



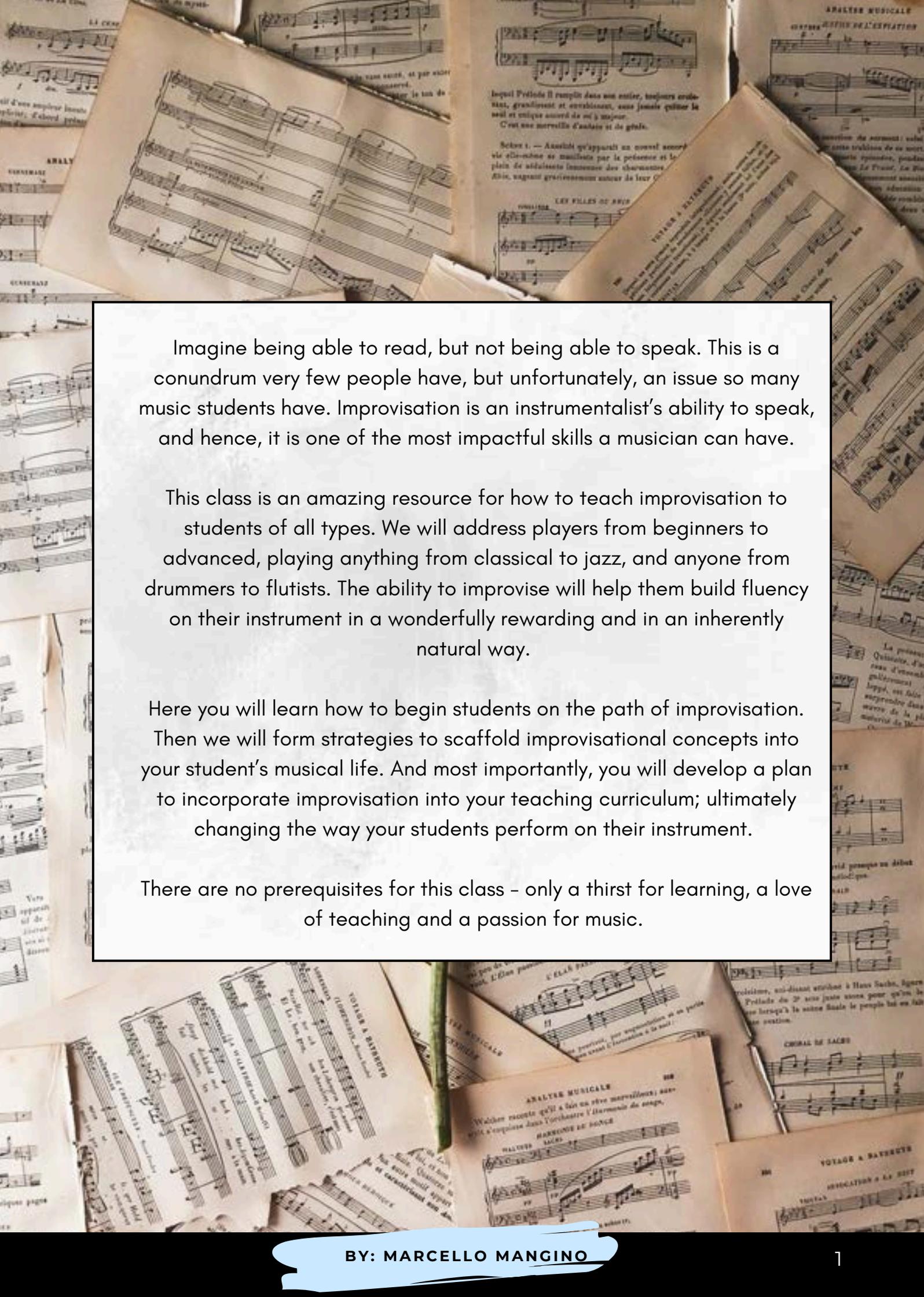
*Education
with
Improvisation*

BY: MARCELLO MANGINO

“Don't
merely
learn
music,
learn
to
play
music.”

- MARCELLO MANGINO





Imagine being able to read, but not being able to speak. This is a conundrum very few people have, but unfortunately, an issue so many music students have. Improvisation is an instrumentalist's ability to speak, and hence, it is one of the most impactful skills a musician can have.

This class is an amazing resource for how to teach improvisation to students of all types. We will address players from beginners to advanced, playing anything from classical to jazz, and anyone from drummers to flutists. The ability to improvise will help them build fluency on their instrument in a wonderfully rewarding and in an inherently natural way.

Here you will learn how to begin students on the path of improvisation. Then we will form strategies to scaffold improvisational concepts into your student's musical life. And most importantly, you will develop a plan to incorporate improvisation into your teaching curriculum; ultimately changing the way your students perform on their instrument.

There are no prerequisites for this class - only a thirst for learning, a love of teaching and a passion for music.

WHY?

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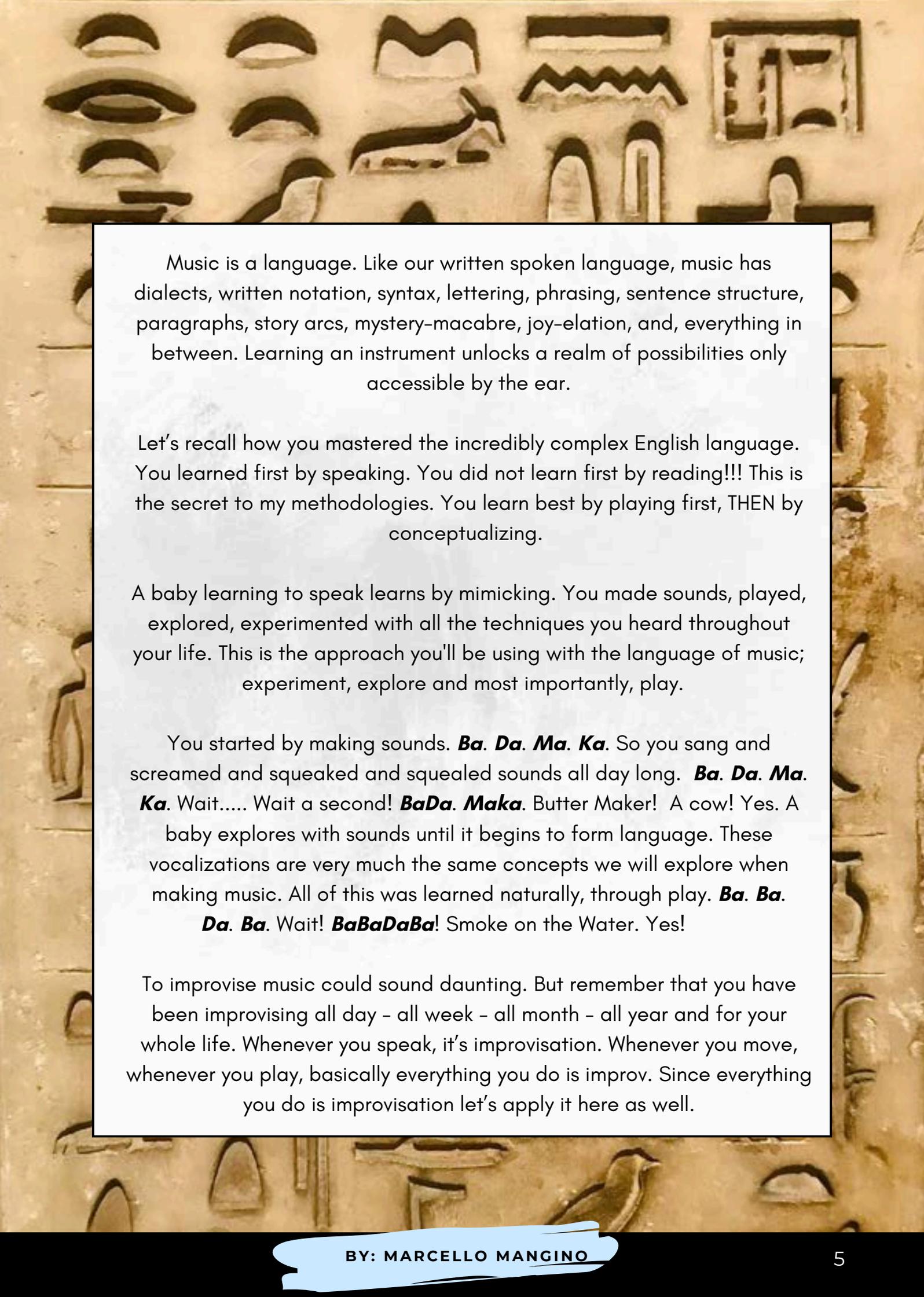
BYE!

