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Western Kentucky University

From the Selected Works of John M Cipolla

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Practicing Tips

John M Cipolla, *Western Kentucky University*



Available at: https://works.bepress.com/john_cipolla/65/

Practicing

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Below are a number of approaches to practicing technical passages that utilize varied rhythms, meters, and poly rhythms.

Introduction

1) Inspire yourself! There will be days when you won't feel like practicing. This is why it is important to always be listening to excellent musicians to learn from and model after so that one looks forward to practicing. It is through this continual listening that one actually develops the desire to "want" to continue to learn and grow as a musician. Always listen to live players and high-quality recordings to inspire yourself to practice and improve.

2) Organize your practicing. Put practicing in your daily schedule planner. Practice in the morning when you are most awake, and if possible, practice at the same time and in the same space each day. Items to have available when practicing are an instrument in good mechanical repair, a music stand, a pencil, a metronome, an electronic tuner, and a chair. Other helpful items—a good quality digital recorder to listen to listen and critique yourself immediately while you are practicing and *The Tuning CD* (<http://www.wix.com/raschwartz/the-tuning-cd#!>). *If at all possible, these last two items will help make the practice process very efficient, immediately revealing areas in need of improvement in an aural way so the player learns to react to them immediately, training your instincts.*

Start your practice session with breathing exercises, then move to tone development exercises, slurred scales, then scales with various articulations, etudes, solo repertoire/chamber/ensemble repertoire, and finish the practice session with some improvisation. Your teacher can guide you through specifics of each of these areas.

3) Ways to practice technical passages


- Fundamental Practice Techniques
 - Rhythm variation
 - 5 and 1 method by Peter Hadcock, former Eb clarinet, Boston Symphony
 - Add a note, backwards, one note at a time
 - Moving the beam to create a new downbeat
- Advanced Practice Techniques
 - Changing the number of notes under a beam
 - Moving the beam under each new number of notes under a beam
 - Polyrhythms
 - 2:3, 3:2, 3:4, 4:3
 - First tapping these rhythms with the hands
 - Playing passages/scales with steady pulse of the metronome

Fundamental Practice Techniques


Rhythm Variation

Play the phrase with rhythmic variations. Some of the more common ones are suggested below. Always start at a slow tempo so as to play all the notes correctly and reinforce the correct execution of the passage, then gradually increase the tempo.

Original Dotted Reverse dotted



Triplet Triplet dotted Triplet Dotted Reversed Triplet Variation



The image shows two lines of musical notation on a single treble clef staff. The first line contains three measures: 'Original' (a sequence of eighth notes: G4, A4, B4, A4, G4, F4, E4, D4), 'Dotted' (the same sequence with a dotted quarter note), and 'Reverse dotted' (the sequence in reverse order: D4, E4, F4, G4, A4, B4, A4, G4). The second line contains four measures: 'Triplet' (three eighth notes: G4, A4, B4), 'Triplet dotted' (three eighth notes: G4, A4, B4 with a dotted quarter note), 'Triplet Dotted Reversed' (three eighth notes: B4, A4, G4 with a dotted quarter note), and 'Triplet Variation' (three eighth notes: G4, A4, B4 with a dotted quarter note, followed by three eighth notes: A4, G4, F4).

Five and One Method

- Isolate passage (work on only one or two bars at a time)
- Play passage one time at half the performance tempo
- Move metronome up three clicks (or if digital, move up 7 (ex. 50 to 57))
- Play passage one time
- Move metronome down 2 notches (or if digital, down 4 (ex. 57 to 53))
- Play passage 5 times
- Repeat process moving metronome up 3, play once, down two, play 5 times until you reach performance tempo. By moving metronome up 3 notches, you are pushing yourself slightly, but not enough to make a mistake. By playing five times at a slightly slower tempo, you are reinforcing your digital finger memory and correct execution of the passage.
- This method really works if you follow the steps exactly.

Add a note, backwards, one note at a time

Play passage starting with the last note, gradually adding one note at a time, moving backwards to the beginning of the passage. It is recommended to do this at a slow enough tempo to play the phrase perfectly with no mistakes, then repeat the entire process of adding notes, each full cycle increasing the tempo slightly.

Original Passage Last note only Last 2 notes

Last 3 notes Last 4 notes Last 5 notes

Last 6 notes Last 7 notes

Last 8 notes Entire phrase

Moving the beam to create a new downbeat

Each bar starts with a new note as the new downbeat by moving the beamed notes to the right by one note. The downbeat is shifted in each permutation until the phrase loops around to the original form. Start at a slow tempo so the phrase is played perfectly, then gradually increase the tempo.

Original Phrase Downbeat shifted to 2nd note Downbeat shifted to 3rd note Downbeat shifted to 4th note

Downbeat shifted to 5th note Downbeat shifted to 6th note Downbeat shifted to 7th note Downbeat shifted to 8th note

Advanced Practice Techniques

Changing the number of notes under a beam

Start with two notes under a beam, then increase by one note at a time until you get to eight. Vary articulations when practicing with this technique.

