



Episode 32: An Interview with Tiana Angus

Christine Goodner: Well welcome everyone. I'm excited today to be talking to Tiana Angus. And I was hoping you could just start by telling people a little bit about who you are, and where you're talking to us from, and what you do.

Tiana Angus: Hi, Christine, thank you so much for having me. I'm so thrilled that you would ask me to be on your podcast, which I love listening to. So hi, I'm Tiana and I'm from Queensland in Australia. I teach Suzuki violin, and I also am so excited that I get to perform. I perform in Queensland chamber orchestra Cammarata, and I've been doing that since 2005. And I love having both - both performing and teaching. I love having both of those to have fun with and explore creatively.

Christine Goodner : Wonderful. Yes. I hope we get to talk about practice from both of those angles today. I always like to ask people what got you started in music. Do you remember when you first learned an instrument and what got you interested in doing that? Or if your parents wanted you to start . . . I'd just love to hear that story.

Tiana Angus: So I believe my kindie teacher. So that's when you are about four in Australian or three or four. So kindergarten, the teacher said to my mom, Tiana's really like showing really like some talent with music. I really think you should get her some music lessons. And my mom had learned piano when she was a really young child. And so mom enrolled me in piano lessons with this wonderful piano teacher where we lived. And I turned up at my first piano lesson and said very emphatically, "but I do not want to learn the piano. I would learn the violin!!" And I had seen Itzhak Pearlman playing on Sesame street a few weeks before. And

mom was like, well, I'm so sorry to the piano teacher. Yeah - So she enrolled me in - the piano teacher said, oh, I know of this really great Suzuki violin teacher. And, and I started with, and the rest is history. So it all started from Sesame street.
<laughs>

Christine Goodner : I remember watching him on Sesame street as a child as well.

Tiana Angus: That amazing. I've seen it on YouTube since. And I'm like, well, no wonder I was so inspired at three

Christine Goodner : Or four. Yeah. And you had a very strong opinion of what you wanted to do.

Tiana Angus: Yeah, I think, right from when I was young, like it seemed like violin, was it - there was nothing else going to be in for my life then violin.

Christine Goodner : I love that. Do you have memories of practicing growing up? Did you enjoy the practice part of it? What, what was that experience like?

Tiana Angus: I remember my mom sat with me with practice until I was in year nine. I don't remember loving practice. No, I remember she would play the piano - along with the violin. So I think that really helped with pitch, but I, no, I didn't love practice back then. What I really, really loved back then was Suzuki festivals and we had several Suzuki festivals in the state that we lived in and I went to them all.

That's what I really loved. And because I think when you practice your just on your own and I think practice really is like the tool. To get, to being able to play with friends in a string ensemble at your school or a festival. Yeah, definitely the friends that I made and I remember like, like a little friend that I had Julie and like one year she would be ahead of me and then, then I'd like, have this look and then, you know, I'd practice a lot more.

And then we'd sort of around the same time and seeing the same people from different parts of . . . And just, I guess it was like sharing the love of music with other people, like at the school that I went to, no one else played violin at all and we didn't have have a violin program to school. I think that was a really big part was having that shared love of music and shared love of playing and also seeing like, oh, I'm playing and practicing these pieces on my own, but oh, you are too. And oh, and you are too. And, and I think that was really powerful for me.

Christine Goodner :

Yeah, absolutely. I think if it's just practice alone or with our parents for our next lesson, that's important, but that's not often what makes people love music for some people for sure. But yeah, I think that's great. I think it's a good reminder to us if we're parents or practice partners of young musicians too, to think about what, what are we getting them involved with? So they have that experience of social time, but also oh, I'm doing this other thing that all these other people are doing and it's fun to be a part of.

Tiana Angus: Yeah, totally. I think it's more challenging right now in the season that we're living in to be involved in extra things, but yeah, for sure that is such a huge motivator for, for practice and what you're practicing for.

Christine Goodner : I feel like when I do these interviews often there is some time, I don't know, teenage years (or) college, when practice does become more interesting to people or more gratifying in and of itself. Do you remember that clicking for you at any point?

Tiana Angus: Totally. <pauses> Oh, absolutely. I remember it changing when . . . so something for me that really changed when I was like in those years that you were talking about was I changed teachers to the teacher that I have now and she is incredible. Her name's Elizabeth Morgan. She's like one of the most renowned teachers in Australia. And she gave me so . . . it was like at that point in my violin playing that, you know, I started practicing on my own and that sort of thing.