WHY?

Why Improvise?



BY: MARCELLO MANGINO



Music is a language. Like our written spoken language, music has dialects, written notation, syntax, lettering, phrasing, sentence structure, paragraphs, story arcs, mystery-macabre, joy-elation, and, everything in between. Learning an instrument unlocks a realm of possibilities only accessible by the ear.

Let's recall how you mastered the incredibly complex English language. You learned first by speaking. You did not learn first by reading!!! This is the secret to my methodologies. You learn best by playing first, THEN by conceptualizing.

A baby learning to speak learns by mimicking. You made sounds, played, explored, experimented with all the techniques you heard throughout your life. This is the approach you'll be using with the language of music; experiment, explore and most importantly, play.

You started by making sounds. **Ba. Da. Ma. Ka.** So you sang and screamed and squeaked and squealed sounds all day long. **Ba. Da. Ma. Ka.** Wait..... Wait a second! **BaDa. Maka.** Butter Maker! A cow! Yes. A baby explores with sounds until it begins to form language. These vocalizations are very much the same concepts we will explore when making music. All of this was learned naturally, through play. **Ba. Ba. Da. Ba.** Wait! **BaBaDaBa!** Smoke on the Water. Yes!

To improvise music could sound daunting. But remember that you have been improvising all day - all week - all month - all year and for your whole life. Whenever you speak, it's improvisation. Whenever you move, whenever you play, basically everything you do is improv. Since everything you do is improvisation let's apply it here as well.

THE WHY SO WHY IT'S WISE TO IMPROVISE

Couldn't pass that title up but it's true.
Here are some of the benefits to improvisation.

BUILDING LANGUAGE

Play is the most natural way
to learn a language.

EXPLORATION

Imagining your own music while
exploring sound gives you something
learning pieces of music cannot.

FLUENCY

Improvisation builds instrumental
comfortability and confidence.

READING VS SPEAKING

Reading is decoding information
while speaking is synthesizing ideas.
Improv gives musicians voices.

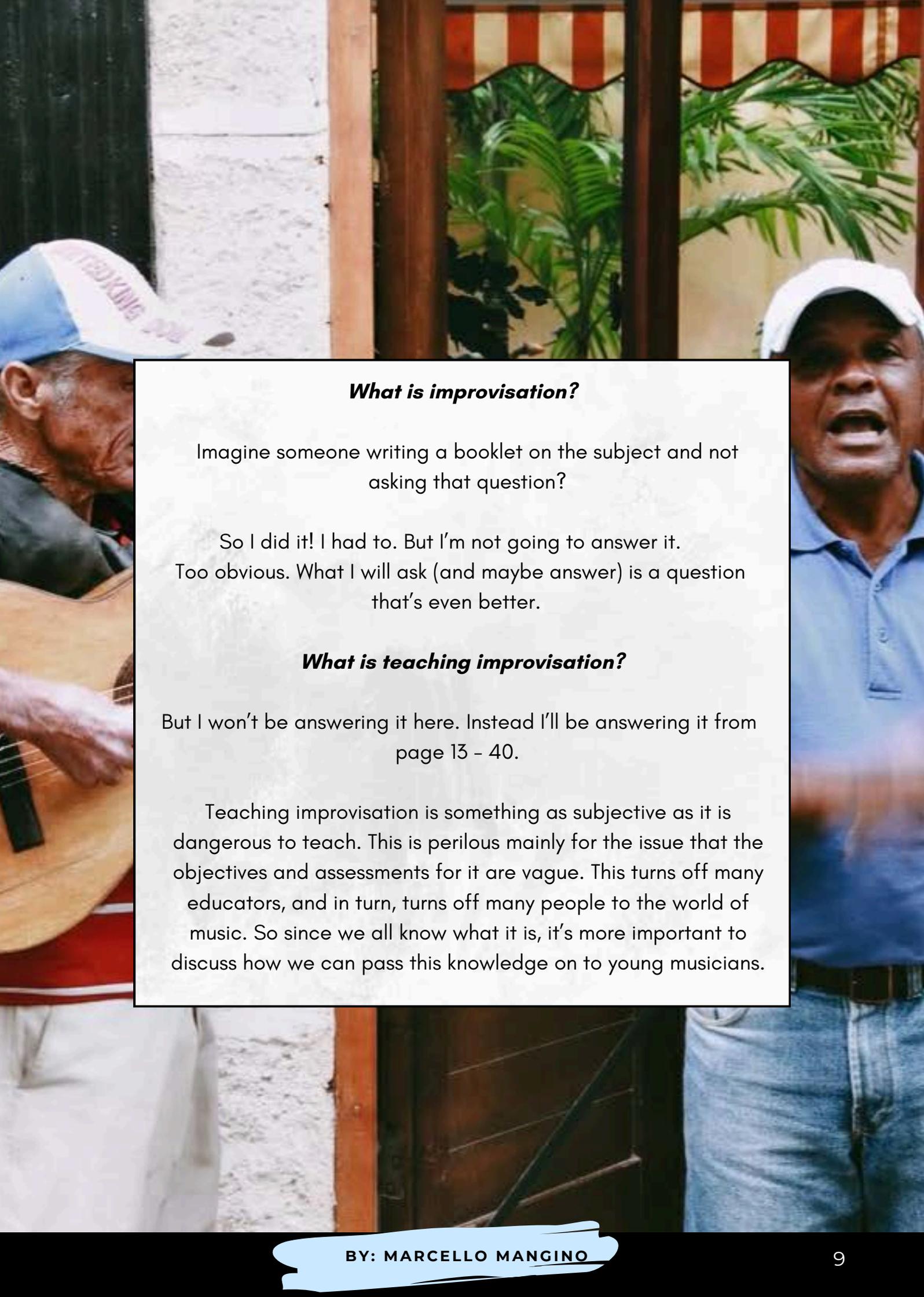


WHAT?

