

Applying mindfulness set-up to improvisation practice.

Step 1 Initial exercise:

Neutral i.e. non-musical/non-expressive exercise, with physical and technical objective. In this case scales with focus on chosen specific sensory/focus (visual, auditory, tactile, “slow-train”). Deliberate focus/attention on body relaxation, establishing the *space*. Return to object (scale) every time attention wanders, as with the breath or any “anchor” in meditation.

Musical applications

Step 2

Major scale, one hand improvisation, stepwise. Remember the usefulness of limits, since we are combining action and attention. Return to the *space* every time the attention wanders. 5-10mins

Step 3 Progressively add more activity, in this case add harmonic element (ii v, turn around, segment of tune, entire tune). Observe impulses and habits of mind, adopt a state of ease, relax, reset intermittently.

Step 4 Play freely with 'an eye' on the previous 2 stages but 'in the vibe'. Here the improvisational mind moves from thinking to sensing. 5-10mins



Punctuate your practice with short breaks approximately every 5 minutes. Practicing improvising requires a lot of concentration and is tiring for the mind. Take frequent short breaks for the mind to “re-boot” (re-set). Even a 30 second break is helpful. Stand up, breath in and out slowly and re-start.



Impulse management – invitation to acceptance and better productivity

Use the Hal Crook “deny 2 impulses” technique whenever you sense impatience. For instance, when something is not working in technical practice (fingering, memory etc) stop, be aware of the feeling in the body, your mental experience (probably impatience/frustration/anger/any kind of non-acceptance); wait for 2 impulses to re-start before you do restart. Punctuate this break with a breath as you cultivate awareness.

Breath-Note-Reset – hyper-dotting scales (or anything else for that matter)

Hyper-dotted scale practice combined with noting and resetting between each statement, i.e. start on out-breath CDE... rest, note, reset, rehear in advance, now play FGA on out-breath, repeat, focussing on anchor (sound, touch, sight).

Familiarity

As with any practice, familiarity is a vital component of learning. The more familiar we are with an experience, the more easily we can access it. This applies to the mindful aspect of improvisation and musical practice. At first, adopting a mindful or focussed/clear mind will feel unfamiliar, perhaps awkward. With practice, this becomes more familiar to the point that we can begin to re-access the mindset and blend with our musical activities, be they long notes, playing a melody, simple or even complex improvisations.