But I felt like in the seasons of high school and undergrad, I felt like I was practicing like four to seven hours a day, but I was just like a hamster on a wheel. Like I was practicing so much, so many hours a day, but just getting nowhere because, <pauses>well, not nowhere, but, and I had really good guidance, but I felt like I was putting in more time than I was getting out of it because I didn't know how to practice really well. And I've heard your quote before you say practice is a learned skill and I can absolutely relate to that sentiment because I, yeah, I felt like I was putting in the time, but just spinning my wheels.

Christine Goodner :

Yes - Effective practice is a whole other thing. And I think a lot of parents ask me like, when will this happen for my child? And I don't know if it's comforting to hear or not, but I feel like a lot of people say it was like in college or at late high school when they really understood how to do it. And I just think there's so many things that come together. Like the teachers we get to work with and our brain

development and we have enough technique foundation under us that we can actually think about (all of that). And, you know, the practice techniques themselves.

Tiana Angus: And I wasn't someone who played pieces through, like I know that they say, oh, don't do that. That wasn't me. But I also didn't have a plan. I kind of was like, okay, what if I just sort of like start from the top? And if I made a mistake, I'd practice that bit over and over and over and over again, and still could have been more learned in there.

Christine Goodner : Sure. Well, everyone, I talk to kind of comes to that in their own way, you know, in their own time. So I think that's good to hear and think about if we have young children, we're supporting in practice that, you know, that's normal, we get there, but it's normal if we're not doing that perfectly as young children, I think that's, that's a rare exception.

Tiana Angus: It's my son and like my students, for sure. I can definitely see that in practice. It's is great, you're talking about on your podcast because we do spend more time in our practice rooms than we do in a lesson. So it's great to have some tools and skills to be able to use that time efficiently and well.

Christine Goodner : What else do you remember loving about music?

Tiana Angus: My school did something called fanfare, which was like a state music competition and it was like our string ensemble, our chamber orchestra won fanfare when I was in year nine. And then when I was in year 10, I did something called MOST, which is like for state school students like Musically Outstanding Students, - MOST, and I did that for in year 10 and 12. And both of those things kind of solidified for me. Yes. This is absolutely what I wanna do. And they were definitely the two things that were for sure inspired me to pursue music as a career.

Christine Goodner : That's really fun to think about. Do you remember what it was? Do you remember a specific moment or a specific thing about it where you had that realization?

Tiana Angus: Yeah, I guess it was like the music that we were playing. Because it was <pauses> we were playing real music like at those sort of, uh, things like, oh, Mozart Divertimenti or or like, I know that we did that and oh, other things, but I can't remember. I can't remember what we played, but I do remember the feeling of like, wow, the music and that chamber music sound with all the string players

and having double bases and having that cohesion. I, oh, I was just sold! It was such a . . . the experience is amazing.

Christine Goodner : There's a colleague of mine and I, Dr. Rebekah Hanson, we were doing some research about what a teen is motivated by in music. And we asked them what do you love most about music? And one of the top two answers was that just the music is beautiful and I love how it makes me feel. And so I really, that came to mind as you were telling that story, that really lines up with what I think a lot of teens or, young musicians feel.

Tiana Angus: Absolutely. Yeah, absolutely. And having musical friends, like I think teens, I can definitely see I'm not a teen myself anymore, but, I can definitely see that friends is a huge motivator for teens. And so having people in their, orchestras at school or orchestra outside of school or whatever is so that's, that's a huge part of, part of it and myself as well. I'm really good friends with my colleagues. So I think, and they're some of my closest friends. So I definitely think that the people, as well as the music is a really good,

Christine Goodner : That combination is really amazing. Absolutely. I agree with you for sure. Well, thinking about as a teacher, I just wondered, especially when we think about how we grew up practicing or what we learned the hard way about practice, what do you hope your students get from working with you (or) just in general about music or about practice itself?

Tiana Angus: I hope that I can convey my joy and love of music with my students and my son. I think that if I have no expectations that my students will become performers. Like some have, it's more like I really want them to be encouraged. I really want them to feel like that they look back at their lessons with such fondness and that they were really encouraged to build some skills. Because there's so much that you can learn from playing an instrument like that. Grit, resilience, determination, skills for diligence and so many things. But yeah, above all, I would love them to have a lifelong joy of music and a love of music.

Christine Goodner : Definitely. I always thought about that, with children and students alike, whatever happens with the instrument. I want them for life to have this joyful fond memory of playing or appreciation for it. Well what do you do if you see a student that seems like they're kind of lacking in that love of music, joy of music, like what are some things you might think about doing if you saw that maybe your student needs some more support to get to that place?

Tiana Angus:

So I've been at the school that I teach at. I've been putting on different concerts for many, many years and they're always a bit random and out like left field. So like last year we did a Celtic concert where we got like one of Australia's renowned fiddle players to come along. And, and that was just so joyful and the music was so fun and we played a Celtic concert. Other years we've done something with a different ensemble that was like did dances and had like the lights show and sort of thing.