What is improvisation?



BY: MARCELLO MANGINO



What is improvisation?

Imagine someone writing a booklet on the subject and not asking that question?

So I did it! I had to. But I'm not going to answer it. Too obvious. What I will ask (and maybe answer) is a question that's even better.

What is teaching improvisation?

But I won't be answering it here. Instead I'll be answering it from page 13 - 40.

Teaching improvisation is something as subjective as it is dangerous to teach. This is perilous mainly for the issue that the objectives and assessments for it are vague. This turns off many educators, and in turn, turns off many people to the world of music. So since we all know what it is, it's more important to discuss how we can pass this knowledge on to young musicians.

WHAT IS IMPROVISATION

I know I told you I wouldn't answer that question. BUTTTT...

This isn't really answering it, but instead, defining it.

Don't be mad:

To improvise requires minimal music knowledge. There are only two elements used: rhythm and tone.

Tones. Each musical journey will begin with a scale. Scales are a series of notes that composers use to create their music.

Tones for a pianist are simple, we can make a great sound within seconds. Other instruments require extensive techniques and hours of practice, but that's the fun part.

Rhythm is the second element. Rhythm is the speed, pulse, beat and tempo of the tones. Rhythm at first can be as simple as the notes. We simplify it to just fast notes and slow notes. This is intuitive as well because you've literally been hearing this since the day you were born.

Sounds like your whole life has been leading to this moment, so let's get into it.

"The mistake a lot of us music teachers make: is we teach kids how to play the instrument first before they understand music. Teaching a kid to spell M-I-L-K before they've drunken a lot of it for a few years doesn't make sense but for some reason we still think it does in music."



- Victor Wooten

WHO?

Who should improvise?



When learning how to speak, children are presented with the entire English language to explore. Except of course for the big seven words you can never say on television or anywhere. Those seven words are:

@#@!
@\$%^
@#\$#@
@#\$%^&%
\$\$#@!!@
@**&^%
@#\$@!!#\$%^&*()*&^%\$

Aside from that, children learning to speak are given almost the entire English lexicon. With the complete language presented to them they are able to learn and formulate complex ideas.

However, when a musician is learning how to play in a method book, we give them only a very small amount of words to express themselves.

Then, they are given very abbreviated ideas, in the form of short, limited passages of music in which to use them. Improvisation easily broadens this.

If children could only use the words they could read, their growth and understanding of the world would be seriously stunted. With music the same is true. If young people's playing is limited only to the notes they are taught to read, then their growth and understanding is seriously stunted. Through an improvisational approach, students can ...

*oh you already know what I'm going to say ...
I'm going back to petting my cat.*

BEGINNERS

Beginners have the most to gain from improvisation. Written notation is a large barrier of entry for classical music, but we can bypass that barrier and free our players.

INSTRUMENT GEOGRAPHY

We can explore a wide range of notes on the instrument.

FLUENCY

Students own concepts because they are using and creating with them.

DEXTERITY

Hand muscles, as well as musical muscles, are toned with this type of play.

EXPERIENCED

More seasoned performers can expand their playing skills, as well as their musicianship, by exploring the theoretical aspects of music.

TONALITY

The harmonic principles of scales and chords are taken out of theory and into practice.

CONCEPT BUILDING

Concepts are explored and thus understood in a meaningful way.

DEVELOPING A VOICE

Musicians that are able to speak freely have confidence and command of their instrument.

ADVANCED

Advanced instrumentalists can advance further by working stylistically and develop their musical voice.

IDIOMATICALLY

These players can solo within blues, jazz, or any style of music that inspires them.

TONALITY

Further harmonic concepts of advanced scales and chords are taken out of theory and into practice.

CONCEPTS

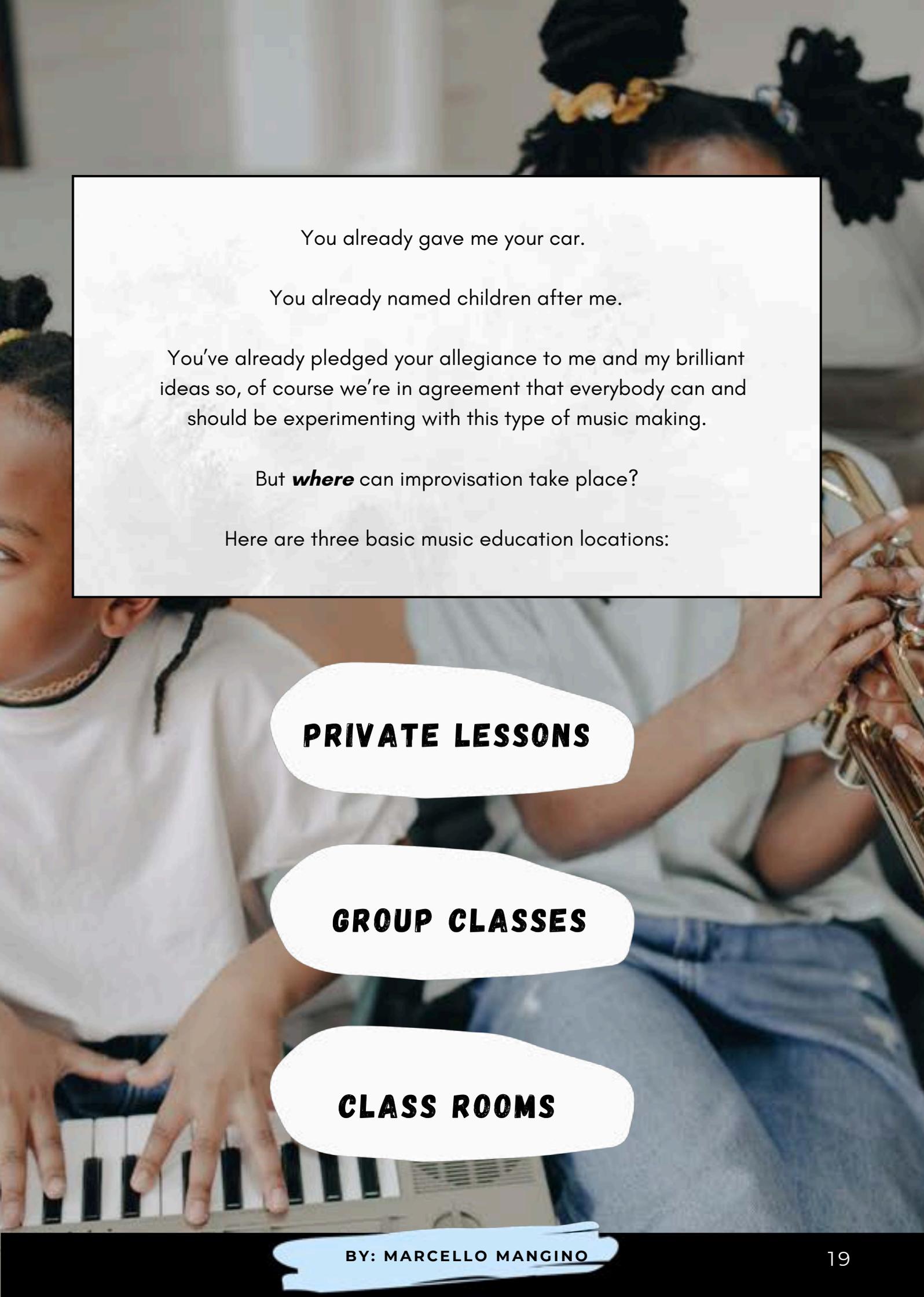
Devices from repertoire of study can be explored and fully understood through improvisation.