Original Phrase

Groups of 2 notes

Groups of 3 notes (cycles back to original downbeat after 3 bars)



Groups of 4 notes

Groups of 5 notes (cycles back to original downbeat after 5 bars)



Groups of 6 notes (cycles back to original downbeat after 3 bars)



Groups of 7 notes (cycles back to original downbeat after 7 bars)



Group of 8 notes

Moving the beam under each new number of notes under a beam

This exercise is a combination of the earlier fundamental technique of moving the beam over by one note at a time, but it is applied to each group of notes in the previous exercise. This approach yields many permutations so only one example will be provided. The arrows display where the original phrase started.

Original phrase



Polyrhythms

Two against Three/Three against Two

This exercise can be done tapping on a drum or the legs to start with, and then can be moved to the instrument. Start with hands tapping at the same time and while tapping 2 in one hand and 3 in the other, vary saying 1, 2, 1, 2, then 1, 2, 3, 1, 2, 3 so you develop a feel for what the 2 feels like against the 3 and how the 3 feels against the 4.

Start by tapping with Right Hand and saying 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, while tapping 1 and 4 with the left hand, accenting 1 and 4 with voice .

Next, continue to tap all the divisions of the triplet with right hand, while shifting the accent to 1, 3, 5. The numbers in parentheses should be whispered. The left hand taps on 1 and 4.

Musical notation for the first part of the exercise. It consists of two systems of piano accompaniment in 2/4 time. The first system shows a right hand with a triplet of eighth notes (1, 2, 3) and a quarter note (4), followed by another triplet (5, 6) and a quarter note. The left hand has quarter notes on 1 and 4. The second system shows a right hand with a triplet of eighth notes (1, (2), 3), followed by a quarter note (4), another triplet (5, (6)) and a quarter note. The left hand has quarter notes on 1 and 4. Accents (>) are placed over the first notes of the triplets in both systems.

Finally, remove the sub-divisions that are being tapped with right hand and say and tap only 1, 3, 5 with right hand, while tapping on 1 and 4 with left hand

Musical notation for the second part of the exercise. It consists of two systems of piano accompaniment in 2/4 time. The first system shows a right hand with a triplet of eighth notes (1, 2, 3) and a quarter note (4), followed by another triplet (5, 6) and a quarter note. The left hand has quarter notes on 1 and 4. The second system shows a right hand with a triplet of eighth notes (1, 3, 5) and a quarter note (4), followed by another triplet (5, 6) and a quarter note. The left hand has quarter notes on 1 and 4. Accents (>) are placed over the first notes of the triplets in both systems.

Three Against Two

In this exercise, put the metronome on 60. The metronome beats the quarter note while scale is played in triplets against the quarter note.

Musical notation for the 'Three Against Two' exercise. It consists of two systems of piano accompaniment in 2/4 time. The first system shows a right hand with a triplet of eighth notes (1, 2, 3) and a quarter note (4), followed by another triplet (5, 6) and a quarter note. The left hand has quarter notes on 1 and 4. The second system shows a right hand with a triplet of eighth notes (1, 2, 3) and a quarter note (4), followed by another triplet (5, 6) and a quarter note. The left hand has quarter notes on 1 and 4. Accents (>) are placed over the first notes of the triplets in both systems.

Two Against Three

Next, the metronome beats each eighth note of an eighth note triplet, while scale is played in eighth notes against the triplet.

Scale on instrument

Metronome click

The image shows a musical score for a piano exercise. The top staff is a treble clef with a scale of eighth notes: C4, D4, E4, F4, G4, A4, B4, C5. The bottom staff is a bass clef with eighth note triplets: C3, D3, E3, F3, G3, A3, B3, C4. The label 'Scale on instrument' is above the first staff, and 'Metronome click' is below the first staff. The number '3' is written below each triplet in the bottom staff.

Three Against Four/Four Against Three

Do this same type of exercise with 3 against 4 and 4 against 3.

5 Tap eighth notes. Then tap 3 against 2, as previously learned. Then divide the duple into four, or quarter notes into eighths

The image shows a musical score for a piano exercise. The top staff is a treble clef with a scale of eighth notes: C4, D4, E4, F4, G4, A4, B4, C5. The bottom staff is a bass clef with eighth notes: C3, D3, E3, F3, G3, A3, B3, C4. The label '5' is above the first staff. The text 'Tap eighth notes. Then tap 3 against 2, as previously learned. Then divide the duple into four, or quarter notes into eighths' is above the first staff. The number '3' is written below each triplet in the bottom staff.

Three Against Four/Four Against Three on the instrument

Next, try playing a scale with the metronome on either three clicks against the four scale notes, or the other way around, four clicks against the three scale notes. Try this with various scales, beyond one octave, and at various tempos.

Metronome click

Metronome click

Scale on instrument

Scale on instrument

The image shows a musical score for a piano exercise. The top staff is a treble clef with a scale of eighth notes: C4, D4, E4, F4, G4, A4, B4, C5. The bottom staff is a bass clef with eighth notes: C3, D3, E3, F3, G3, A3, B3, C4. The label 'Metronome click' is above the first staff. The label 'Scale on instrument' is below the first staff. The number '3' is written below each triplet in the bottom staff.