



## Episode 99: Music Practice Tips for Consistency and Excellence with Sherry Luchette

Sherry Luchette:

I think that what I've learned through Suzuki and the pedagogy is that it's the consistency of every day. It's the no drama, no extremes, it's just part of your day. And that if you add up those days over the years, that's what takes you to excellence, that repetition equals excellence.

Christine Goodner:

Welcome to the Time to Practice podcast. This is a space where we talk about music practice, this ups and downs that young musicians go through related to practice and learning music, and how we as parents, caregivers, and music educators can support the young musicians in our lives, support ourselves and support each other. My name is Christine Gooder. I'm a music educator. I'm author and podcaster who has made it my mission to talk about music practice and to support educators and families looking to make home practice more effective and to reduce conflict and frustration in the practice room. I'm glad you're here.

A short PSA, be sure to subscribe to this podcast wherever you listen so you get automatic updates when a new episode is published. This is one of the simple ways you can help support this community driven project. Speaking of that, you can now find us on YouTube. The handle is at time to practice pod, and since I've just started, I just have a handful of subscribers there right now. So I would love your help to grow and reach my first 100 subscribers and then eventually more so I'll put a link to find me there in the show notes. Alright, on to today's episode.

Welcome to episode 99. I'm excited today to bring you one of our monthly conversations about music practice from a guest expert. And this week we have bassist and music educator, Sherry Luchette. Here is a bit of her background, which comes from her website. Sherry Luchette is an accomplished LA bassist playing jazz rock and classical style music. In addition to being an accomplished musician, Sherry is also an acclaimed music educator and author. She teaches jazz bass and young musicians classes at the Pasadena Conservatory of Music. Sherry has authored the Flying Jazz Kitten series, a collection of three elementary jazz music education books. And Sherry is here today to share with us some of her favorite tips about music practice. I believe she's our first bassist to be on the podcast, so it's exciting to have her here and I can't wait for her to share those tips with you.

Let's jump in. Well, welcome everyone. I'm excited today to be talking to Sherry Luchette and Sherry and I met recently at the Oregon Suzuki Institute where she was teaching bass and improvisation, jazz improvisation classes, and it was really wonderful to connect and fun fact, we found out we had both had something published in the same American Suzuki Journal as each other, but we had never really met or interacted. So it was super fun to connect and you gave a great talk at the Institute, Sherry, about practice tips and tricks that we're going to talk about today because it'd be wonderful for everyone to get to hear that that couldn't be there, be there live. So thanks for joining me today.

Sherry Luchette:

Yeah, absolutely. Thanks for having me. It's wonderful to be here.

Christine Goodner:

Yeah, absolutely. And think, I would love to start off by just having you share anything you'd like to about who you are and what you do in the world of music. I talked a bit about what you did at OSI, but what else would you like to share?

Sherry Luchette:

Well, right now I'm teaching at the Pasadena Conservatory in Pasadena, California. And I do a lot with adults as well. I have the adult jazz studies program that I run, and then I also have lots of bass students. And then I have a jazz class for kids ages four to seven called the Flying Jazz Kittens, or that's where the materials come from, my books that are called the Flying Jazz Kittens. And then I use those materials and adapt them for private students, for my adult students, like the same type of materials work at all age levels with some tweaks.

Christine Goodner:

I love that. And I was telling you, I don't think we've had a basis on the podcast before, so I'm excited to have you here.

Sherry Luchette:

Yay. That, that's exciting.

Christine Goodner:

Yeah, it is exciting. How old were you? I'm just curious, how old were you when you first started learning music and did you start on the bass? I guess I'm curious about

Sherry Luchette:

That. Yeah, so I did not start on the bass. I was an ear kid and I played a lot of instruments by ear with no formal instruction for a while. I played some piano. I started violin for probably a couple of months and then moved and that didn't work out. And then I played flute, I played bass clarinet and tenor saxophone and euphonium in the high school band and then landed on electric bass and really liked the bass. Didn't really know about the upright bass at that time, but I taught myself to read bass clef and got practiced and took some lessons with some guitar teachers on electric base. And then I started to play musicals at different high schools around the area. And that's where I came from coming kind of through the back door, not a lot of formal training, but, and I also learned a little bit about chords.