WHERE

Where should you improvise?





You already gave me your car.

You already named children after me.

You've already pledged your allegiance to me and my brilliant ideas so, of course we're in agreement that everybody can and should be experimenting with this type of music making.

But **where** can improvisation take place?

Here are three basic music education locations:

PRIVATE LESSONS

GROUP CLASSES

CLASS ROOMS

SETTINGS

With the appropriate planning and tactics we can (and must) foster the ability to ad lib musically on an instrument in all musical situations.

PRIVATE LESSONS

These students have individualized assignments. This means they can explore the most types of adventures.

GROUP CLASS

This is a magical place to create. With others, there is synergy in creation that makes music the phenomenon that it is.

CLASS ROOMS

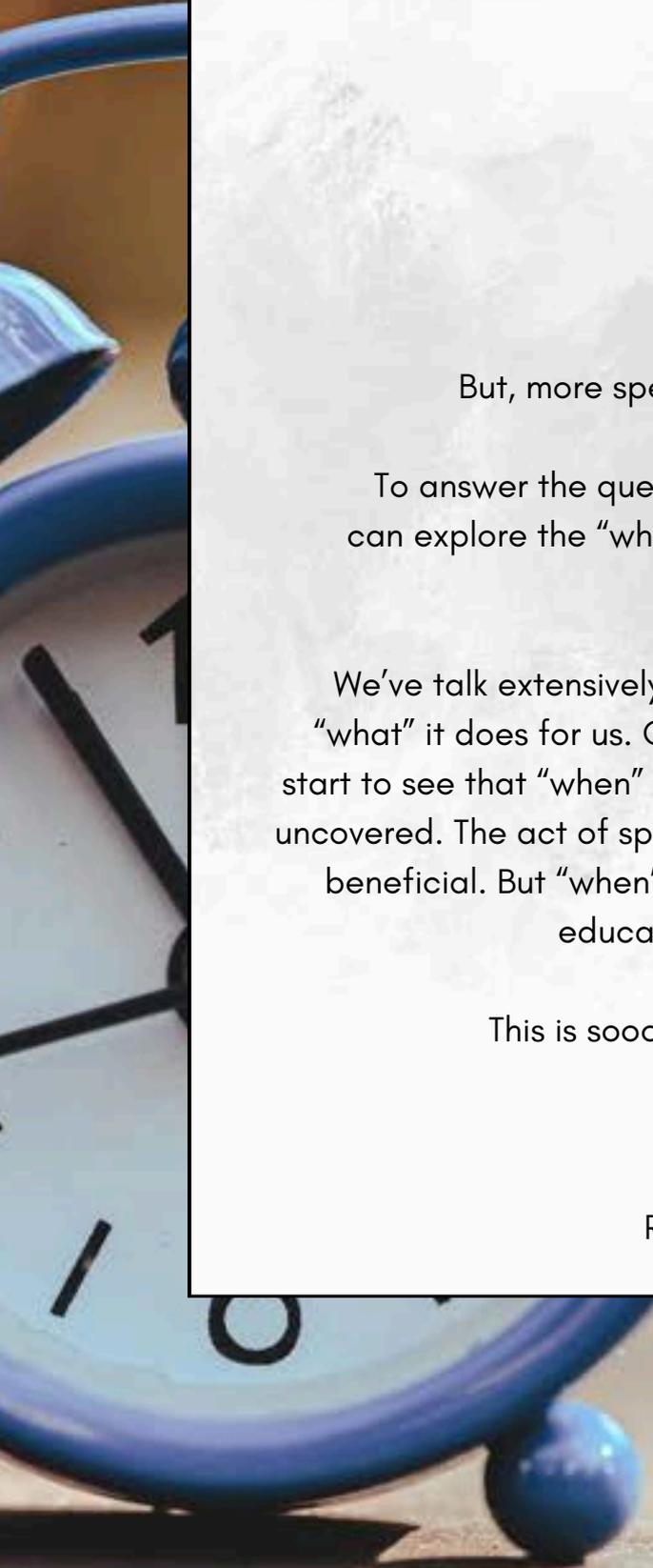
Our learners will not be engaged in music without making it, literally and figuratively.



WHEN

When should you improvise?





All the time!

Everyday!

Even holidays!

Skip meals!

But, more specifically in all the settings.

To answer the question of "***When to Improvise***" we can explore the "when" in the learning process we can employ it.

We've talk extensively on the "why's" of improvisation and "what" it does for us. Great stuff, tell your friends. Now we'll start to see that "when" you use it there are more benefits to be uncovered. The act of spontaneous music making is itself beyond beneficial. But "when" and "how" you use it has even more educational nuance to it.

This is soooooooo fun. Let's dive in!

When?

Right now!!!!

IN PRACTICE SESSIONS

In individual practice time, students can improvise at a variety of times in the session for a variety of reasons.

WARMUP

To prepare for daily practice, an improvisational warmup can be fun and functional.

PREPARATION

Students can develop skills, techniques and concepts through this exploratory education.

EXPRESSION

Self expression is a freedom that music gives us, improvisation can be a nice reward to a productive practice.

IN LESSONS

To me lessons are a time to establish goals, but they can also be a time for inspiration. Some students have never before seen a musician play in person and that can be life-changing.

COMPREHENSION

It's hard to learn French without hearing the nuances of pronunciation. Music is obviously the same.

ENGAGING

A student playing with a professional will learn invaluable lessons.

INSPIRATION

Without role models what are students striving toward?

