

Heather O'Donnell

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The Art (and Science) of Practice

This workshop explores many aspects of practicing with the aim of developing a broadened concept of practice and identifying aspects of practice that correspond to an individual musician's needs and goals. The workshop ideally consists of 9 sessions (1.5 - 2 hours each), allowing ample time for the introduction of concepts, discussion, and practical work at the instrument. The contents of this workshop can be condensed into a 2-hour introduction to practicing. The workshop is adaptable for a wide range of abilities and experiences, from amateur through professional musicians.

The workshop consists of nine sections:

1. Exploring differences and similarities between the acts of practicing and performing, with the goal of incorporating certain aspects of performance – spontaneity, engagement, openness - into the practicing situation
2. Defining practice: identifying which neuromuscular, cognitive, and emotional process might be involved in instrumental / vocal practice. Discussing Feldenkrais's definition of practice:

Practicing makes...

the impossible → possible

the difficult → easy

and the easy → graceful

3. The individuality of practice: In this unit we think about the efficacy of one-size-fits-all solutions as well as older models of practicing that may negatively influence our approach (militaristic drill, more = better, 'no pain no gain'), with the intention of identifying effective alternatives.
4. Planning / Goals: identifying what planning processes and goal-setting techniques can assist in practicing, as well as identifying which plans and goals might have a counter-productive effect.
5. Work-in-Progress: a cognitive-behavioral approach to preparing for performance, viewing the performance as one of many events in a lifelong exploration of music rather than an 'end product.'

6. Feedback Loops: balancing activity in practice and performance with opportunities for sensorial feedback: listening, feeling, receiving
7. Emotions: their role in practicing as drivers of neuro-plasticity. Neural mechanisms involved in reward, memory, satisfaction, and emotional connection to material
8. Mental Practice: exploring a wide variety of techniques for mental practicing with the aim of improving aural imagination, technical abilities, and memory, as well as reducing stress and avoiding injury.
9. Integration / Embodiment: the goal of embodiment of a musical idea, sensing that the music eventually resides in the performer's muscles, bones, mind, and heart.

Lecturer Heather O'Donnell

After an extensive concert career (1995-2012: www.heatherodonnell.info) and in the wake of her own health problems and injuries, pianist Heather O'Donnell shifted her attention away from performance toward a full engagement with musicians' health. She has henceforth developed programs to assist musicians throughout the lifelong process of health development.

After studying Psychology at the *Freie Universität* of Berlin and receiving a certificate in Musicians' Health at the *Kurt Singer Institute / Universität der Künste Berlin*, she now works with musicians who suffer from playing blockages and disorders and educates young musicians on the development, maintenance, and recovery of health. She is also currently working on a Master of Science in Prevention and Health Psychology at the SRH Fernhochschule.

O'Donnell gave lectures at the International Symposium of the *Performing Arts Medical Associations (PAMA)* in New York City (2017), at Brainery Rochester (2017), at the World Piano Conference in Novi Sad (2016), and at the Max Planck Institute for Human Development in Rheinsberg (2015). She has been a guest lecturer at the iArts School in Hangzhou, China, at the New England Conservatory in Boston, the *Ostrava Music Festival* in the Czech Republic, and a jury member at the *Concours international de piano d'Orléans* (2012).

Additionally, she gave workshops, lectures and masterclasses at numerous universities, such as Columbia University in New York, Manhattan School of Music, Cornell University, the Musikhochschule in Mannheim, the Lebanese Higher Conservatory of Music in Beirut and at Rhodes University in Grahamstown, South Africa. She taught in the Humanities Department of the Eastman School of Music until 2019 and gave regular workshops on musician health and practice strategies at the Eastman Institute of Music Leadership.