Music Mindset Podcast - Episode 4: Measuring Methods of Musical Training
Episode 4 Transcript

Hello, everyone. Welcome to the Music Mindset podcast. I'm your host, Carmen Morin, and this is episode number four.

So today we're talking about how you can measure the quality of your musical training or education. And now this can be a tricky or even sensitive topic because the feeling of measuring or trying to quantify music or art does not sit well with most people, myself included. So to be clear, I'm not here to discuss how you can measure music or any art form for that matter. There is so much subjectivity when it comes to art and music, that I agree there is no one way to quantify or measure or compare one genre or composer or style to another.

So, there are also many different areas of music. There's education, history, composition, performance. So there is so much subjectivity when it comes to music and the arts. So the purpose of today's episode, and for the sake of this podcast is I want to talk to you about how you can measure the quality of certain musical training as it relates to building a skill to be able to play an instrument. So learning that musical language and what you can look for in your own music education and training, or if you are a parent, if you are trying to choose or keep track of your child learning as well.

I want to share this so that you can be educated and clear when it comes to perhaps making a choice, and also just kind of having a clear idea of where you're at, if you have already begun. So, I mean, all will agree on the benefits of music education. If you do a quick Google search of the benefits of learning a musical instrument, you will have hundreds, probably thousands of research-based articles and evidence and information about the benefits of musical education. So because of that, there can also be a lot of noise out there on what to look for in music, education or musical training, and if you don't have experience yourself, it can be quite confusing on what's the best way to get started.

My good friend, Jen [Chakuda 00:02:14] shared on her Instagram, just the other day, a wonderful quote that I wrote down. So "Methods are many, principles are few. Methods always change, but principles never do." So there will be a lot of noise out there on what's the best method and way to learn, and what I'm hoping to give you today are some core principles and some clear parameters that can help you to really cut through the noise, and really know if you are pursuing the musical training that is the best fit for you, and the best return of your investment of time and resources and all those things that have to be involved when you are learning something such as this.

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So my background is one of quite formal classical training. So students work with a highly trained teacher in a pretty formal and direct setting. And this is conventionally that sort of tried and true musical instrument format, where generally this is where you go, if you want the highest quality results, and it's just kind of this long standing tradition in Western music.

But I recognized that this format of lessons in reality is just not accessible to all people. So people will learn through apps. Some will be self-taught. Some will learn in groups for a variety of different reasons. And a lot of these options have come about to try to make music education and training accessible, and so that the benefits of musical training can be available as an option for everyone.

So whatever option you have been trying, or that works best for you, the goal is to give you these parameters that you can look for as a way to measure if you are on the right track for what you hope to get out of your musical training.

So, as you know, I am a big believer that the early stages of lessons and training are arguably the most important. This is when you lay the foundation for whatever you will or will not be able to do down the road, and I'm not saying that if you have begun in a way where you might be developing less than ideal habits, I'm not saying that you won't be able to turn things around, but if you are going to invest in any time or point in your musical training, I would say that the foundation at the very beginning is one of the arguably most important.

So when you're making these decisions, it's different, then I suppose if you were learning a sport. Personally, if I were learning a sport that I didn't know anything about, I would appreciate guidance on what to look for in a training or program. But if you were learning a sport, let's say basketball, for example, you might have a really clear way to measure if you're improving, and that would be counting how many baskets you are able to make. You can see that improvement that out of every 10 shots you can make, you know, four baskets, then six, then eight, and then finally 10, and you can really see that measurement of how you're improving.

Now, I recognize that it's a little bit different when you're learning a musical instrument, because in this case, the number of pieces you learn is not indicative to the level of training. Also, the number of years you're in lessons is not going to tell you the quality of the training. So it can be very hard to evaluate, and I definitely appreciate that. People will come to our school and we have pretty formal classes and lessons in our programs, and they will come after learning in another method or a group program or a learning app, and they will have been learning that way for many years. And it can be a little off putting to meet a formal instructor who says that they have to go back and redo things or the quality hasn't been what they would expect for a certain

amount of time. We have to give this honest feedback and hopefully work with a student to go back and fill in some holes, or just make some adjustments.

