

C A R M E N M O R I N

Music Mindset Podcast - Episode 1: Finding Clarity in Music Lessons

Episode 1 Transcript

Hi, everyone. Thank you so much for being here. I'm Carmen Morin, and this is the Music Mindset Podcast, episode number one. I'm so excited to have you.

I have wanted to start a podcast for quite some time. I have been teaching for about 20 years, teaching private piano. I taught at the university here in my hometown, and then opening my own private music school. I have learned over the years there are these key conversations, tools, mindset shifts that I have had with students, and I've really seen it give them that pivot or that perspective and set them up for long-term success. I have always wanted to have some kind of platform where I can share this with a wider group of people. Of course, if you are learning music; if you are a teacher yourself and you want to see how any of these conversations or tools can benefit you; or, of course, if you are a parent and you have a child in music lessons, this is here to support you along the way. I have a lot of things that I have seen firsthand show a lot of value, and I look forward to sharing them with you here.

This is episode one, and I plan to publish a new episode every week. I would love for you to subscribe so that you can stay in the loop with bonus content and new episodes as we publish them. We will definitely talk about music-specific things here, but I wanted to name this podcast Music Mindset because over the years and throughout my own training and journey, I've really learned that musical expression is just one of the greatest joys that you can have in your life, but I also know that musical training as a discipline has a very unique way of developing certain character traits, learning habits, and values that give people this unique set of tools that they can apply to unlock potential in all areas of their life. We will talk about specific music training and music teaching points here, but also the broader spectrum of how you can approach learning and how you can develop these tools within the model of musical training and then apply them elsewhere in your lives. That's where I think so much of these little treasures lie throughout the process, as well as, of course, the gift of musical expression.

Let's get started. The very first thing that I wanted to do on our first episode is what I like to do with students when they're brand new to lessons. I do this with my private students, and then we started doing them with all of our students at our school as well. And this is a clarity exercise. Anytime that I start a new goal or endeavor, just like this podcast, I always like to take the time to sit down and find clarity on why I'm doing this, why it's important, what my goal is, what my intention is. And, if we're honest, clarity is everything in our relationships, how we choose to spend our time or our money, but definitely when it comes to starting something like learning a musical instrument.

And the reason why I feel this is so important is anyone who has learned a musical instrument before will tell you that no matter what you thought you were kind of getting yourself into or the reason you got started, once you're in that process of learning, there is actually a really wide

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range of feelings and experiences that you are bound to have along the way. And those are all natural things along the process, but being able to have the clarity and awareness of what you might expect and why you might be going through different feelings and experiences is so important and will set you up for even more fulfillment when you attain your goals or when you're able to do what you set out to do or play the instrument the way you wanted to play it.

Learning to play a musical instrument will bring you so much joy. It has brought me more joy in my life than I can put into words. It is also very much like learning a second language, and we can talk in a later episode about the similarities between music learning and language learning, but it takes time and patience, and so much of it also requires this solitary and deliberate learning. And you can cultivate this set of learning tools and then be able to apply it to other areas of your life when you are able to be clear about what you're experiencing in the process.

When I'm working with my own students, I like to have them do this clarity exercise because I always want to think of myself as their guide. I want to guide them through their own personal growth and their own process of learning, as well as guiding them through understanding and interpreting and expressing themselves through the musical language. But if you are a student or if you're a teacher working with your students, so much of what the students will come up against or be challenged with are challenges within themselves. There's a lot of self-discovery, learning about yourself. You might have tons of fun one day, and then be totally bored a week later. You'll experience confidence after working through certain challenges, or be totally nervous and discouraged in other experiences. I love to do this clarity exercise with my students when they're getting started because I've seen firsthand how much it can really give them that awareness and perspective. And if you are a student, I am certain that by putting these things on paper, you'll be able to have this greater appreciation for the learning process as a whole that you get through learning a musical instrument as opposed to just maybe one or two outcomes that you originally had in mind.

This exercise is fantastic if you are just getting started on learning a musical instrument, but you can also check in and do this at any point along the way. I did this myself, as an adult for the first time, probably in about my mid-twenties. And I was in a workshop and I was encouraged to put these words on paper, similar to what we'll do today. And, for me, because I have come from a musical family, and really learning to play a musical instrument in my house was like learning how to walk or learning how to read. Just everybody did it. For me, to actually put down into words what I wanted out of the process for myself and what my intentions were for learning music, that was very impactful for me because even though I had been a musician my entire life at that point, since the age of two, I had never actually stopped and thought about it, to be honest. Wherever you are in your musical journey, this will have a lot of impact, I'm sure. This is great for teachers, if you want to communicate this exercise or a similar one to your students.

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Now, if you are a parent and your child is the one learning, I would encourage you not to do this with your child. This is still an exercise for you. I always like to remind my students, families, and we can talk about this again in a later episode, that really the choice for a child to study a musical instrument is such an educational commitment. And you will soon learn, if you haven't already in the process, that the process takes foresight and it does take a level of maturity. We will, of course, work to develop awareness in children as they grow and mature through their music lessons, but they don't have that ability to make those choices themselves as a child, which is why parents will make educational choices for their children, just like they make nutritional choices for their children. And really, your choice for your child to have a musical education will be your own.