And so I feel like something that's really a really joyful performance of working together to something that's really fun, like a concept. I find that that's kind of what I've been working towards with them. I guess if they're not feeling it in one phase, you can always come back from that. It's like that practice - progress - pleasure. Like the more that you practice, the more that you get out of it. And then the more that you enjoy it, but that can also work backwards.

The less that you practice then, you generally don't enjoy it as much because you see that you're not making as much progress. So I guess encouraging to have some practice, but in like a meaningful way and, and having some tangible goals and some measurable goals and as a teacher, I guess I lean <pauses> and a parent, I do some, bribing <laughs> with encouragement. Yes.

Christine Goodner : Yeah. All great ideas. I think like people to come away from these conversations with some ideas to think about so creative performances and what are some, or some fun, maybe practice challenges we can put in into place to kind of spur us on because sometimes if it's just like, oh, we need to practice for nothing in particular. It's not as motivating as like, oh I'm gonna be in this concert or I'm gonna get this (incentive). I have this little bin of bouncy balls and pencils and stickers. And sometimes my students will practice something, you know, 30, 50 times to pick out a little ball if it works, it works.

Tiana Angus: Absolutely. And I, I totally feel like, I know we're both Suzuki teachers, but I have in the past taught like exams. And I found that a student can be less motivated to practice for something scary, like an exam. So, but like there's other reasons to practice.

Christine Goodner : Right. And we're <pauses> I think we're talking about if internal motivation is low, how do we kind of spark enough motivation to start making progress? And then you can feed off of that and it comes from inside, but

yes, it's hard (sometimes) to get the momentum rolling. I think sometimes unless we have something a little creative, I mean know for myself sometimes it's like, I'm gonna make a nice latte after I do this thing I don't wanna get started on or you know, it's just life.

Tiana Angus: Absolutely. Yeah.

Christine Goodner : I think that's an important conversation. There's a lot of talk about not bribing or only we want intrinsic motivation, but I think these are the things that sort of feed into that. Sometimes we need that little spark, like you're saying, if we don't make progress, then we have less fun and we feel less like practicing and so have to get it rolling and then let it take off.

Tiana Angus: I so agree that like often that extrinsic or external motivation will, if you keep that up and it'll lead to that intrinsic, (motivation) because you'll see the progress that you're making, which will bring the joy. Yeah, totally.

Christine Goodner : I want practice partners and parents to not have guilt if it seems like they need a little carrot at the end of the stick to get their student to practice.

Tiana Angus: Yeah. Oh, I would have a bunch of carrots myself. I would have all the carrots. <laughs>

Christine Goodner : We all, as a parent, you know, you just read things about what to do and not to do and you wanna do it. Right.

Tiana Angus: Yeah, exactly. Or if you feeling guilty about offering carrots, know that you're not

Christine Goodner : Absolutely. Yeah. One thing I wanna make sure we talk about today is that you have some really fun practice cards that you have available to help spur on creative practice or motivating practice. I wonder if you could tell us a bit about how those came about and what those are.

Tiana Angus: Yes and also, I've just launched a planner as well, just recently. And so it all kind of came out of having students say, oh, I had some students who would come back week after week doing nothing. And they were like, oh, well I don't what to practice. Or then I'd be like, oh, what you do in your lesson is what you practice or I don't know how, and so I was kind of like challenge accepted!! And so I kind of, when I, I had my daughter, (and she was a) baby, when I was

nursing her during the night, I remember like writing down all these different ideas. So, and it's exciting to have them out now. So basically I wanted to give students tools and skills to know how to practice because I did not have that at their age. And so with the practice cards, it will be like pulling out something to focus on and just having that one focus and with the planner, it's all showing students how to break a piece down.

Like here's a previous spot and here's different ways that you could practice your practicespot. Wanting really to give tools, to help students not practice mindlessly, like just playing it through and not having a plan so that they've got some tools. And also we were talking about extrinsic motivation. I wanted to give students a goal to work towards.

So with the planner, it's like playing it through a hundred times with different focuses. And I feel like that for me is a really great carrot, but it's also like a really good way of practicing. Just having the planner, it's little rewards along the way, or a star to color in. But having that, those little steps that builds momentum and help with, you know, building that excitement for practice and seeing that you've got the tangible fully by focusing in a really good way on what you're practicing is going to lead to really good progress with violin playing.

Christine Goodner : Yeah. I'm excited to check that out actually. So how do people find that or how will they be able to find that resource

Tiana Angus: It's on my website, which is, Dolcestrings.com.au. And I also have an Instagram, which is @Dolce.Strings and there's the link in the bio there.