And then when I did finally meet mob based teacher at the local university, he started me with walking baseline and writing baseline and then asked me, how are your grades? And I said, well, they're good. And so he said, okay, well how would you like to come here and play the upright bass? And I said, well, that's only my dream to go to music school, but I did not have that formal training, so there was nowhere that was going to take me. So he took me and we started at the beginning with classical bass, no jazz for two years, all just fundamental. So I actually stayed in my undergraduate degree for six years because I had to catch up. And then, so I did come into it from a different way, but that's okay because here we are.

Christine Goodner:

Yeah, no, I think it's so valuable to hear people's stories who are not maybe what people expect or not the typical path because everybody's path does not look the same when I talk to a lot of musicians, and it's really important to know that we have a lot of parents of music students that listen to this podcast, and sometimes it can feel like a lot of pressure that our path has to look a certain way or my child is doomed or something like this. And really, there's just a lot of ways people get into music. I'm really glad you're sharing your story.

Sherry Luchette:

Yeah, absolutely. Absolutely. There is not just one right way to do it, and if you're determined, and there's a lot that has to do with your motivation too as well, because a lot of information is free out there now, it's just what you do with it.

Christine Goodner:

Right. I had on my list of questions ask you, did you always like to practice, but something was driving you to keep figuring out these instruments by ear and self-teaching yourself. Do you remember what that felt like to you or what motivated you when you were young?

Sherry Luchette:

I don't know. I don't think I really thought it through when I was younger. I think it was just something kind of fun to do. I wanted to play in the band and figure it out, or a band director may have said, Hey, would you play this for me? Sometimes they were trying to get students to switch to less popular instruments, and I was just that kid that was like, yeah, okay, sure. But I think it was just a, there's probably some curiosity there and wanting to figure something out

Christine Goodner:

And some social situations that you got to be in with music maybe that felt interesting or Oh, try this. And then you were willing.

Sherry Luchette:

Yeah, it was just kind of a place to belong to. I wasn't a super athletic kid, so that was sort of my way of trying to find something to do.

Christine Goodner:

And I think a lot of us love music partly because of the people we get to surround ourselves and make music with, making music with other peoples. There's something magical about that that draws a lot of us in.

Sherry Luchette:

Definitely.

Christine Goodner:

I love that. Then I was curious what made you want to be a professional musician, but it sounded like you found the right professor at the right time. You took you under their wing, and that's how that opportunity came to pass.

Sherry Luchette:

Yes. It was not short of miraculous, and I think I knew when I was about 14 or 15 that I really wanted to do it. I just loved the sound of the bass and that's what I wanted to do. I just wanted to play the bass. Then I just decided I didn't know how I was going to get there, but I was going to figure it out.

Christine Goodner:

Wow. Wow.

Sherry Luchette:

Yeah,

Christine Goodner:

And I imagine if we're a college professor meeting the kid like that who's really clearly got a passion and a drive for it, I can imagine that would motivate someone who's willing to take you under their wing. I mean, it seemed like you had the right

Sherry Luchette:

Ingredients

Christine Goodner:

There to meet the right person at the right time.

Sherry Luchette:

Yeah, the perfect storm in a good

Christine Goodner:

Way. I love that. I love that. Yeah, absolutely. Well, thank you. Thank you for sharing some of that. I think it does help just to hear everybody's different story and know that our kids, if we're a parent coaching a child through this process, it might be hard to tell what that story is and when we're in the middle of it, but it's helpful to hear that these things come together, so I appreciate that. So when we were talking to the beginning of our conversation about the talk you gave at the Oregon Suzuki Institute about practice, and I'm excited to hear what you can share with us and some of your ideas about music practice that you share with students and that you shared with the families at the institute.