So what I want to give you are some parameters and guidelines that can help you to have an idea of what you might look for, and also just help you to gauge if you are in the right spot. So when I thought about this as a topic, there were actually many different ways that I thought I could approach and share this information. But when I really thought about what would be the most simplified way, and how people can really just have an actionable tool that they can walk away from after listening to this episode, I decided that the number one thing that you have to look for to determine the quality of training that you can receive in any method is to focus on the output that it creates.

I know that that might be simple, but when I was doing research for this and I was looking at how we tend to make these decisions, most of what we look at is actually input based. We focus on what the program will input to us, what we will receive, and actually less thought goes into the output because the output we're waiting to come later on, and we see all this coming in that we're receiving from a program or a method, and there's actually less focus on the output. So I would like to pose that you should actually measure any method or the training by looking at the output.

So people will focus on the input and what they receive in their lessons. They might think about what they're going to receive from their teacher, so how often they'll have their lessons. In something like an app, they might look at the newest technology that helps them to track and read the notes and music. They might focus on the input of the number of pieces that they're given. If they are in a group program, they might focus on the types of games that you'll get and the resources that you'll have access to. Or, in certain programs, you might focus on the number of concerts that you'll have access to and all of this input that you'll get from that method and from that program, things that add convenience. So all of these things absolutely add value. I'm not saying that they don't, they certainly do. But if you want to measure the training that you can receive from those methods, instead of focusing on the input, you have to focus on the quality of the output.

So let's frame this outside of music lessons and let's compare if I had a broken computer. And if I wanted to really find out how I should go about fixing that computer and who should fix that computer, I would base how effective they are entirely on the output that they can create. Can they get the computer to be functioning again? I wouldn't focus on how much I enjoyed being at the computer repair shop. I wouldn't focus on the additional resources that I might have, all this extra value that would be input, input input. I would want to focus all of my attention to the

output of who can fix and what method will fix the computer. Because this not only means that the computer repair person has the knowledge and experience, they understand how the components work together, but they also know how to implement it and give a sequence of how it all comes together, what has to come first before you get to that end result and to get everything working like a well oiled machine.

So, similarly, if you are trying to choose a method of learning music or a school or a program, there is bound to be differences in levels of ability between the students' levels of commitment. But in general, you can still get an idea for what's possible with that training by focusing on the output. Now don't worry though, I'm not going to leave it at that because if you don't have a musical background yourself, or even if you do, it might not be clear what you're looking for in that output, and that is of course what we're talking about today.

So first one that we'll start with, not in order of importance, we'll begin with technical proficiency and control. So has the student developed technical proficiency? Can they play fluently and connect to their instrument? Are they utilizing their body when they play? When I see technical ability, I also recognize that they have learned how to practice. They have learned how to delay gratification. They have learned how to break down challenges. They've learned how to manage their time so that they can get everything ready. So when you're focusing on output and you see these things in a student, you know that not only have they become technically skilled, but they had to learn all of these things and all of these aspects were incorporated into their musical training.

Next for what you might look at in output at the musical instrument is expressiveness, artistry and emotion, and this will also come to you through literacy, being able to read and interpret and understand the music. So we all have expressiveness and emotion in us, but when a performer can convey this in their performance, it tells you many things about their training. Like I said, we all have things that we have within us that we can and should express. But when you have gone through training where you're developing tools of how to let that expressivity come out through your playing, and also when you're able to look at a piece of music or art, and learn how to frame it in a way where you can share or convey emotion, that is something that is developed through your training.

