

C A R M E N M O R I N

Music Mindset Podcast - Episode 6: Five Signs your Need to 'Keep It Fun' may be taking the JOY out of your music lessons

Episode 6 Transcript

Hello. Welcome. It's so great to be back. I'm Carmen Morin and this is the Music Mindset podcast, episode six. I am back after the summer break and we are into a new school year in this unbelievable year that is 2020 and I'm so happy to be back to it. This summer, I wrapped up my first online group training for the Piano Foundation Formula. This training is something that I've worked through and done in workshops at my own school here in Canada but this was the first time sharing the program online and it was such an amazing experience for me to teach and observe students move through the program from all over the world and with this new platform. I had the most incredible group of students of all different levels and from many different countries. We had everything from beginner students all the way to pianists playing at the advanced university level.

Learning how even though the music that we learn will become more complex as we advance, the foundational technique and the skills are actually the same for all levels and that's why it's so important that you learn it properly at the beginning in the early stages and then you continue to thoroughly master these and learn how to combine the different elements as you advance. It's all about learning this vocabulary of sounds that you can produce on your instrument and it is very detail-oriented and because it has to be. You have to be able to refine your movements and your own listening if you are learning a musical instrument. This type of training is very detail-oriented which means it will be challenging, it is meant to be challenging. That's part of what makes it so enjoyable.

Now, it's all within reach but it can be a little bit of a switch to start to think this way and really train your focus and your attention. But when you do, what you experience is such a greater reward than if you worked on everything at surface level. Something that I love to see is just how rewarding things are. Seeing students who came from backgrounds where they might've been just focused on pressing the right notes and not really training skill and really how rewarding it is to start exploring what you're really capable of.

Now we've also started a new school year at the studio and at the same time, we are welcoming many new families, starting music lessons for the first time or transferring to us for the first time for their lessons and something that I always like to ask them, new students and families, is this simple question of why do you want to learn music? Why do you want to learn this musical instrument? Because there is just such a whole myriad of reasons why that might be. The answers are just as an individual as the families and the students themselves. Some have very specific pieces they want to be able to learn and perform, some haven't really thought of it, some specifically want to have a certain level on their university applications. There are so many answers to this question because on top of its inherent standalone value, music education

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really does boast just the longest list of benefits. Everything from strengthening your study habits, brain health and development, social skills, creativity and imagination, not to mention most importantly its inherent human trait, okay?

There are many different responses but one that comes up quite commonly is the answer of our goal is that we just want to have fun, we just want to keep it fun nothing serious, we just want to make sure it's fun. I hear this a lot from parents and from students themselves as they get started especially if they have not experienced learning an instrument before. To be clear, I think that this is a wonderful goal and it comes from a beautiful place of intention. Of course we want joy and fun for our students and for our children and for ourselves, that is all very important. Now, it also raises an important talking point which is that if we want to fully reap the rewards of learning a musical instrument which includes maximum amounts of joy, what are some of the things that you might be setting yourself up for if your top priority, learning your instrument, is to make sure to keep it fun. Let me explain.

After a lifetime studying music and decades of teaching, I have seen firsthand and know that there is such great deep human joy that comes from learning and making and sharing music. It's very much a part of who we are as social creatures and I have had more fun experiences than I can count. That's everything from performing formerly on stage to going to listen to concerts, playing in groups or even at family parties. I am forever grateful that it's something that my parents made sure I learned and I have so much love in my heart and have experienced great joy and connection through experiences involving music. Now that I've made that clear, let's talk a little bit about what the day-to-day experience of learning a musical instrument is like because if you asked me when I was practicing earlier today or even at a certain point as a younger student in my past development, you will hear a very different response depending on the day and what I was experiencing. Of course, there are days when lessons and practices are lots of fun.

These would probably be when I can finally play a piece that I'm working towards and have been learning or after a successful performance. But also, many of these days would have had a lot of boredom, frustration, days of wanting to give up so that I wouldn't have to practice, not feeling inspired or passionate about the music. None of these experiences or feelings would be something you would describe as having fun but all of these feelings and experiences are very natural, integral, important parts of the learning and skill building process. Learning an instrument will of course sometimes be fun but it's important to know that the type of work and patience needed to build this intricate and multifaceted skill may often not be, depending on the

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season that you're in. It may be slow and arduous process that takes time and patience to reach proficiency.

It calls on the student to perform countless repetitions in many different ways to reinforce, find physical skills while also challenging your mental focus. Students learn to stretch outside of their comfort zone, trying new things in front of others no less and then they learned to test their skills. These experiences will be what bring great joy. But again, I don't know if I would describe any of them as fun to experience them. It's not quite the right word. Now, the thing that I'm getting at is, that's okay. To be clear, I'm not saying that you shouldn't expect to have fun in music lessons or learning an instrument. What I'm talking about today is that the deepest feelings of joy that are available for you to experience are actually on the other side of those less fun parts of the process.

