

Deepening my (piano) practice

Categories : [General](#)

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Nuvole Bianche 1/2

Intro

The image shows a handwritten musical score for the introduction of 'Nuvole Bianche'. It consists of five staves of music. The notation is written in blue ink on a white background. The first staff starts with a treble clef and contains the notes C, C#, C, D#. Above the first measure is a circled 'x2'. The second staff contains notes G#, G#, G#, A# in the upper voice and F, F, D#, G in the lower voice. The third staff contains notes A#, G#, A#, G# in the upper voice and F, D#, D#, D# in the lower voice. The fourth staff contains notes D#, C#, C#, D# in the upper voice and D#, C#, C#, D# in the lower voice. The fifth staff contains notes C#, A#, G# in the upper voice and F, C, F in the lower voice. There are several 'x2' markings throughout the score, indicating repeated sections. The notation is somewhat messy and appears to be a personal practice sketch.

When I was a youngster my parents signed me up for piano lessons, and then a few years later it was boring and I wanted to quit.

My parents were clever, they told me: "If you can find one adult who stopped playing the piano when they were a child and is glad they did, you can stop taking lessons and we'll never mention it again"

How easy! (I thought). I cornered the first old guy I could find, I think it was my dentist Dr. Larry, and after asking him if he ever played the piano he bared a wide-bearded-grin: "Oh I used to

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play...every time I hear someone tickle the ol' ivories oh man I wish I still did!" Blast! Larry wasn't very helpful. And neither were the next 5 adults I asked. So I stopped asking and kept playing, curious as to why everyone gave me the same answer when it was so clear that piano playing was not fun.

The few times I did receive enjoyment was when my teacher held an annual competition to see who could practice the most. For 2 months we would chart how many minutes we played on a whiteboard for all to see; my time playing would skyrocket and I'd average between 90-120 minutes/day. I enjoyed the feeling of being at the top. Then the competition would end, and I would lose motivation.

A few years later I was in middle school, and realized that for some reason girls paid more attention to guys who played the piano. I learned "All my life" by KC & JoJo and took my 15 minutes of fame as a middle school heartthrob. After some time this wore off and time spent on the bench steadily deteriorated.

When I reached high school I decided to drop this darned thing once and for all. My parents didn't put up much of a struggle, and I was happy to have left it behind, so I could move onto other, more important tasks...like chatting on AOL Instant Messenger.

As years passed every now and again I would consider playing again, but my sight-reading skills were rusty and I wasn't any good at playing by ear...it seemed like too much work to get started again.

Then one day during my junior year of college, I walked into a friend's room to witness him playing a simple rendition of Boston by Augustana on a digital keyboard with joy and comfort. There were a couple others with him and they were all swaying and singing along, serene grins on their faces. I marveled at this sense of community, especially because I knew my roommate had never taken any lessons.

My roommate was a smart guy, he didn't read sheet music but utilized this new thing called 'youtube'. Whoa! At first I was prideful, thinking that somehow free online videos were beneath me. And then I wized up and explored for myself. It didn't take me long to find [Web Piano Teacher](#), and immediately the style of teaching resonated. It was at once so obvious yet just that far outside of the box where I wouldn't have thought of such a system myself. I started trying out this new method and found I was able to learn new songs quite quickly.

After college I moved to the Middle East, where many evenings were spent in solitude looking out over the Persian Gulf. I decided to buy a digital piano (Yamaha P85) and pick it back up again using vids from Web Piano Teacher. I looked at the song library and made a list of all the songs I wanted to learn, and one by one I started checking them off: Piano man, Imagine, The Scientist, Tiny Dancer, 100 years, Moonlight Sonata, Clair de Lune...I would scout out pieces I liked, learn the notes, and for certain songs, learn to the point of being able to play in front of others. But that's as far as I got. *I played to the point of recognition, far from the point of mastery.*

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I continued for a while and then I stopped playing again. Why? Because new songs are fun to play for a while, and then the novelty wears off.

Then I heard [it](#). A song which captivated me, and which neither I nor anyone I knew had ever heard of before.

I pulled up a tutorial on youtube and hand drew all the notes (see above). Then I played it. And played it again. And then again. And again. And again. And again! Far beyond just learning the notes I dove fully into the piece, maneuvering through galaxies of louds and softs and manipulating silence like some puppeteer. And I enjoyed every single minute of it.

Why was this happiness so foreign to me? I realized that throughout my life my motivations in playing the piano were either to a.) try and be the 'best', b.) gain attention from others, or c.) have finished a piece. None of these were satisfying enough to keep me going. But now I began playing simply to *fully enjoy the experience of playing Aye*, and that's what made the difference!

It was as though I had unlocked a secret door of fulfillment that I didn't know existed. I realized that prior to this I was actually limiting myself to experiencing happiness only in a certain set of circumstances. (i.e. well practiced piece, performed well, in front of an audience who was engaged while I was playing)

So what did I learn?

Well for starters, **find a way of learning which speaks to you**. Just because something has been done the same way for hundreds of years doesn't make it the 'right way' (or wrong way for that matter). This opened an accessible door that didn't require me dusting off my old music and to remember that All Cows Eat Grass (a memorization technique for the bass clef)

The more important lesson here was that long-lasting fulfillment was found in the capacity to truly **enjoy the journey**. The age-old adage that I'd heard a million times before but had always brushed aside.

Turns out it's true.

Did you used to play the piano as a child? Maybe it's time you gave it another go around.