Music is often considered a language in itself, and as part of that literacy, I use the same basis of language learning when we apply and talk about literacy and music. So if you think about how a child will learn their language, first they develop the ability to imitate. They learn how to imitate what their Moms and Dads are saying and just repeat after them. So that's a skill in itself and the child may not know what word they are saying when they first learned to say it, but then the

next step would be that they learn how to recognize the word and understand the meaning of it. And next, that leads to them being able to apply that word to different contexts, and eventually giving them the tools that they need to be able to use that word to express themselves in authentic and personal and unique ways.

So developing that same literacy through musical training will not just show you that a student has musical expression within them, because all human beings do. But what that tells you about their training is that they have been guided on how to develop that and how to share it and use it as a tool, and understand the meaning in what they are creating and what they're sharing as well. So when you are listening and watching for the output in a student, and you see that they're expressive, it's wonderful to see that human nature coming out through their music, but it also will tell you a lot about their musical training.

Now that leads me to my next point, which is that ability to be able to perform and share your music, and that is a very big part of music education. It's being able to communicate authentically and convey meaning through music. And I am a big believer, music is meant to be shared. Communicating through music is an integral part of studying and learning an instrument and a part of musical education. It's like learning a language, but then not having the ability to communicate and speak it with others. Of course, they are going to be introspective experiences that are very important to art and music, just like there isn't language, but the ability to convey and show and communicate an idea through music is a tool that is developed and trained in your musical training and in your lessons.

When you see a student performing and you're looking at the output of a student, and you see that they're really trying to express something through their music, not only have they learned that this is something available to them, but they've also developed the tools to do so. And that's a really beautiful thing to measure and look for when you're looking at the output that a certain method of training or program will create.

Lastly, if you are looking at the output of a student to determine the quality of the training and education that they've received, I always like to look at the enjoyment that they receive through music. Now I have to be clear. I do not mean the enjoyment of practicing and the enjoyment of the lesson, because I will be the first one to tell you, and we've talked about it lots already just in these first four episodes, that the delayed gratification and the working through challenges to really feel great joy when it comes to playing a musical instrument is one of the most important and fruitful parts of the whole process. So what I mean by enjoyment is the way that the student has the potential to enjoy the creative process and enjoy making music.

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And when you see all of these other areas are in place, so they've developed their technical ability, they've tapped into their emotion and their expressivity through playing, they understand the musical notation and they are literate, and they are able to communicate their authentic selves through their own music, that is when you will see a deep level of joy because the student is confident and knowledgeable, and they are able to infuse their own personality and ideas into what they perform because they have developed all of the tools to do so. And when they can confidently do that, you will see that they will have that enriching experience of musical enjoyment and expression.

So I hope that these four or five guidelines can really help you when it comes to understanding parameters or guidelines that you might look for, if you are receiving or pursuing a quality musical education and seeing how that can line up based on what your learning goals are as well. When I think of the word education, I never think of it as reaching some level of certainty. Of course, there's a lot of knowledge involved, but when I really think about education, I believe in developing the tools and the ability for your mind to be able to pursue constant inquiry.

When you look at music as a language, you are able to see how much depth there is that by developing certain tools of communication and vocabulary, and the things that you need to be able to communicate through these means, then it opens up this door for the many layers of ways that you can explore the musical language. Musical education is very comprehensive, and you have to develop the physical skills and control so that you have the full range of tools needed to then communicate your thoughts, your personality, and your interpretations when you perform.

Musical training teaches you to think differently, but also to enjoy listening differently, and it gives you a knowledge of self and your own culture, and really opens the door for your own creativity to flow. So, however you are pursuing musical training and education, this is meant to give you an idea if you are on track to opening all those doors for yourself. So as always, I hope this helps. Please feel free to reach out with any questions at all that come to mind.

Next week, I want to talk about one of my favorite topics and probably something that I get asked about most, which is motivation. And I want to talk to you about the truth about motivation, what it is, how do we get it, and why do some people seem to have it more than others? So until next time, feel free to reach out and find my show notes on my site, carmenmorin.com/episode4, and reach out with any questions at all. Otherwise, we'll talk to you again soon. Goodbye!