



JB
MASTERCLASS
SERIES

DEGREE ≠ EDUCATION

MAKING THE MOST OF YOUR
TIME IN SCHOOL

JOSH BYNUM

MAKING THE MOST OF YOUR EDUCATION

As a college professor, I meet young people at a turning point in their lives...shifting the mindset from “student” to “professional.” For many, it’s the first taste of independence they’ve had...as well as personal responsibility.

I try to use our time together to keep the compass facing true North --- leading to an easy transition into the “real world.” The most important lesson I teach is that TIME is the most valuable resource. Once it’s gone...it’s gone for good. Along these lines, here are a few pieces of advice I share with my students...

1. Take Ownership of your EDUCATION, and the DEGREE will earn itself:

DEGREE & EDUCATION ---- They’re not quite the same thing, are they?

A true education is the result of developing a sincere professional curiosity. This curiosity (or “passion”) is a lifelong journey. I’m a student of music....everyone I have the honor of working with are students of music.

Is the GPA important? Absolutely! But having a 4.0 doesn’t necessarily mean that you’re prepared to be an authority in your chosen field. That’s entirely dependent on how you spend your time.

Believe it or not, your time in school will go by VERY fast. Take **ownership** of your education. You’ll never have more time than right now to immerse yourself in the subject of music – which is the reason you’re all here!

To illustrate this point...let me highlight my area of Applied Study:

Heard about the 10,000 Rule? Forget about it...let’s just focus on 120.

- 15 weeks per semester – 30 per academic year.
- 30 hours per year of private study.
- For your degree, that’s 120 (or less -depending on your concentration).

All together, that is 5 days worth of private study with your teacher. Treat these lessons with that type of sense of urgency, to get as much as you can (which means bringing as much to the table as you can).

Understanding WHY you’re taking certain classes (such as theory, ear training, history, piano) can help give you focus. The goal is to be an artist....not just a mechanic.

A few examples of “don’t be that student” (or: The Meathead Mentality):

- Complains about taking ear training – but can’t effectively address poor intonation.
- Thinks Theory is just a bunch of rules that don’t matter ---- but can’t make informed phrasing choices due to a poor grasp on basic keys, chords, cadences, or form.
- Says Music History is boring and useless names/dates – but can’t carry a meaningful conversation on the differences of Mahler, Mozart, and Monk.

Take ownership....don’t be passive with your learning. Be proactive, and recognize that it’s simply

not always possible to cram every meaningful course into a 4 year degree plan. A lot gets left on the table...and you need to spot what would be useful for you. Your EDUCATION probably won't always fit in the 9-5 work day. I know mine didn't.

Be willing to do whatever you NEED to do in order to grow...even if this is not part of your "degree plan."

- Extreme performance anxiety? Take a jazz improv class, and learn to let go of the fear of imperfection you're carrying.
- Having real trouble with pitch accuracy (after ear training)? Sign up for choir for 1-2 semesters and train your voice.
- Always waiting for others to make your musical decisions? More chamber music!

2. Keep the flame LIT ----- Take Ownership of your "Passion":

Here's my Socrates quote for the day: "Education is not filling a vessel, it's kindling of a flame."

Taking ownership of your PASSION means being sure to keep stoking the fire. Tracing back to WHY you've chosen this path is so important. For me, being a part of an amazing performance (either as a performer or audience member) has always been the motivation & inspiration I needed to pick up my axe and get back to work.

LISTEN to as much music as you can! (Naxos Music Library, Berlin Phil. Digital Concert Hall, YouTube, Apple Music, University Library.) So many resources, but it's sometimes an overwhelming prospect.

As with many things...the only wrong decision is indecision. There is an OCEAN of music out there...just dive in and start swimming. Take note of artists, composers, pieces, styles that resonate with you...and start building on that and branching out. MUSICAL CURIOSITY. Know who and what you're listening to ("found it on YouTube" ---- doesn't really say it all, does it?). Have listening parties with friends, everyone bringing something to share. Keep it informal and enjoy "the hang."

GO TO CONCERTS! Everywhere and Everything! There is no substitution for listening to live music— every performance you hear provides you with the opportunity to learn something about your own musical tastes.

PERFORM as much as you can, in as many different settings as possible. For those who are performing regularly, recitals and juries are just another day at the office. There is a natural-ness to their stage presence that puts the audience at ease.

But if your only performance each semester is a 10-15 minute jury....you're not giving yourself enough of an opportunity to grow. Getting a recital together? Set up a few performances off campus and grow with the repertoire (and with collaborative musicians). You'll be amazed at how much more comfortable you'll be...and how much more willing you'll be to take musical risks.

Same for all disciplines---seek out opportunities that aren't just handed to you on a platter. CREATE musical opportunities for yourself outside of the academic bubble – get involved downtown (schools, churches, clubs), in surrounding area. Will help for when you're no longer in school.

SET your ARTISTIC GOALS for yourself. SHORT TERM & LONG TERM ----. Keeps you moving at a consistent pace. When I was a junior, my teacher took a lesson and helped me create a 10-year plan to get from where I was to where I wanted to go. I still have that paper, and it's almost an

exact blueprint of how my life has played out.

Know that every great musician in the world still considers himself or herself a student of music. Wynton Marsalis is a music student. Joe Alessi is a music student, as is Yo-Yo Ma, Simon Rattle and Emmanuel Ax . Make lifelong improvement and lifelong learning your goal. I am not as good as I think I, and neither are you. The older I get, the more I realize that I have only begun to scratch the surface of what there is to know. Use this blessing of an opportunity that you have as a full-time music student to your advantage. Your hard work will pay off in the end!

3. Take Ownership of your Surroundings ---

One of my teachers told me: To Be a Great MUSICIAN, you must be a great HUMAN BEING.

There are two things that are very contagious: Positive Attitudes and Negative Attitudes. Each of you has the power to positively affect the climate of music and attitude here. Are you a person who builds others up, or tears them down? Support each other's musical endeavors, and let any feelings of competition evolve into Iron Sharpening Iron.

Recognize these tendencies in those around you, and be sure you are surrounding yourself with and contributing to the positive energy in this school. Sometimes, the only thing preventing you from rising to the top drawer is simply the attitude of the students. I came from a pretty small school – and believe in a blue-collar work ethic. Practice rooms at Juilliard are basically the same as those here...so stop waiting to jump in.

DO NOT BE AFRAID OF TRYING YOUR HARDEST AND COMING UP SHORT. I've learned more from my mistakes than from my successes. (Michael Jordan). "The master has failed more times than the beginner has even tried." - Stephen McCranie

Be professional: Just as you are using this time to become better musicians, now is the time to move towards a professional mentality. Honor your commitments. Always be early – always be prepared – and listen twice before speaking once (or with email ---- read several times before sending).

Your personal integrity and reputation are more precious than gold. Strive to be the person that others enjoy collaborating with and being around.

If you want to have an easy transition from school into the real world, then you need to begin thinking of yourself as a young professional. That isn't handed out with your diploma.

You owe it to yourself to be the best musician that you can be. Anyone worried about their future? Now...ask yourself: Do you spend as much time working to ensure your success as you do worrying?

Work hard - NOW, run after your goals - NOW, but keep an open mind to where the road leads. You'll find more than just a job...you'll find fulfillment.