When you begin lessons or at any point in your lessons, it's just important to remind yourself that yes, there will be fun, but those periods of challenge, boredom or frustration like so many areas of life, the big outcomes will come because of these small mundane things that you have to do consistently leading up to them. We talked about this in my very first episode of Music Mindset podcast and the clarity worksheet that we had in episode one has been downloaded many times, connecting the dots between our goals and what we might be experiencing at any given moment. There are many different ways that you can adjust your learning and it should always be engaging. But today, what I want to share with you is 5 signs that your need to keep things fun might actually be taking the long-term joy out of your process, out of your learning process. And private lessons and music lessons can allow for many different adaptations to lesson plans to make a student feel encouraged. But in today's world of instant gratification, you see it lots in the music education field just like every other field.

More and more programs and apps are all built and wired to try to help people skip these steps, skip those challenging steps or areas of frustration so that we can keep it fun, keep it playful. But actually if you look closely, these have the opposite results because it's by working through these challenging or mundane parts and learning to really appreciate those parts of the process, that you actually will be able to experience the great joy now and for years to come. I've listed the top 5 signs that will usually tell you that if your need to keep things pleasant and fun might be stealing that long-term joy from your learning process. And because it's such a common question and challenge that students and families have, I've created and attached a free worksheet that you can download in the show notes of this episode. This simple worksheet is something that you can use and would be helpful for you to look at if you are exploring where you are right now in your own musical journey.

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But if you are ever feeling bored in lessons or practice, you can keep it handy if you are about to make any big decision about what direction you're going to take your music lessons. Having it as a reference in case there might be something in your mindset that you need to take a closer look at. The worksheet is available for download at my website at [carmenmorin.com/episode 6](http://carmenmorin.com/episode6). The word episode and the number 6. Sign number one that your need to have fun might be robbing you of some of your joy of the process. Sign number one is you view your music lessons as entertainment instead of education. Music certainly is a form of entertainment but the process of learning it can feel quite different. It requires intricate skills to be built, knowledge to be cultivated, a great deal of immersion and repetition. Consider the fact that learning to play a musical instrument is most similar to learning a language.

If your child were learning a second language, would you expect every aspect of their schoolwork to be fun and entertaining? Or in that same vein, if they were struggling one day, would you think that there was something wrong with the process or would you believe that that was par for the course? Although it is so similar of a process since music is so often associated with entertainment, parties and concerts and special occasions, there can be a sense of alarm if there are tasks or material that aren't so fun and entertaining but there are lots of these. There will surely be activities and exercises that we will like more than others but when challenged, we know it is par for the course and offer support and tools to navigate through. We don't think that there's anything wrong. When we think of the process as educational as opposed to something that is supposed to be entertaining, it allows us to see the big picture to know that we will be able to work through it.

Sign number 2, you switch from pieces if they get challenging. Feeling frustration is a very natural and healthy part of any learning process. In fact, most recent studies have taught us that it is a necessary part of deep learning. It almost always happens just as we are about to push through to a new level of learning and accomplishment and so if we can start to consider this as a good sign, if you find yourself dodging pieces as they start to feel challenging or when you feel frustrated and opting to move to something more fun and easy to play, you may actually be missing a great opportunity to dig deep. Beautiful things will happen outside of your comfort zone. Sign number 3, you expect to eventually feel like practicing or you need prizes and gifts in order to practice.

Motivation is a wonderful feeling when it comes to you but it is just that, it's a feeling. Feelings and emotions come and go so it can be risky to rely on these things to help us reach our goals. It is normal to not want to feel like practicing. Be aware that you may not always feel like you

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want it and that's okay, that's perfectly normal. It is important for young students to learn to rely on building strong habits of support from their families, instead of allowing their emotions to dictate whether or not they will reach their goals. Practice identifying challenges and begin to celebrate every small accomplishment to help stir that intrinsic motivation. This challenge may feel uncomfortable while working through it, but the feeling of working hard towards your goals that you're striving for will be far more gratifying than any external gift or prize as could be. Number four, another sign is if a young child is given the responsibility to determine the direction of lessons.

Obviously as parents and teachers, it is so important to observe and be attentive to the needs and feedback of our young students. But remember that what a young child expresses is often their wants over their needs. Repeatedly asking a child if they want to continue in formal music lessons is similar to if you asked the child repeatedly if they would like to go to school. "Do you want to learn math? Do you want to learn how to read or write?" By asking them for their validation as opposed to providing it to them and asking young children if they are enjoying themselves at all times in the process, may lead them terribly confused when they are inevitably going to have periods when they are feeling challenged and they need that support and solidarity instead. Sign number five, comparing the experience of an hour of sports practice to the feeling of an hour of instrument practice. Children participate in many tedious tasks as part of a sports team whether they enjoy them or not.

