

Getting the Most Out of Organ Practice

Presenter **Jerry Evans**

PRACTICE MAKES PERMANENT!

- I. Three stages of skill acquisition
 - A. Cognitive (factual)
 1. Figuring out what to do
 2. Planning fingering/pedaling/stops
 - B. Associative (procedural)
 1. Repeating (practicing) what you've planned
 - C. Fluent
 1. Autopilot

PICK A GOAL FOR YOUR PRACTICE SESSION

- I. Strategies for learning a new piece.
 - A. Using your plan, play through the piece (or section) once or twice.
 1. Identify tricky spots.
 2. Perfect them using the Belnap 7 step method.
 - B. Play the piece (or part of it) at a tempo that you can do it right.
 1. If a planned fingering or pedaling doesn't work, change it. Write it down. Follow it!
 2. Use a metronome. It keeps you honest.
 - C. If you make a mistake twice, do something fix it.
 1. Practice (repetition) makes permanent.
 2. It's too easy to get very good at doing something wrong.

III Getting to Autopilot

- A. Amateurs practice until they get it right; professionals practice until they can't get it wrong.
- B. Mental practice can be very helpful.
 1. With the music
 2. Without the music — on the road to memorizing
- C. You'll lose 20% when you perform. So practice for 115% accuracy. Then you'll only be down to 95%.!
- D. Four half hours of practice time is worth much more than two hours straight.
- E. No more than 45-50 minutes on the bench at a time, and don't stay on one piece too long.

EVALUATE YOUR PRACTICE SESSION

- IV. Preparing for performance
 - A. There's a difference between practice mode, and performance mode.
 1. Better to leave it out than play a wrong note.
 - A. Don't make significant changes (including corrections) close to performance time.
 - B. Get enough sleep. Wear comfortable clothes. Avoid caffeine and medications.

Finally, from Bonnie Goodliffe's keynote address at the BYU Organ Workshop in August of 2009:

"In your performances, do not rely on your emotions. Emotion is not a legitimate substitute for technical skill. Do not rely on inspiration. The Lord can magnify your abilities but not if you have done nothing first. Remember that Nephi asked the Lord where to go to find ore.

He didn't ask the Lord to drop a set of ship-building tools into his tent.

Even in church service, the angels will attend you, but they won't practice for you."

Resources

Bonnie L. Goodliffe: *Organ Practice Tips*; Handout; BYU Organ Workshop August 2012
Jay Goodliffe: *Effective Practice Techniques*; Handout; BYU Organ Workshop August 2014