers like Bach used motivic development in their compositions big time, and I highly recommend you to listen to Bach, as do many other musicians. When I practiced, I was able to take a simple motif and mess around with it effortlessly throughout the tune. There were even times when I was able to juggle two or three motifs over a longer stretch of time, and it's really quite enjoyable. This could be a whole article unto itself.

4. Spontaneous Arrangement Ideas. This meant that I was able to direct the trio that I happened to be playing with on the fly in terms of endings, vamps, credenzas, and intros. Not only that, I was able to spontaneously arrange ideas for trading solos and doing counterpoint, and all kinds of groovy things.

5. Unlimited Creative Expression and Execution. I suppose this goes back to number one, Relaxed Creativity, but how it differs is that I was able to hear an idea in my head, and execute it with a lot more precision, of course, than when I hadn't practiced. Therefore I felt at ease with the two different sides of making music; the

creative side, and the technical side. Because the two were in sync, I was able to execute things that I could conceive of, and then also on the flip side, I was able to conceive of things that I could execute. The two become one, whereas when I hadn't practiced, the two are separate. You hear an idea but it doesn't come to your fingers immediately, so there's a gap there.

6. Expanded Listening by Not Singing While Playing. I used to have a bad habit of singing out loud whenever I improvised. I'm not saying that hearing melodic lines in your head is a bad habit, but I'm saying that relying on singing in order to force out the lines, like I used to do, is a bad habit. I'm a lot more relaxed now that I hear the lines in my head, and let them come out the instrument. However, on the session when I was not well practiced, my tendency to want to do this was greater, and, whether I actually sang out loud or not, I was a lot less able to listen to the other instruments beyond my own, because I was busy trying to force out the notes.

7. Dynamics. My sense of dynamics was so much greater when I practiced. I would play songs, I would play loud, I would help direct the band. In fact I didn't need to direct the band verbally, or even with non-verbal clues, because they just picked up on it musically, and they knew exactly where I was going, because I was relaxed, and I was able to communicate effortlessly with them. This also ties in with point number 4 about spontaneous arrangement ideas, but it goes beyond it because it's not simply referring to the arrangement of the tune itself, it's referring to the actual improvised sections. Dynamics is a big thing, and in my opinion, modern pop, rock, and often jazz, don't have the same dynamics as say, classical music has always had. In any case, when I practiced, I was much better able to vary the dynamics.

8. Spaciousness. My lines had space around them, and I was able to develop slowly. Spaciousness in music is one of the most delicious aspects of it that, again, modern pop music is almost completely devoid of. Have you ever had the experience of listening to a piece of music that just felt so expansive to you, that you weren't even aware of time itself?

9. Even Volume Between Lines and Chords, and Between Pick Fingers and Hybrid Picking. This is a big one for my students. I always find that they play single notes at a certain volume, and then when they go to play chords, it's a lot louder. I intend to do a whole separate article on this topic. For now, let it be said that when I was well practiced, I had no problem transitioning between single note lines and playing chords without ever touching my volume knob or any pedals. I simply knew how loud to pick or to strum each part so that it all flowed together in an even volume. The second part of this was that I was able to use different techniques all interchangeably, such as using just the pick, or picking fingers, or fingers only.

10. Logical and Lyrical Phrasing. Musical lines have a logic to them, but they also have emotion. Playing music involves both sides of the brain. I found that when I was well practiced, I was able to access the technical side and the creative side, as I stated

earlier. This point is simply illustrating what the harmonic results of such connection between the two sides sound like, ie: logical and lyrical.

So again, I invite you to come up with your own list that will be inspiration for you to practice more, and also maybe even help you to determine what you want to practice, based on the things that you want to hear more of, and less of.

Good luck, and have fun.