Sherry Luchette:

Sure. Because I was telling you that I was an ear person and I started late when I got to music school, I felt very behind and very, I knew that there were kids that were light years ahead of my abilities, and so I actually practiced out of fear of not being good enough, and that motivation stayed with me. And still, I find sometimes that I battle it even now. I think that that's a very common scenario with many people is that they practice because they're afraid that they're not going to be good enough or they're comparing themselves to someone else. And these are, I think, very human tendencies. And while there's an element of fear that can motivate us all to change because it's not a comfortable feeling, I found that in the bigger picture, in the long haul, it's not the way that you want to practice because it leads to a lot of perfectionism and just it has to be all or nothing kind of mentality.

Like either I'm going to practice five hours a day or I'm walking away. And it kind of encourages extremes. And I think that what I've learned through Suzuki and the pedagogy is that it's the consistency of every day. It's the no drama, no extremes, it's just part of your day. And that if you add up those days over the years, that's what takes you to excellence, that repetition equals excellence and that it's actually can be done in a very calm kind of matter of fact way. I wish I would've known that I was in college. I would've probably done even better, but I know that now. So a lot of my tips and tricks are surrounding promoting that scenario of, okay, let's talk about how much time do you actually have each day that you'd be willing to practice. Because it's not easy. And I don't think that it's always particularly fun.

It just depends. Sometimes you can get into things and have fun with it, but a lot of times we're alone when we're practicing and it can feel kind of isolating. And if someone just says, go practice, well, what does that mean? What does that mean? So one of the things that I've developed is I call it my base practice plan, and I actually designed a sheet that I give to every student when they come in for their lesson. We put their name on it, we write what their warmups are going to be if they're working on scales, what scales they're going to practice, and then the songs. And what about the songs? Are they going to practice? Are they going to practice an entire song? Are they going to practice certain measures? And everything is written out according to the timeframe that the student says they can commit to.

I had one student, she told me I can do eight minutes a day. I said, okay. And so I broke down her assignments to cover eight minutes because I know that eight minutes a day is better than cramming 30 minutes one day in the week and then coming in for your lesson. And it seems to be working because then people, I think students know that they're not being judged or why didn't you practice? Because that's another thing. I think people feel kind of ashamed or embarrassed if they don't practice at this certain mysterious number of minutes a day. I mean, there can be suggestions, but then there's also real life and what students can actually handle. And that's what I'm interested in is knowing really what can you really handle? Let's be honest about it, and I'm not judging you, but tell me so that we can make something where you can stick with it and then you can feel successful.

So that's probably the one big thing that I start students off with is you're going to have a plan each week and we're going to divide that plan by minutes of what to work on so that you have a beginning and an end when you go to practice by yourself instead of just, I'm going to go and just do whatever for however long. That's so scary. When there's no end, it just feels very overwhelming. So this way there's a plan, and then when you're done, if you want to keep going, go for it. If not, you did what you needed to do for the day and you can have that sense of accomplishment.

Christine Goodner:

Yeah, exactly. And I can think of people listening, maybe thinking like, oh, eight minutes wouldn't be enough for my child and feeling stressed. But I think also you and I know if they're in reality is more time, often just getting started is very hard,

Sherry Luchette:

Very.

Christine Goodner:

And once students get going, and if they start to see, oh, this is feeling satisfying, because it's like you're saying, it has a beginning and an end. It could expand from there. And I think knowing that helps

Sherry Luchette:

Very well. It could expand. And when I said eight minutes, I mean that's for that student. So everybody's different. And I had another student tell me one day they might go for two hours and another day they can't stand it for more than 12 minutes and they're done. And so this is just being real. This is humans, these are human beings, and not everybody can be 30 minutes every day. I'm sure there are students that can, and that's great. That's so amazing. But then there's a lot of other people, and if they're struggling with practicing, then definitely five minutes a day is better than nothing. So sometimes we have to start small and build up if we're learning what it feels like to practice. I think some people are a little bit more naturally able to practice easier than others. I know that I really struggled with it for a while, like I said, but I'm sure there are students that don't as much that just sort of get into it. That's great. Hopefully they can share their mindset when they're in that zone. That would be great to know. Because