But this will feel quite different from the repetition of instrument practice because they have the physical movement and that group momentum. Music practice involves much mental activity but it is often a solitary activity. It's very difficult to compare. Each set of activities that develop our children and students offer unique benefits, challenges, and rewards. Those are the top five signs that I find that you can look for. Before we go, how can we shift the mindset? If you noticed any of these or you notice one of these in your future practicing or in your students or in your own child. To be clear, I'm not here saying that lessons are meant to be this slow, painful torture and just eat your vegetables because it's good for you. But you would probably agree with me that the goal is to learn in a way that will lead to long-term success and enjoyment. If your top priority is always to make lessons fun, you are missing out on so many deeper layers of what can bring longevity and long-term joy through your perseverance.

If you're feeling like you're in a rut with any of your home practice or enjoyment, here are some tips that can help. Number one, schedule your practice sessions. Now, I know this might seem counterintuitive for this to be number one of how to make your practicing and your lessons enjoyable but I promise this is no mistake. Often we meet families who want to keep lessons fun

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so they think it will be best not to push practice to see if it will happen on its own. But this actually has the opposite effect. The majority of the time, students who are sinking with feelings of motivation or lacking enjoyment are not practicing regularly. Learning an instrument is all about delayed gratification which means that it will become more enjoyable the more that you build your skills and gain confidence. No one feels good. Being unprepared and lack of consistent practice can create this inaccurate inner belief that they aren't capable. Added support and structure may be needed at home to make sure that consistent practice happens each day. Do shorter sessions if necessary, but do them each day consistently.

And you may be surprised how quickly enjoyment increases when practicing happens every day. Action step number two that you can try is game-ify your lessons and practice. How can they be fun? To be clear, we don't want to avoid feelings of being challenged or frustrated. Instead, see this challenge as an opportunity to cultivate a growth mindset that will serve you in all areas of life. Make the challenge fun and game-ify your practice sessions as soon as there's something that you're stuck on. To game-ify something, to turn it into a game, you need to play a scale passage fluently, no problem. Doesn't mean that your drills and repetitions have to be no fun. You can. game-ify the repetition using anything such as a jar of marbles each time you play a passage with the finger posture you want, you put a marble into a jar and then 10 times helps you to win the practice.

It's not so much about winning any prize, it's about setting that challenge and seeing if you can beat it. Action step number three, work with an engaging teacher that does suit your personality. There is a lot of work to do in lessons so it sure does help to have a warm and engaging personality to work with. Being in an environment of constant support will be key to setting students up for success and they have to feel safe to work through their inner and outer challenges. Building new skills is a challenging thing to do and you can often feel vulnerable when you are working through things that are new to you. Your teacher should be positive and engaging while also keeping you accountable to get the work done that they know you need to do in order to really bring joy through your playing. Action step number four that you can try is really take the time to identify what may not be fun.

It is pretty rare to find a student who has just played a piece beautifully and successfully and will say that they don't enjoy it. When a child or a student of any age isn't having fun, try not to hear it as a blanket statement but rather as communication of how they're feeling in that moment and try to help identify and that way you can offer support around what they might be struggling with. Are they feeling overwhelmed with a new challenge or piece they're working on? Do they have a home practice schedule in place so that they feel supported to get this work done and they can

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feel prepared and confident at their lesson? Do they have support in executing their practice schedule? Is there a performance looming that they might be nervous or in flight mode for? Have they been stuck on the same section of a piece and so they can't move forward?

Humans are musical beings so I believe that all people enjoy music when given the right environment to do so. Delayed gratification is associated with success all throughout life. Cultivating this growth mindset that welcomes challenges, working towards goals is one of the greatest benefits that our children and our students can learn through their lessons. And by digging deep through this process instead of aiming to play in the fun icing on the top, always keeping it fun, our young students and our students of all ages have an opportunity for immense growth while also learning a great deal about themselves. Lastly and action step number five is really make sure to start attaching accomplishment to the learning process itself. Never any one set outcome always attaching it to many steps throughout the journey.

There is a great deal of knowledge of how important it is for all of us to guide ourselves and our children to enjoy exploring the learning process. For example, instead of talking about a beautiful picture that your student drew, instead, you can ask the child, how did it feel when drawing it? What was their thought process when they created it? How did they choose all of the colors in there? Instead of celebrating the final product, we want to start to celebrate the process behind it, all of the little steps that would have resulted in that final outcome. This doesn't mean that we have to celebrate regardless of any outcome because there is lots to be said for enjoying the challenge and healthy striving but that's kind of the whole point. If we emphasize and highlight all of the beautiful things that happen throughout the learning process, this includes frustration or boredom, or being able to work consistently at things even if you weren't feeling inspired, you are setting yourself up for success in a truly enriching learning process of growth and confidence that you can apply to all areas of your learning.

There you have it, true joy and fun I believe comes when all of us as students of all ages and levels are able to attach to the learning process instead of any set outcome. This is how we can feel genuine reward for our work and have a gratifying experience and really feel genuine joy from the process. Thank you so much for listening. I'm so happy to be back again for a new school year, the worksheet for this episode and all of my show notes can be found on my website [carmenmorin.com/episode six](http://carmenmorin.com/episode6), the word episode six, and I can't wait to see you back here next week. Talk to you soon, bye.