Even though it will be great to communicate this with your child afterwards, or you could do this exercise with your child later on, I would encourage you to first do this exercise on your own as a parent. Put onto paper why you want this for your child. And this will really be a guiding star for you because it does take a lot of support, guidance, commitment from parents for their children to be successful and reap the many benefits that we know that come from musical training.

This exercise is very simple, but it does have a few steps to it. So, I'm going to walk you through it on this podcast, but I don't want you to feel like you have to write all of the steps and points down. I have attached the same worksheet that I like to use with my students in the show notes of this episode so that you can use that version, or if you're a teacher, you can create a version of your own. The detailed show notes and the worksheet are all available on my website at carmenmorin.com/1, just the number one because this is our first episode.

Let's get started. At our school, at Morin Music, we really meet all sorts of people and families who come to start their lessons with us. And we have really messaged that we offer high quality, formal classical music education. You don't have to be learning always classical genres of music, but we want that formal training for our students so that they will have the tools that they need to learn any style of music. We have that as our studio-wide philosophy, but we have lots of different families with lots of different musical goals, and they are all able to fit in within that.

We will have people that will come and start their music lessons specifically because they want it for brain health and cognitive development because of all of the research and studies around that. Others will say that they just want to be able to play an instrument and have fun, one day play in an instrument or an ensemble. And that's great. We have others that will come and they will directly say, "We are here because we want classical training to be on our university applications and our educational records."

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What I've learned over the years and after a couple of decades of teaching is that whatever your end goal is, as a student, if you're a student; or teachers, if you're hearing students come to you, whatever their end goal is, I mean, assuming it's a healthy one, just kind of on the list of goals for musical education and benefits of musical education, whatever your end goal is you can rest assured that it's the right one.

I remember being a younger teacher and I would try to kind of adjust their end goals when I first saw them come for their interview or their first meeting. And what I've learned over the years is whatever their end goal is, even if it may not be exactly what yours is, you can consider it the right goal because learning to play a musical instrument is not, in any way, a straight line; it is very much a web of skills and processes and ideas and experiences that are very much intertwined and very interrelated with each other. But there are so many benefits to learning a musical instrument, there's no way to reach one of those benefits without having to work and develop the others.

For example, one of the most common end goals that we hear from our families who come to us at our school is "We just want our child," or "We just want ourselves... We just want to make it enjoyable. We just want to have fun. That's our end goal, and so that's going to be kind of our primary focus." And, to be clear, that's fantastic. To have joyfulness and happiness and enjoyment as something that we can anchor in for our children or for ourselves, I think that's great. Let's definitely do that. But anchoring in that intention, we have to also be aware that in order to get to that fun, there are lots of other things that are maybe not as much fun that you have to experience in the process to get to that point.

Learning a musical instrument is so well-known for teaching and experiencing delayed gratification, which is because even though it will bring you so much joy when you get to the point of having that skill built, to get there, you have to do a fair bit of repetition. You will have to deal with feelings of frustrations. You will have to actively develop your patience and your problem-solving skills. Your one goal may be to have fun and enjoy the musical language and musical expression, but being able to see that you'll have to be supported by things that may not seem like that at the time, they may not seem like fun, but they are paths along the way.

Another example of an end goal that we hear very often is "We want to develop artistry and artistic expression." Again, beautiful goal. It's their one goal. That's their main goal, is they want to be able to interpret the world through imagination, find deeper meaning in the world around us with art. Absolutely. Those are all very fantastic things to strive for. Let's anchor in that. But it's important to connect the dots and build awareness that, in order to get there, you will have to involve a fair bit of dryer work that will hone skills so that you have the tools to express what's inside of you.

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So, that saying, "craft proceeds artistry." Even though your end goal is to be artistic and to have a means for artistic expression, a lot of what you'll have to do before getting there will involve practice drills, refining your technical ability and your physical coordination so that your body is able to convey what you're learning to express. Again, when you have this end goal, it's wonderful to anchor in that, but you have to acknowledge, and I find it is so impactful when I teach my students and families this vocabulary to acknowledge, you have to build that awareness that that end goal you're working towards will likely need other supporting experiences in order for you to get there.

In order to learn how to connect these dots and develop awareness around the learning process, I created a clarity worksheet that I like to use for this. And, again, this is available to print on my website, carmenmorin.com/1, just the number one. I can tell you that in exercises like these, and in all things, I have learned and I fully believe in the importance of writing things down. Put pen to paper. There's, of course, so much evidence for how much more likely you are to be successful at things when you write them down, so that's why I believe in using the worksheet. But not only is it powerful for you to have that action of putting things into words, it will also be so good for you to just have this on paper where you can see it. Save it, take a picture of it, save it on your phone. Trust me when I say that if you're planning to learn yourself or if you are a parent supporting your child learning, it will be something that you'll want to revisit because when you are experiencing challenges along the way or what may seem like stagnation, all those things, you will be very thankful that you have this written down to kind of connect the dots and build that awareness.