IN THE CURRICULUM

Information that is given is always at risk of being a waste of time, unless it is designed into the teaching curriculum. Here are ways we can install improvisation into the learning methodology.

PRE-LEARNING

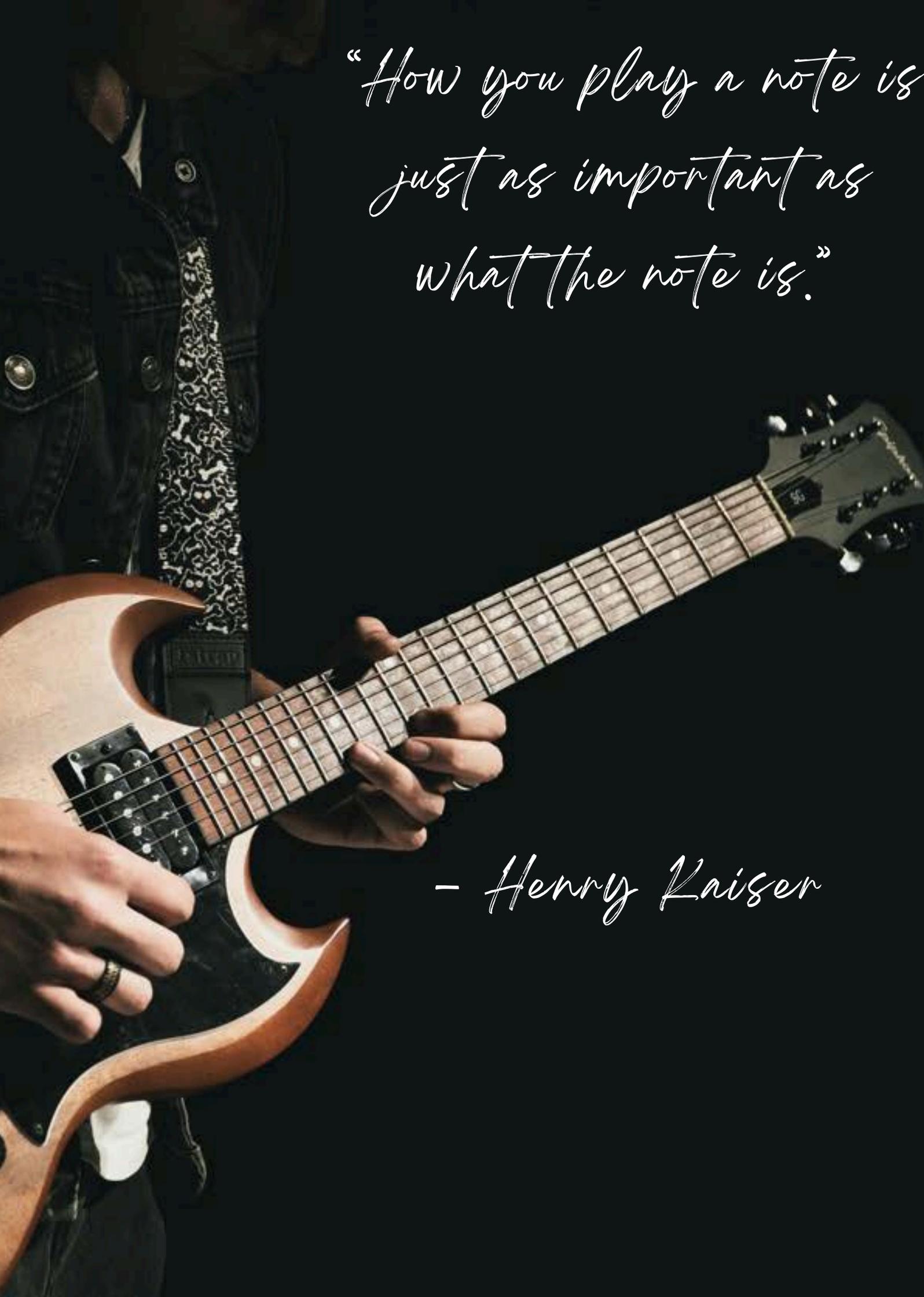
Before new projects students can explore on key elements of the piece as a preparatory bridge to introduce the new challenges.

DEVELOPMENT

To cultivate our musician's understanding of tonality, rhythm, their instrument and the language of music making.

PRESENTING

The most natural way to learn a new concept is through exploration before over explanation.