Some of the other things that I do besides the base practice plan is that I have repetition games. So I'll have students, I take my little stuffed animals, I have these little stuffed cats, and I'll pull them out of the bag and I'll say, okay, if we're going to look at a passage and I want you to play this passage as correctly as you possibly can, I don't like to say perfect. I think that perfect is kind of an illusion because there's nothing really to do with that word, because perfect is kind of in the eye of the beholder. So I tell them, play it as correct as you can. And then in my case with my stuff, kitties Kitty goes over in the bag and then we do it again. And if it's a good correct practice, the second kitty goes over into the bag and then we go to the third time and let's say there's a mistake or something different.

And then I'll ask the student, what happened? What do you think it was that was a little off? And I might say, oh, I missed that shift. I was a little sharp, or I over shifted. And I'll say, okay, great. So now the kitties all come back out of the bag and we start again until we get three in a row. But I think it's a fun way to do repetition, and it also gives students a chance to be a little bit more objective with themselves when there is a mistake rather than, oh my gosh, the world is over. Instead you just say, okay, well alright, I made the note. I tended to over shift on that note, so now I'm going to go again and try not to over shift and just keep doing it until you get those three in a row. Or it could be a five time game or it could be a 10 time game depending on the passage. So I've had a lot of success with that. That makes it a little bit more fun to repeat passages.

Christine Goodner:

Exactly.

Sherry Luchette:

And then we'll go back and after doing a micro practice on a certain thing, I'd like to let the student play the whole song after that because that's a very satisfying feeling after you've isolated a certain area that you're targeting to just go ahead and play through without stopping can be very satisfying and kind of feel like an accomplishment.

Christine Goodner:

Right. And I think sometimes people come to lessons and they do feel like, I want to show the teacher I can do this correctly. And then we can have a misconception that at home when we practice, everything's supposed to go correctly all the time and practice. I think someone's not, and they're helping their child practice. It's good to know that it's a messy process. We're going to make mistakes. And I love what you said about just like, oh, what happened there? Can I figure out what went awry and then

Sherry Luchette:

How to make it better? And instead of looking for perfect, we're going to just try and be more correct, as accurate as we can be, and then move on

Christine Goodner:

And problem solve a bit. Yeah, yeah.

Sherry Luchette:

And then just move on. That's always the key anyways. Just keep moving forward. Don't give up, keep moving forward. Yeah,

Christine Goodner:

I like that. I like that. Your three cats game, again, there's a beginning and an end. So it's like, okay, we did this three times. We can revisit this tomorrow or whenever, but it's go on forever.

Sherry Luchette:

And then some of the other tricks are just, and I'm sure many students already do this, but having a timer on so when you're 10 or 15 or 30 minutes are up. I think practice sheets are really fun where you can visually put a sticker saying, yes, I practice today and have some kind of chart at home. I think doing it earlier in the day is usually better because then it's done and it can be checked off the list. Sometimes that's the main motivation, but at least it gets done because when we get to the end of our school day and there's homework and people are tired or they have a sports practice, it can get really difficult to



then go over to your instrument and practice. So I think the earlier that it can be done, the better. Generally speaking, I think having a long, maybe a long-term reward is kind of fun.

If a student finishes a Suzuki book or a solo piece or another milestone, they might get a special meal at home or a small toy or a cool new stuffed animal, something like that. And then the other thing that I offer is I let my students know that if they're stuck on something during the week and they don't remember how to do something, that they need to have their parents or themselves text me and tell me what it is that they don't understand. And I can send them a video or I can hop on FaceTime and show them. Because with today's technology, it's so easy to do that and it's so quick. There's really no excuse to wait a whole week saying, well, I don't remember. It is, you can be proactive and ask me, because I told them, if I don't get back to you right away, it's because something has come up, but I will get back to you. And so I have had a few students do that, which I think is great. Then it clears up any misunderstanding or whatever they don't remember. So I encourage my students to be in touch if they need to, and not to feel bad about it and not to feel shy about it, but just reach out if there's something that you just can't figure out, don't wait. In other words, don't wait the whole week and then come back and go.