Christine Goodner : Okay, great. We can link to that in the show notes so people can find it easily. And I, I love your practice cards or the kind of principles that you can use to draw. Like you're saying different ways to focus, what things to focus on and

Tiana Angus: Yeah. Hopefully some tools that helps practice be less mindless. I think when I also with my son practicing, one of the things that we clashed with is that he wanted to have control, but I was coming to practice with some ideas and some things that I wanted to do, because like, I'm gonna make this fun. And so even though the things that I was coming to the table with were fun. I believe! With him wanting control that we had some, you know, some issues and had some tears. And so one of the things that I've really found that has been brilliant with this planner with my son is that I can be like, okay, so you pick what we're

gonna focus on. And so that's giving him control and then he loves that and that's been so great for us and I can be like, okay, so what piece are we gonna focus on? But he can see in the planner, it's all sort of worked out for him. And so there's parameters there, but for him to have the control of what's his, what is his focus going to be? And that has been so beneficial. I can see for my son, I was like, oh, this has worked so much more than I could have ever imagined because he's, he's loving it. And he'll be like, oh, I'm five from the end. Can I play this five more times? And I'll be like, yes, you can.

Christine Goodner : I'll Allow that <laughs>

Tiana Angus: Yes. Okay. Yes, Really <laughs> And so then I can see him making his own goals and like, oh, I'm gonna get here. And then once he's got to a hundred times that he's played it, he's we can have that celebration together and like, hi five. And, and the planner is very much like just you get to color in a little star. And so, and he's loving that. So it's real. I can definitely see that that's helped his motivation and excitement for practice. And it's very colorful, which I really like to, like,

Christine Goodner : I hear a lot of, or I have a lot of conversations about those like strong willed. I want to be in control of practice kids. And really, if they have the tools, they are great independent practicers later, but it's very challenging in those years when they really do need some guidance, but they would rather not have it.

Tiana Angus: Yes. He's very, yes. Very, as you say yes, very strong-willed but that's wonderful. Like I think that could, yeah. And I'm sure I'm not the only one raising a strong-willed lovely child.

Christine Goodner : Absolutely not. I hear all the time and I have one of my own, that's now grown and they make fabulous adults, but it's hard to practice together (sometimes).

Tiana Angus: He's making a great kid. So I'll, I'll take it all.

Christine Goodner : Yeah. Yeah, absolutely. I think that sounds like a great way to work with those kiddos that really could use, you know, some choices and not a choice of am I gonna practice or not, but what of these things that are going to help me, do I get to choose from is really key?

Tiana Angus: Absolutely. Yeah. And to be, to have that, your own creativity with practice. Like I think, bless my mom, she would've done a great job, but I think I

was like told what to do and I didn't have that ownership of what I was doing with my practice. So I think having that ability to choose and having <pauses? I think it gives students and violinists that ownership of what they're doing. And I like that.

Christine Goodner : Yeah. Right. Because at some point maybe when we, if we have preschool students, for example, we kind of have to tell them what to do when we're practicing. (Tiana: Absolutely.) It has to switch to, oh, I want to do this. Or this is for me at some point and that switch is hard.

Tiana Angus: Yeah. That's true. That's true. And so hopefully they've got some we've passed on some lovely skills and tools in that season that we we're playing with them and yeah. It is a lovely season. Tough but lovely.

Christine Goodner : Exactly. Just like parenting in general. It's true.

We can make sure people can find your website and your Instagram to connect with. Oh, thank after this. Yeah, absolutely. Absolutely. We wanna definitely connect with that. I would love to see if we could end today's conversation with a practice tip, you could leave people with, It could have to do with something we've talked about already or if you have something else to share. We'd love to hear that as well.

Tiana Angus: I think for me, it's being kind to yourself because you're spending so much time practicing on your own often. Well not as a child, but like, this is like, I guess for teens and being that because you've got that inner monologue going, oh, like, oh, that didn't go through of just being kind to yourself. But I guess if it's for young students, I guess a great tip is just to be consistent. Like you're not always going to be able to rely on that feeling of,(being motivated) and so I guess going back to that, having a really good habit is going to be really good for that consistency to, to make great progress.

Christine Goodner : Yeah. It ties in what we're saying earlier, when we have fun and do it more, the motivation just builds on itself.

Tiana Angus: Absolutely.

Christine Goodner : Well, thank you so much for speaking with us today as a pleasure to speak with you.

Tiana Angus: Thanks so much for your time. I've loved chatting to you.

Tiana Angus: Christine thanks so much for having this conversation with me today. So my name is Tamara Gonzales and I'm a Suzuki violin and Viola instructor now based in Minneapolis. And I'm also an orchestra conductor. I've realized over the past year I'm an education advocate also.