*“How you play a note is
just as important as
what the note is.”*

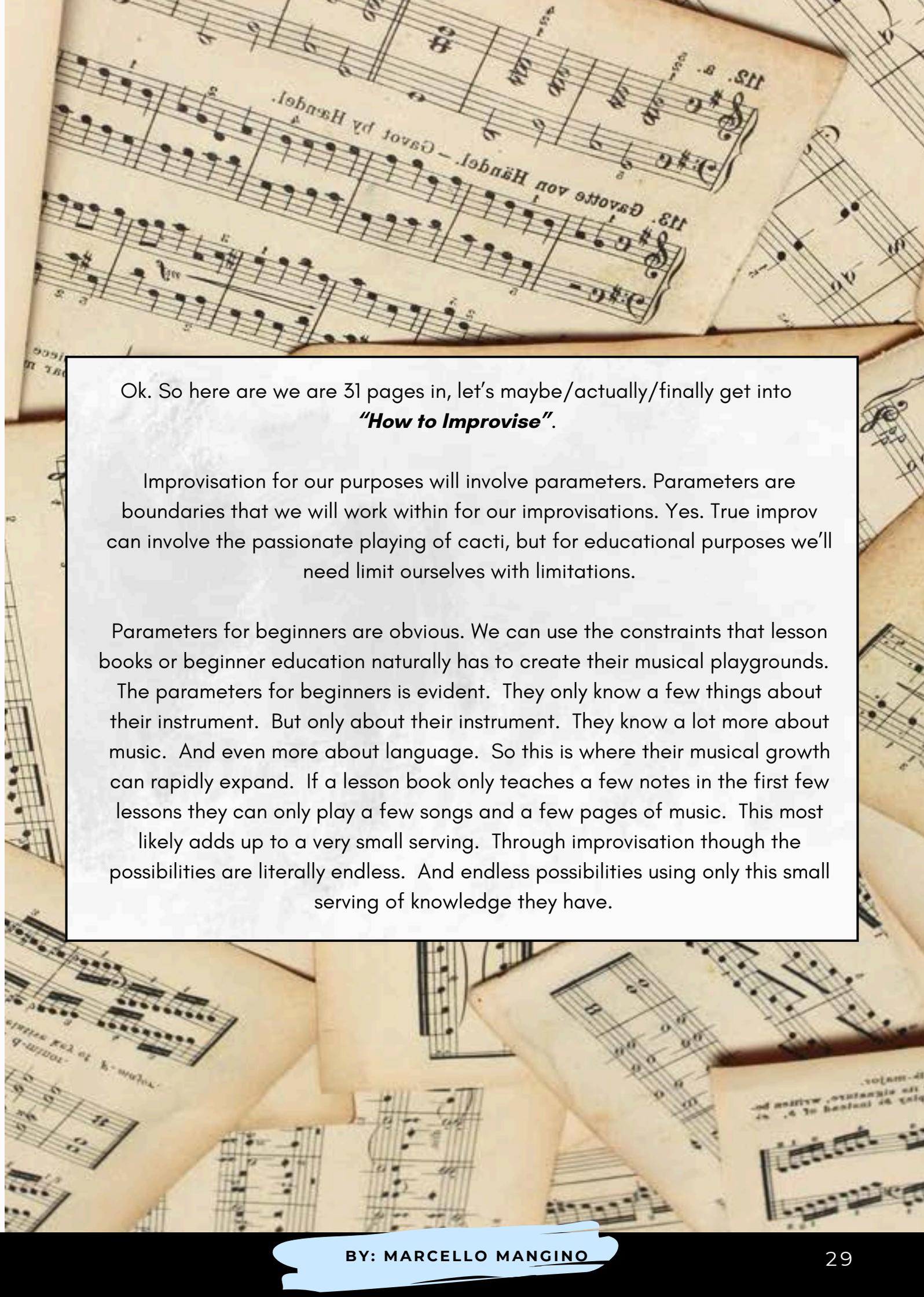
– Henry Kaiser

HOW

How can you improvise?



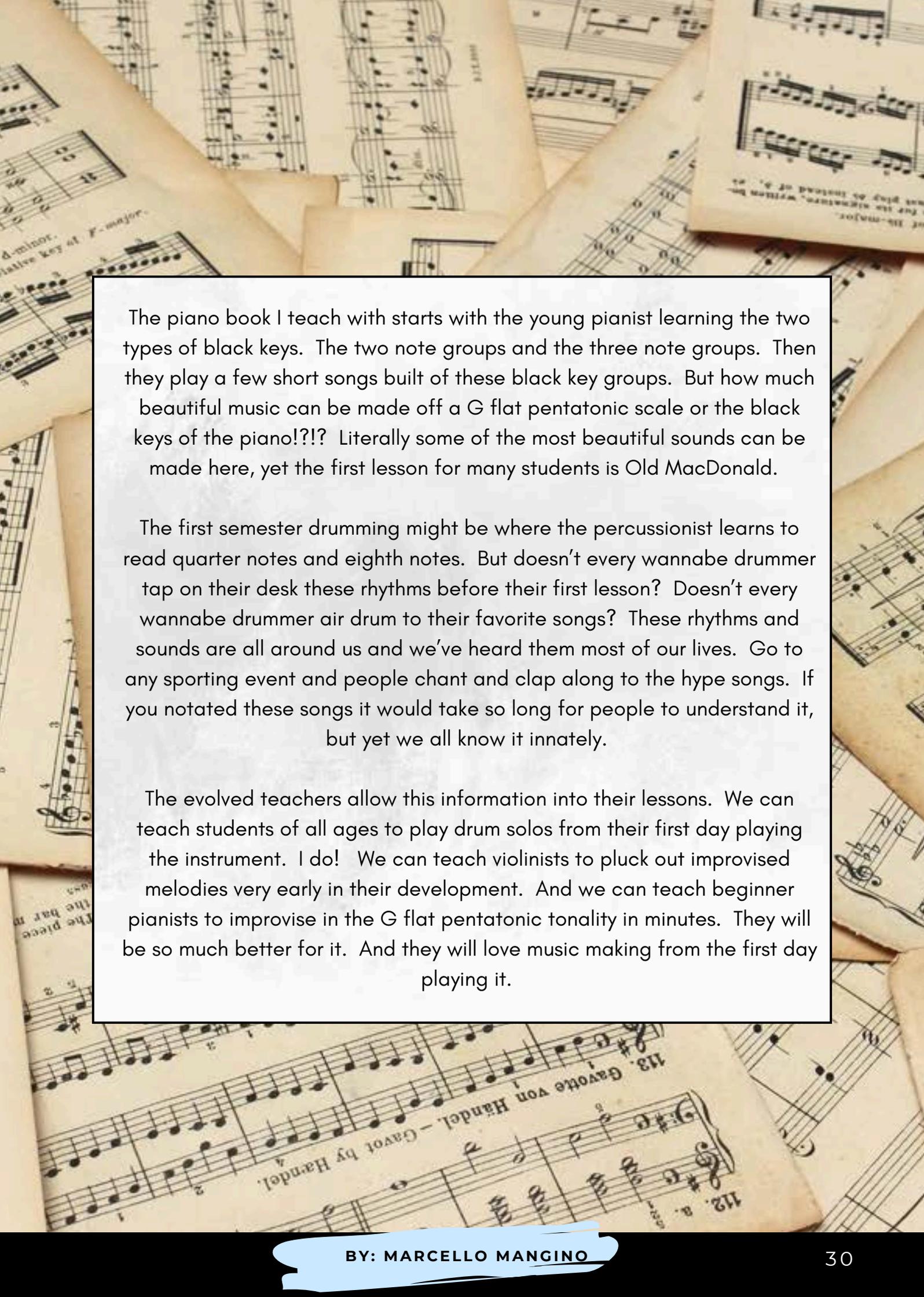
BY: MARCELLO MANGINO



Ok. So here are we are 31 pages in, let's maybe/actually/finally get into
"How to Improvise".

Improvisation for our purposes will involve parameters. Parameters are boundaries that we will work within for our improvisations. Yes. True improv can involve the passionate playing of cacti, but for educational purposes we'll need limit ourselves with limitations.

Parameters for beginners are obvious. We can use the constraints that lesson books or beginner education naturally has to create their musical playgrounds. The parameters for beginners is evident. They only know a few things about their instrument. But only about their instrument. They know a lot more about music. And even more about language. So this is where their musical growth can rapidly expand. If a lesson book only teaches a few notes in the first few lessons they can only play a few songs and a few pages of music. This most likely adds up to a very small serving. Through improvisation though the possibilities are literally endless. And endless possibilities using only this small serving of knowledge they have.



The piano book I teach with starts with the young pianist learning the two types of black keys. The two note groups and the three note groups. Then they play a few short songs built of these black key groups. But how much beautiful music can be made off a G flat pentatonic scale or the black keys of the piano!?!? Literally some of the most beautiful sounds can be made here, yet the first lesson for many students is Old MacDonald.

The first semester drumming might be where the percussionist learns to read quarter notes and eighth notes. But doesn't every wannabe drummer tap on their desk these rhythms before their first lesson? Doesn't every wannabe drummer air drum to their favorite songs? These rhythms and sounds are all around us and we've heard them most of our lives. Go to any sporting event and people chant and clap along to the hype songs. If you notated these songs it would take so long for people to understand it, but yet we all know it innately.