Those are some of the big things that I like to use with students to help them have some kind of practice routine.

Christine Goodner:

I love that. I love that. And at first, when you were talking about the base practice, I was thinking like upright base, but you're maybe saying like BASE, like the base level or can you say more about what you're calling that?

Sherry Luchette:

Oh, BASS? Yeah, my base practice plan. Yeah.

Christine Goodner:

Okay. It is like the instrument. Yeah,

Sherry Luchette:

It's for the instrument. They're all bass players. Right, exactly. And so we're going to have for the base, because it's such a physical instrument, sometimes in the beginning years, some students crossover or many students with bass tend to have played something prior. That's not an unusual scenario, although we'd love to see more three and four year olds start because we have small but very small bases that can be used to teach them. But a lot of my students played other things or do play other things. And so when they come over to the light, just kidding. I love it when they come and play bass, a lot of them have some general musical knowledge already. And what happens with bass is that it's kind of a slow burn from the

physical standpoint of playing with the bow, playing picado, pressing down on the fingerboard. These things are very physical and the body needs time to create calluses and build up hand muscle.

So sometimes a lot, their brains know what to do, but their hands aren't cooperating. And that disjunct can happen for I think up to about three to six months even. So your body needs time to catch up with your brain, and not every instrument is like that, but the base it is. And so warmups are really very important on the base as part of their practice plan because they have to warm up their hands because we don't want anybody having some kind of physical problems with their hands or shoulders or arms. So it's a little bit of a slower burn or pace in the beginning stages with the base for that reason. So I tell students, be patient, don't give up, it will come. But it's not like the piano where you just go over and you press a key and you get that sound, instant gratification. It's going to take a little bit longer with the bass.

Christine Goodner:

Oh, that's super interesting.

Sherry Luchette:

But the payoff is that the bass is like an instrument that's in almost every style of music, and it's such a versatile instrument that if you play it and you can play it well, you'll always have musical opportunities regardless of how far you want to take it, even if you're just an enthusiast or if you GoPro or you just are more advanced player, there's always somebody who needs a bass player. So that's a beautiful thing because not all, you don't hear that about violins. Right. I know there's so many of us. So there can be some advantages to the turtle winning the race, so to speak. Absolutely.

Christine Goodner:

Absolutely. Yes. I love that. That's a good plug for a more basis in the world. I know that in the Suzuki world for sure, it's just starting to grow. I feel like it'd be more visible to me. So it's exciting.

Sherry Luchette:

Very much so. Yeah,

Christine Goodner:

Very exciting. Absolutely. Well, I always like to lead people with some practice tip for the week ahead, and we've talked about a lot of tips in this episode.

Sherry Luchette:

Yes.

Christine Goodner:

So I was thinking it would be fun to hear what is motivating you right now in your own practice or when you are most motivated, what is the thing that gets you in the practice room or gets you excited about music these days?

Sherry Luchette:

So when I practice, I like to play songs from the Suzuki books as my warmup. And I will try and challenge myself by playing them in a different position on my instrument or playing them like an octave higher on the bass, which is fun. If you do a bunch in a row up higher than you usually play them like up in thumb position. That's a great way to warm up your hands in the case of the bass. But another one is because, well, Gary Carr just passed who's our great classical bassist who was actually the bass player that recorded the first three CDs of the Suzuki bass books. And I've encouraged students just play along with Gary Carr on the recordings. That's also a fun way to warm up or just get started. If you're not sure you're ready to look at something else, you can just put on a recording and just start playing along.

