

Finding motivation

It's hard to stay motivated during a lockdown, but is there more to this than just being stuck at home? Victoria Samek – director of Samek Music, performer and teacher with a master's degree in performance science from the Royal College of Music – explores what drives motivation and introduces the online Practice to Performance Course she started with saxophonist Chris Jolly

Motivation is a word that will be familiar to musicians at all ages and levels, professional or amateur, particularly in the context of practice. But never has it had a hollow ring since Covid reached our shores, and all shared music-making, rehearsals and live performances came to a sudden stop. While the impact of such a profound rupture of all musical activities was bound to have severe consequences, it has perhaps exposed a more serious underlying issue demanding investigation – the motive that gives individuals the motivation to practise.

On the surface is the sudden disconnection of all musical activities, paid or otherwise, but on closer inspection lies the question of motive. To this end, it is rationale and models offered within science that provide a starting point.

One such study is by Richard M. Ryan and Edward L. Deci, entitled *Self-Determination Theory and the Facilitation of Intrinsic Motivation, Social Development, and Well-Being*. Before you rush to turn the page, this title can be explained simply and most importantly identifies key elements associated with motivation. While this study highlights many significantly important factors, the inquiry must begin with incentive.

Is the incentive that motivates a player due to the inherent satisfaction of the activity itself? Is the source of motivation and determination dependent on the value, connection and ownership that the motive gives us? Second-hand motives which rely on others – an event, exam or rehearsal – as the primary source will not facilitate

sustainable and enduring motivation to power our sense of wellbeing to practise. Total ownership means striving for excellence at every step of the process in the chosen activity. This is over and above the main incentive and the most powerful autonomous motive, which will, in turn, generate the strongest motivation.

Conversely, is the incentive driving motivation linked to gaining credibility or primarily to please someone else? A displaced incentive where no personal gain or value can be perceived? Examples could include practising a piece or performing in an event without feeling a sense of personal value. If it is not possible to identify reason or purpose to derive identifiable personal value, then our motive, and therefore motivation, will become unreliable, and resistance and demotivation are almost inevitable.

Reason and purpose are fundamental in establishing a robust and constructive approach, changing the tide of inertia and despondency that demotivation brings. It is of maximum importance there is personal sense of purpose in practice and reason to perform. It is for this very reason that the Practice to Performance Course was created – to support players at every level in finding meaning, reason and purpose for playing, perhaps lost or never clearly defined. This, combined with developing a structured approach with clearly defined personalised goals, is how motive and therefore motivation will reignite the flame and the desire to play.

This is what the Practice to Performance Course sets out to address. It is through establishing a connection, a sense of relatedness and personal responsibility to every part of the playing process, that will generate a strong reason and purpose, with motive and motivation completing the circle.



Victoria Samek

PHOTOGRAPH: OLIVIA WILD

Practice to Performance Course

Prompted by the devastating impact the first lockdown was having on every corner of the music world, Chris Jolly and I started to meet regularly on Zoom. The first Practice to Performance Course was launched nine months later in December 2020, reflecting our determination for Covid not to extinguish music and musical activity. Music takes centre stage, which can so easily get lost along with motive. We must cherish the art form to have the determination and resilience to strive for excellence in pursuit of music itself. Recognising sustainability and support, particularly in this time of feeling disconnected, is what the course offers.

Immediately after signing up, participants are sent a link to join a Google Classroom. A supportive process awaits to help and incentivise practice, through a host of learning resources, short tutorials, knowledge nuggets and repertoire ideas. In addition participants are offered the opportunity to book a one-to-one lesson, which can be claimed at any time from the point of booking to the course itself.

On the day of the course there is a lunchtime concert, for which participants, course directors and special guests are invited to contribute pre-recorded performances as audio, film or animated presentations. Guidance is always close at hand, particularly when it comes to new ways to record and deliver performance online – a real opportunity to be creative!

The Practice to Performance Course is encapsulated under six key headings:

REPERTOIRE

...from pieces to studies and exercises, and an agenda of repertoire from warmups to recital, exam or audition programmes. Repertoire is our resource.

TECHNICAL

...from facility and agility to reliability via fingering dependability, and from clarity and speed of articulation to breath sustainability and stamina. Ever extending our technical prowess.

MUSICIANSHIP

...from essential theory to its practical integration within practice and performance, and from interpretation to applying musical intention. Musicianship is the essence of a musician.

GUESTS

...from renowned players and composers to voices within academia and technical specialists. Guests will encompass excellence and diversity.

KNOWLEDGE NUGGETS

...from companies introducing new products, books and resources to artists sharing an insight, a discovery, new initiatives within education or fitness advice. Knowledge in nuggets!

SCIENCE AND CREATIVITY

...from theories and concepts that give reason and understanding to the appropriate integration of intuitive spontaneity. Science and creativity in partnership.

These six topic areas are delivered in the form of presentations, shared discussions and interactive classes (the joy of being able to mute the microphone comes in very useful!). As our resident associate artist, Paul Harris joins Chris and I to deliver the most engaging and informative sessions in his indomitable style.

Having an invited special guest gives an additional dimension to the course. In January, participants enjoyed a stunning workshop followed by a mesmerising recital delivered by celebrated new music exponent clarinettist Roger Heaton.

Connecting players with composers is important to break down barriers and engage performers. Alongside Chris Jolly, who is a composer as well as a performer, our guest composers are commissioned to write pieces for the participants and course directors, guaranteeing at least one world premiere every concert. Guest composers so far have included Charlotte Harding, who wrote a memorialising duo for bass clarinet and tenor saxophone, and Paul Harris, who composed a new sonatina for solo clarinet.

In collaboration with June Emerson Wind Music, all participants benefit from a unique discount code and 20% off all recordings and publications in the Clarinet & Saxophone Classics catalogue. To complete the benefits offered within Google Classroom is a section called Lockdown Chamber Music, in which Chris and I, as well as associate artists, offer the chance for participants to play along with pre-recorded tracks within an ever-expanding library of music.

There are also voices from the trade and industry with information, advice and top tips, which to date have included Lucy Aughton, woodwind sales and marketing specialist for D'Addario (a classical saxophone player in her own right!) and Simon Weir, director of Classical Media – a multimedia company specialising in audio and video production for the classical music industry.

The ethos of the course is to direct purpose, structure, reason, confidence and fulfilment, which combined, ensures and secures the motivation to practise and perform. ■



Chris Jolly



Victoria and Chris online



Online course

The Practice to Performance Course runs every two months with the next courses taking place on 28 March, 23 May, 25 July. For full information and booking visit www.samekmusic.com. All enquiries can be directed to victoria@samekmusic.com