The evolved teachers allow this information into their lessons. We can teach students of all ages to play drum solos from their first day playing the instrument. I do! We can teach violinists to pluck out improvised melodies very early in their development. And we can teach beginner pianists to improvise in the G flat pentatonic tonality in minutes. They will be so much better for it. And they will love music making from the first day playing it.

SCAFFOLDING

Building and stacking concepts so they are leading toward something.

SHEDDING

Woodshedding is when we dive in to a singular topic.

JAMMIT

To jammit means to improvise music off of a motif.

PARAMETRICALLY

To improvise within the restrictions of the set parameters.

STYLISTICALLY

Exploring a genre of music that has its own characteristics.

PRE-LEARNING

Exploring the elements of a piece before actually learning it.

SCAFFOLDING

Curriculum. If you freeze it, put it in a blender and mix it with pineapple I'd drink it everyday. I loveeeee curriculum.

What I love about it is that you have access to a framework that can guide your lessons, songs, concepts and musical trajectory. It's like a hammock and life is just better with a hammock. This hammock is not for a nice relaxing nap on a summer afternoon, this hammock is a structured set of educational experiences to guide and support the learning process of students. So it's not exactly like a hammock but more like a pineapple....oh Nevermind.

To improvise within a scaffold means to use the framework of your previous lessons as a mixture to create a musical froth. The ingredients will be all the notes, techniques, (not pineapples), rhythms and concepts covered in a previous chapter or unit of study. So, if your student has a lesson book (or a curriculum) you can highlight most current topics in the improv. If the last chapter was on legatos vs staccato you can create using these sounds AND all of the other previous material you want them to keep fresh within their mind.

My drumming curriculum exercises this principle. In each unit there are soloing opportunities that incorporate all the elements of the previous lessons. This way when you are in Chapter 7 the earlier Chapters are still active in their drumming life. One of the challenges newer teachers have to keep to be sure their students aren't forgetting everything old to learn something new. This is why curriculums and lesson books and to a lesser degree, smoothies, are so useful. Because the teacher has a database of all the information we want to recycle, refresh and refer to as the pupil learns repertoire. The scaffold improvisation is an amazing way to review passed material in a way that ensures the musician internalizes and understands it before moving on. And a hammock is a great way to enjoy a nap on a nice summer day.

SHED.DING

How do fingers work?

Finger movement is controlled by flexor and extensor muscles in the forearm that pull shared tendons crossing the wrist and finger joints.

This is great, (thanks ChatGPT) but a much better way to learn how to move fingers is to just move them. Learn about the mechanics of it later when you can in fact move your fingers.

This is also a great way to learn about how your instrument works as well, just play it a lot and see how it functions. When you can play a bit try to learn about the mechanics.

To build a skill in music, experimentation is essential. Producing certain tones, developing techniques or creating effects can be fostered in these jam settings. Students can be given musical scenarios to craft these skills. Skills that all musicians need to know whatever their style of playing.

How does music work?

Well, there are a million details, but a great way to start learning it is by playing it.

JAMMIT

Jammit is a word I kind of made up. It's a real thing, it just doesn't have a name.
Now the world is a better place.

To jammit means to improvise music off of a motif.

A drummer knows this well. Often times to play with a band the drummers groove off of a beat or feel to bind the music together. What they play is not static and has a life of its own. The drummer augments the groove by adding ghost notes, embellishments, fills and let's just say a little sauce to keep the music flowing and not dry. Guitarists, bassists, keyboardist all take the ideas from the song and add flavor to them. This is one of the tenets that makes band based music so darn special. But I'm special too, so I developed a way musicians can practice this type of playing in a quasi improvisational way I called Jammit.

Quick aside to say hi to anyone named Todd.

To Jammit is different than improvising because it is built off something. Songs have keys/hooks/riffs/motifs that form to make their character. When playing these songs it's common to take these ideas and "play off" them to form the "living" sound of live music. This incantation is why it takes musicians to play music and why the word play should be italicized. True musicians are literally playing with the elements of a song. Then all sorts of dopamine like chemicals go off in people's brains and make them want to dance or at least shake their booty.

This type of play is important for developing musicians just like it is important for developing humans. Growing up means we learn how to use our body/minds and coming up for a musician means they learn how to use their instrument/ears. When we Jammit we learn both.

Todd Jammit! Means Todd (or any non-Todd people) "play" off a musical motif. For a drummer he can Jammit off a one handed 16th groove. A guitarist can Jammit off of a chord progression. A bassist can Jammit finding walk ups or downs in a sequence. But non-Todd's can find ways with our non-rock instruments as well.

PARAMET.RICALLY

Have you ever wanted to walk on the grass just because it says do not walk on the grass? Well you can't. Get used to rules in society. And get used to rules in music! Because as much as people think they can break them, there are still rules.

In education, these rules will help us. When it comes to teaching improvisation we will use parameters as our rules. Parameters are the guidelines we are using to define the boundaries we are playing within.

~~One way to utilize improvisation is parametrically.~~ Setting parameters for students to play within is a great way to focus on one concept and maximize your execution of it. Without these boundaries the improvisation lacks definition and a lot of its educational value.

Parametrically is a cool word and I think makes me sound super fancy but here are some quick examples of these focuses.

If you're teaching five stroke rolls on the drums the student will understand it in a more comprehensive way if they explore it in a jam.

If you're teaching a certain scale or a piece is in a new key, the student will understand it better if they spontaneously create in that key.

(Don't get me started on scales)

The parametric improvisation technique can be used for just about any topic that is being taught and with these parameters comes educational value.

STYLIST.ICALLY

Like the world, music has hundreds, if not thousands, of different dialects, cultures and styles. These different syntaxes will teach us so much about the language of music. And learning how to speak in some of these different ways makes you so much more fluent a player. New styles can open us to different moods, characters, approaches, scales, tonalities, feels, etc. They are interesting, stimulating and educational.

Some of these styles can be discovered with just small variations to our western theories. For example: an oriental sound can be unlocked simply with a pentatonic scale. The pentatonic scale is a major scale without the 4th and the 7th. A blues scale is a pentatonic with a flat 3. This scale in the relative minor is great for the blues and this scale in the major is great for a country sound. Finding these flavors or dialects relates to the concepts we hope our students understand. And of course our students must use this to truly understand the knowledge. These explorations will be fun, practical and educational.

Alterations to scales force another dimension of understanding. Learning to balance different feels make you so much more firm on your feet.

Exploring new chords progressions open up new harmonic doors. Musicians that know their scales so well that they can make alterations on them AND THEN improvise off this are the musicians that know their scales. Musicians that know concepts so well that they can make alterations on them AND THEN improvise off this are the musicians that know their material.

This is the deeper levels of learning that we can access through the world's dialects of music. The bar of entry can be as easy or hard as you'd like. Open the doors and see the world!!

PRE-LEARNING

Before a student is introduced to the next piece of music they are going to learn they can be prepped by improvisation. The preparations can be based on many different challenges that the music will present the performer. This forward thinking approach will set them up for greater success learning the music.

