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Emily's studying tips!

1. Ask yourself why you want to play!

If it is for fun, then make sure that it IS fun!! Make it clear to your teacher that you are playing for your own enjoyment so that you are both aiming for the same thing! (But don't forget that even if you "only" play for your own enjoyment, the better you can play, the more pleasure you will have and to achieve this, you will at some stage have to work on less enjoyable studies or exercises!) Play music which you enjoy, and take pleasure in exploring the technical (including sound!!) possibilities of your CHOSEN instrument.

If performing is an important element of flute playing for you, then make sure that you do COMMUNICATE! Make recordings of yourself playing (at least once a week) to check that what you THINK you are doing is actually coming through the flute! When you have a performance with an audience, try to arrange for someone to video you and watch the tape critically, judging yourself as objectively as possible (perhaps it helps if you see this as "giving yourself a lesson")

Is playing with other people important to you? Don't wait to be asked, why not set up a group yourself? Be imaginative! If you can't find enough repertoire for your particular combination of instruments, then why not try your hand at some arrangements?

Do you want to play the flute professionally? Make sure that before you launch into a full-time study, you seek advice as to whether this is a real possibility from at least a couple of professional flautists, APART from your teacher. Also ask flautists you come across in competitions and masterclasses whether they think that this is a reasonable goal. THEN be prepared for hard work!!

2. With your clear aims in mind, decide how you want to invest in your flute?

How much actual time do I have? Whether you play as a hobby, as a student or professionally, there is one word which is the most important when it comes to practicing - CONSISTANCY! This means the discipline of doing some work every day. (A beginner will always improve much faster if he/she does 10 minutes a day EVERY day than if he/she does one hour a week on the day before a lesson!) Try to devise a realistic practice routine which suits you and which you can do every day. (Perhaps you have one hour every day and then in the weekend more time - make sure that you use the daily hour effectively with scales and tone exercises so that when you have more time to have play the actual music, that you are in good shape and have control over the instrument)

The next most important word for me in relation to studying is ACCURACY! Whatever you are practising, make sure that you are always reinforcing the positive NOT the negative, the right, not the wrong! If you play a scale 4 times incorrectly and on the fifth time you get it right and then go on to the next one, you have practiced the mistake or mistakes FOUR times more than the correct version!! When you play a difficult passage, look upon your slow study of the notes as programming your fingers with the right combination of fingerings, rather than "boring, frustrating work" .If you always work in this way, then I promise that you will actually improve MUCH faster!

With your own clear ideals of COMMITMENT and a promise to yourself to work CONSISTANTLY and ACCURATELY, you now have to decide WHAT to practice.

3. What to practise - My theory about practicing!

I suggest that you divide your study time into four quarters.

Use the first to develop sound/tone,

the second to practice moving your fingers,

the third to work on starting and stopping the notes (articulation!) and the fourth for music.

This may sound as though music is the least important to me, but in fact I think that most music practice can be done WITHOUT the flute! By this I mean singing to ourselves in the bath or whistling as we walk down the street to think about instinctive/natural phrasing, or of-course listening to others play either live or on CDs, researching the composer in the library, looking at paintings of the period to give you ideas as to the general style of the time and so on. What we need to do in our practice time is to develop the tools or skills to put into practice the musical ideas.

Tone Practice:

The sound we create is the obviously THE most fundamental aspect of music making. On the flute, breathing is the most basic, fundamental thing which HAS to be right. (I think of it as like the bow with a violin) With poor breathing (the way you take in air) and breath control (the way you use that air) you will be able to make a nice, small sound, but will never have the ability to really project a sound in a concert hall and will probably be rather limited in terms of dynamics and phrasing too. To work on sound, I work on the following exercises;

Breathing, Harmonics, Whistle tones, vibrato, colours etc.

Fingers:

The common scales and chords are most used for a reason - they are the most useful!! When it comes to this kind of practice, the WAY you work is far more important than what you actually play. Always practice the right version, even if it is much slower than you would like. This will always be more beneficial! Make sure that you don't always start in the same place with the same key and go through the keys in the same order - why not try writing down all the scales you have to practice, each on a separate piece of paper or card and pick them randomly out of a basket. Try and make it fun for yourself! Always work at these exercises with a metronome at the tempo at which you can play the most difficult scale! Keep your fingers even and close to the flute!

Articulation:

Basically once we have a good sound going and the finger technique is developing too, we can then start working on getting a good range of ways to start and stop notes. My personal experience is that it is always worthwhile beginning with a good, clear, well controlled, single staccato which you can play at a wide variety of speeds. Also try to have at your disposal a wide variety of ways to tongue a note - soft/gentle attack right through to hard/aggressive attack. Make sure that you can vibrate at the beginning of each note too! Until your single tonguing is good, don't worry about double or triple (if you have a slow single tonguing speed and you can already double tongue, then it can be very hard to push yourself into improving the speed of your single tonguing!!) When you do start to work on double and triple, work on one repetition fast with a long gap, then repeat (for example; TK rest rest TK rest rest. Building it to TKT rest rest TKT rest rest then on to TKTK rest rest etc.) That way you practice the action fast, because it is always done fast. I also work at the the K or G part alone.

For all these studies there are many excellent work books to help you; Trevor Wye's Practice Books, Moyse's De La Sonorite and others, Peter Lukas Graf's Check-up, and Philippe Bernold's Embouchurebook, to name but a few. I also particularly like Angelita Floyd's book about Geoffrey Gilbert which contains many interesting exercises and comments on what and how to practice. HOWEVER, at the end of the day, OWNING the books isn't enough it's up to the individual to work sensibly, consistently and above all else, to LISTEN carefully - to your teacher, to other flute players but MOST IMPORTANTLY for improving your own playing, to YOURSELF!!

I think it's very important to keep flute practice (technical mastery of the instrument) separate in your mind from working on the music. I realise that this is perhaps a little controversial, and I know many fine musicians who have never practiced a scale or study in their lives, but have learnt the technical skills through practising the music. It's worked for them, but it wouldn't work for me!!

As with music itself, there are many "right" ways (but also a lot of wrong ways!!) - my outlines for study tips here are MY PERSONAL views - perhaps you or your teacher (or both!) disagree, but what I hope is that perhaps it will make you think, and realise what YOU believe in!!

Good Luck and enjoy your music making!