So those are two things that I like to do in terms of getting warmed up and start some practicing just very light, easy, fun thing. And the last tip I'll say, and this is probably a little bit more for bass players or students that play bigger instruments, but have your instrument out of its case at home and have it set up either in a stand or nose in the corner ready to play. Because 50% of getting started is getting that instrument out of the bag. If you can have it take it out as soon as you get home, you're much more likely to pick up your instrument and begin playing than you are if the case stays on.

Christine Goodner:

Oh, I love that tip so much. I so agree with that. My own violin sits on a hanger in my practice space.

Sherry Luchette:

It really helps.

Christine Goodner:

Yes, yes. And I do think one of the advantages of a piano, for example, is it's just there. And parents will tell me, well, the piano, they just sit down and play it. And they're not doing that with their instrument, but maybe their instrument has to come out the case like you're saying. And the piano is just there ready to play. There's such a big thing about that.

Sherry Luchette:

Exactly. Easy access.

Christine Goodner:

Easy access, yes. And if your child's young and you don't want them touching it without you being there, you can have a way to have it out, but maybe not reachable or accessible to them.

Sherry Luchette:

Or you can have a little area that's like, this is our practice corner and there's a gate here, and then when we come in, this is when we're going to play. But it's ready to go. I think it makes it a lot easier.

Christine Goodner:

Absolutely. Yeah. Such a great tip. Well, thank you so much, Sheri, for being here with us. It was delightful to speak with you and hear your practice tips, and I know a lot of people will get a lot out of this and have some new ideas to try in their practice this week.

Sherry Luchette:

Well, thanks so much for having me. This was really fun.

Christine Goodner:

My pleasure. My pleasure. Before we go today, here are a few of my takeaways from today's episode. First, be realistic about how much time you have to practice and make a plan to use your time as effectively as possible. I love how Sherry talked about how she coaches her students through that process. So ideally, work with your teacher to identify what to practice on those days when you only have a short time to get your practice in so you can get the most out of the practice time you do have. Second, feeling like there is no end to practice can be overwhelming. This is so important to keep in mind for everyone, I would say, especially very young children, but it does apply to people of all ages. This also came up in episode 61 when Catherine Drake came on the podcast, and Drake had a great perspective to share on this topic as well.

So if you have not heard that episode or have not heard it in a while, I'll add a link to that in the show notes if you want to check that out as a next step after listening today. Finally, it can't be said enough that a short daily practice is often more effective than trying to cram all your practice into one or two longer sessions. It's always great to have the time and freedom to have longer sessions a couple days of the week, but it's really worth it to get to our instrument, even if it's very short on the days in between as many days as we can. I loved all of Sherry's advice on music practice, and especially loved some of her discussion and perspective on sharing the physicality of playing the string bass and some of the different needs that students have based on that.

That was something I learned that was new today. That makes a lot of sense. I'd love to hear what you took away or even what you tried in your own practice this week based on today's conversation. You can send me an email, [christine@suzukitriangle.com](mailto:christine@suzukitriangle.com) or message me on Instagram. My handles at Suzuki Triangle there. Before we go, I want to thank everyone who has subscribed to the podcast on our new YouTube channel or any place you stream your podcast for that matter. I'd love you to help me get to my

first 50 subscribers on YouTube and be on that if possible. So next week. So I'd love you to go there and subscribe to my channel. I can put a link to that in our show notes as well. Next week, I will be joining you with 10 things I have learned, or 10 ways my perspective has changed since starting this podcast and what will be a 100 episodes next week when that goes live.

So I look forward to being back with you to share some of those lessons that can apply to all of our own music practice or that with the young musicians in our lives that we support. In the meantime, thank you for all you do to support the development of the musicians in your life. Learning and participating in music is such a gift to young people for so many reasons. And what you do each day matters. If no one else tells you. This week, I want to give you a big thank you on behalf of everyone in your life you are supporting in music. All right, everyone, take very good care of yourself this week. See you soon.

Transcript created by Rev.com