This, I call ***Pre-Learning***.

Imagine the next piece of music you are learning is in C# minor and you have never played in this key before, because who has. Your preparation for this, rather than merely running the C# minor scale 5 times, could be an improvisation in this key. Playing a scale a few times does very little to prepare you for the intricacies of a piece of music, but jamming in that key is a higher level of understanding and builds deeper connections to remembering the key.

The same philosophy can be used for playing techniques for the new music.

Say the next song is triplet based, or articulated a specific way, the variables are plentiful. The scene be set with an improvisation exercise.

When we use this approach thoughtfully it can change the way your students learn and how they play forever. This is not a waste of a lesson or a time filler, we can introduce concepts while they are learning their current repertoire!

Toward the end of the process of learning a song (maybe while they are memorizing or putting the finishing touches of their music) it is important to look toward the next piece of music. Sometimes after several weeks on a piece a pupil will get restless and want something new to work. This is a perfect time to start the Pre-Learning the next piece.

This forward thinking approach benefits the player in so many ways. Improvisation gives voice to musicians and allows them creative freedom to the creative minds of musicians.

PRE-LEARNING POSSIBILITIES

We can prepare students for music projects in the most natural way through Pre-Learning.

Here are some ways that I use this approach.

**PRE-LEARNING
BY NAME**

**PRE-LEARNING
BY KEY**

**PRE-LEARNING
BY JAMMIT**

**PRE-LEARNING
BY PLAYALONG**

**PRE-LEARNING
BY HARMONY**

**PRE-LEARNING
BY CONCEPTS**

“Improvisation should be at the core of the music curriculum. Musicians educated with improvisation at the center will have a better-developed ability to think musically - to deeply understand music as well as be better prepared to interpret written scores.”



- R. Keith Sawyer

A man with a beard and sunglasses, wearing a white dress shirt and a dark tie, is sitting outdoors. He has his hands clasped in his lap. The background shows green trees and a clear blue sky. The text is overlaid on the left side of the image.

“YES!

*That’s
basically
what I’ve
been saying
for 40
pages.”*

*– Marcello
Mangino*

A photograph of a multi-story red brick building. A large, bright pink rectangular sign is superimposed on the building's facade. The sign contains the text "BUY MARCELLO'S BOOKS" in a bold, black, stylized font with a white outline. The building has several windows, some with dark frames and others with white frames. A water tower is visible on the roof of the building to the left. The sky is overcast and grey.

**BUY
MARCELLO'S
BOOKS**

KANI KA PILA

My Methodolgy

Don't merely learn the piano, play the piano!

These are my method books: Kani Ka Pila. I have created an innovative approach for those new to the piano, or those new to improvisation.

Click the tacos for free samples!



Kahi Ka Pila

Taco me!!!



Marcello Mangino

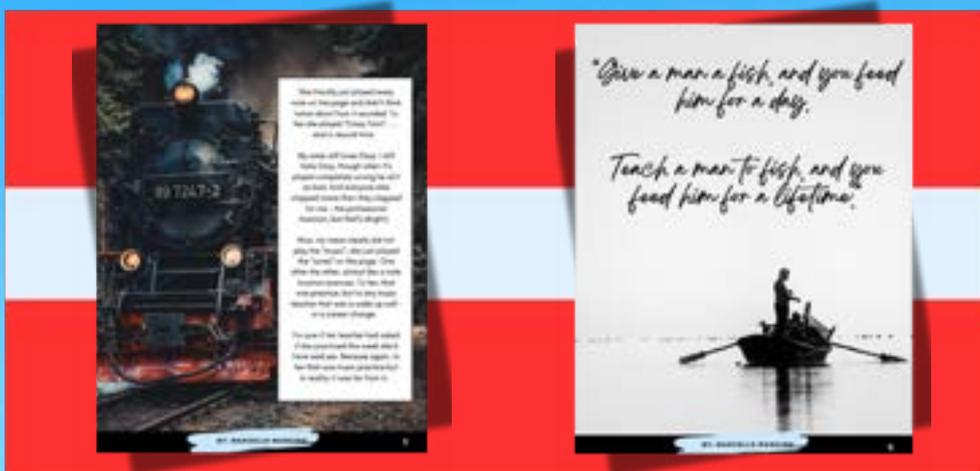
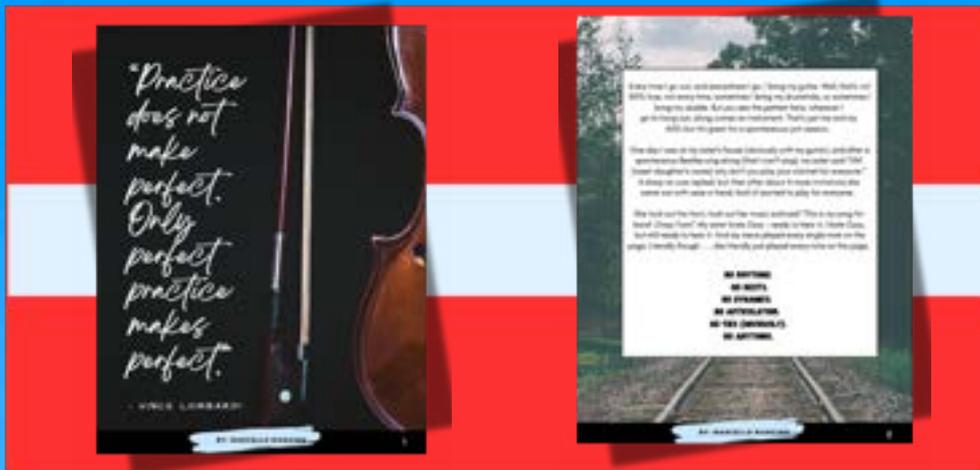
THE PRACTICE OF PRACTICE

My Book

For about a year I thought about practice, I wrote about practice and sitting by the river with my cat (getting weird looks) pondering practice. Synthesizing my ideas and crafting this book truly opened my ideas to what I believe is the missing link in music education:

The Practice of Practice.

If you have any questions about the most important aspect of musicianship just read and then re-read page 1-224.



THE PRACTICE OF PRACTICE



THE PRINCIPLES OF PERFECTING PRACTICE

BY: MARCELLO MANGINO

OK, BYE!

Geeez.

I really should have been working on the presentation that goes with this booklet but sometimes procrastination turns out to be productive.

I hope you enjoyed ***Education w/ Improvisation***.

I hope you even enjoyed me talking about it.

I know. I know. I get a little excited but hopefully I made sense between all the rumblings.

But most of all, I hope you enjoy implementing all of these ideas. Just as is practice, unless you use it you will lose it. So experiment in your lessons, maybe even . . . (ready?) . . . improvise in your lessons. Musically. Logistically. Joyfully!

Find the magic in creation and we'll taco all about it!

Bye!!



Marc Mangino

Click taco for much more.