Over the years, I have begun calling this clarity exercise, Mapping Your Iceberg. We've all heard the saying "just the tip of the iceberg," and that's kind of where this came from, meaning that the small point that we see on the surface has a big mountain underneath. We're all very familiar with that concept. But I started talking about icebergs with my students years ago when students or their families would say, "Oh, well, you probably never had..." They would say things like, "Oh, well, you've probably never had any problem wanting to practice because I see how much you love piano. You love music. Our son or our daughter doesn't really seem to love it like that." That would be something that would come out, "They don't have that passion."

To which I would say, "So, yes. The tip of the iceberg that you see are the feelings of love and passion that I have for it. And I've worked really my entire life to get there. Absolutely those feelings are there. But what you may not see beneath the surface would be cumulative years, I'm sure, of frustrations and failures and, to be clear, boredom, and feeling disinterested. These are things that I would have had to push through and work through along the way. On that peak, you see the majority of my time, I can express love and passion and excitement for making music, but, to be clear, even most days now, it's not that I necessarily feel like practicing; I have just built up such an awareness of what it means to be disciplined, is that I'm kind of able to

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detach from that feeling of whether or not I need to feel motivated." Again, that's something else that's on the list for us to talk about in this podcast, is we have lots of things to talk about with motivation.

For my clarity exercise, what I started doing with my students is I reverse engineer this idea. I like to have this conversation with my students at the beginning of the process because, of course, awareness is everything, but then it sets the tone so that I can come back and revisit with them these same words and things that we discussed later on. On the sheet, what you'll see on the top of the page are many of the benefits of why people want to learn a musical instrument. You have everything from brain health, cognitive development, patience, perseverance, goal-setting, developing imagination, being able to perform, all of these different things that you'll see on the sheet.

What I'd love for you to do, and what I ask my students to do, is go through and just check off whichever ones apply to you. It can be however many or however few that stand out to you. There are also, of course, some blank lines so that if there are bound to be things that are just unique to you and aren't on that list, please do fill them in. And those will be part of your exercise.

Of course, on the bottom then, you will see your icebergs. This is how we will map our icebergs. What you'll do is you will write what you believe your end goal is at the peak of that iceberg. In our case, on our example, we wrote delayed gratification. We do get lots of families and students who will come and say, "We want to be able to practice learning that discipline of delayed gratification."

If that is the peak of your iceberg, that is your end goal of what you're working towards. Then what are two supporting things, feelings, experiences that you have to have and work through in order to reach that, that benefit? In ours, we said, "If you are wanting to learn about delayed gratification, you have to experience patience. You have to build patience. And part of delayed gratification is that you have to experience discomfort. It has to be a little bit less than enjoyable for a little while, otherwise, it would be instantly gratifying." You have to kind of go through that experience of like, "I wish this would just hurry up," and, "This is taking too long," and, "This is not as fun as I thought it was going to be." Pushing through that actually is a big part of the process.

Being able to step back and connect these dots is everything. And these things will often come up in conversation. For example, for me to say this to you now, it lines up with what you think and the knowledge part of you that understands that, but to be able to connect these dots, and for your students or for you as a student to be able to look at this when you are experiencing it, when you're actually feeling these feelings, will be something else entirely. And that's when I've

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really seen this worksheet become just, like I said, like a guiding star for my own students or the parents of my young students.

You can write anything in the points of your icebergs as you'd like. I have found over the years that this exercise is most powerful when you try to have as many of the points interconnected in the different icebergs. For example, if your first triangle, try to use one of the points from there in the next triangle, and see if you can connect it. But that can be kind of on a round two if you'd like to refine it later on. But for now, you can kind of dump down the things that are important to you, and then work to think about what you'll have to experience in order to get there. And it's just huge for building awareness.

To be clear, it's not just about listing the benefits of learning music. You can go online and you can find mountains of data about why learning music is so beneficial for us. But this is about you connecting the dots of what you might find yourself experiencing, and when things might feel a little bit different than what you were expecting, being able to have that awareness and push through is not only where you'll find success in your music lessons, but this is the starting point for really cultivating tools of learning because you will be able to take this same awareness and apply it to other challenges that you have in life. I think that that's always where kind of the gold is in this learning process.

I really hope this is helpful to you. I have seen this serve my students and families well for years and years. It is a simple exercise, but taking the time to sit down and do it really has just long-term benefits and really can set you up on a trajectory of success. The worksheet and transcripts for this episode are all available on my website, carmenmorin.com/1.

If you are interested in connecting on social media, I am on Facebook and Instagram as well. And thank you so much again for joining me. I would love for you to hit subscribe so that you can be in the loop for our episode again next week.

Next week, I will be talking about a very sneaky sentence or phrase that we hear most often when students and families are getting started in music lessons. If you are a student yourself, this phrase has likely crossed your mind. And if you're a teacher, I'm sure you've heard it said by students, new students and old students. I want to talk about how important it is to catch it when you hear this, and how much it can impact your mindset and your perspective going forward. Can't wait to see you then. Thanks so much for listening, and we'll see you again next week.