

## *Balancing Life and Art*

**"Love the life you live and live the life you love," - Bob Marley wrote. Sometimes, this is easier said than done.**

Entering the 'future professional' stage in one's musical development means enrolling in a Conservatory and becoming a full-time music student. If we haven't already had many ups and downs in our musical practice, we will certainly start to experience them now, up to the point that our practice might even reflect our daily lives: whatever we have going on in our brains and our hearts, will not only have a direct impact on our creative process, but it will also determine the result of our hard labours.

An important part of our mental development - and thus for our craft - is creating awareness of our mental state during practice. While trying to tackle a technically difficult passage in our score, our mind might choose to focus on a heavy talk we had that day, or be distracted by the list of the things we still need to get done. These thoughts occupy the very brain space that we would have liked to be in the present moment, addressing the musical problem at hand. Once we become aware of the places our mind is travelling to, we can start to gently bring it back to the present moment, and 'store' the thoughts that were troubling us, so that we can digest them out of the practice room. When we then sit down to practice the next day, we have already taken a conscious step to accept our state of mind at the moment, to clear it, and to create the mental space for our best work yet.

Another perspective on our hard work may come in the form of concerned looks from our friends and family. Once we're in the desired Conservatory, they will undoubtedly notice our devotion to our craft. "Practicing your instrument is all you ever seem to talk about..." they will say to us, often confused and slightly concerned. "Do you have time to see friends? Do you have a social life besides music?" These kinds of questions root from this mental image of musicians and composers being reclusive or misunderstood castaways, and to be fair, this is partially true. However, the image is often related to well-known stereotypes regarding musicians in general. Yes, most of the work we do, is done in solitude. Solitude, however, is not to be confused with loneliness. Our friends might conjure up the stereotype of a person hunched over his instrument in a practice room with only his stream of consciousness to keep him company, but this is by no means a valid reason for us to feel like we are socially distanced or emotionally unavailable.

When we accept that we cannot count on everyone's understanding of our fundamental need for solitude and discipline we will make progress in our practice. We can only thank them for their concern and by explaining our situation to them, remind ourselves that our craft can only blossom in solitude and silence.

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With a mind that is full of thoughts and speculations, the learning of a difficult musical passage and the ability to multitask seem the problems at hand. If we zoom out, we will find that this dialogue inside our brain is also part of our search for balance, along with the worry on the faces of the people close to us: how does our art fit into our life? Can it even fit 'perfectly'? The answer to this question is both yes and no. We try our hardest to keep up with the lives of our friends and family, and we succeed up to a certain level. We might schedule calls every week on a set day, plan dinners to have conversations that inspire and motivate both parties. But however great we might be at planning and time-management, the specificity of our profession demands dedication and a lot of our energy. That is why most of us cannot rely on spontaneity for social gatherings - our profession is in itself a spontaneous one: when we are students, we often don't know how many concerts we are going to play this month. But we do know we have to be prepared to grasp any great opportunity when it presents itself: we have to be physically and mentally ready at all times - and this requires a constant level of dedication.

When we are students we can feel how our art can empower our life and vice versa - this usually means that steps are made in our search for balance. The realization can come to us in the form of a fulfilling practice session, for example. Practice means happiness and fulfilment (with some frustration, make no mistake) for most of us. It fills us up to our very core. As a result we become happier people, living a meaningful and fulfilling life. The search for balance is worth it, but we will keep searching for the rest of our lives.

