

Practice Strategies: Geology vs. Archaeology

There is no single practice strategy that will suffice for all repertoire. We also cannot assume that an approach that has worked in times past will function the same way in the present. Our skill sets change, our daily disposition changes, and our perception can be numbed by a repetitive approach to observation. I have always viewed the practice room from a somewhat “Medieval” perspective. Our goals (technique, repertoire, etc.) are in a fortified castle, and it is our job to “storm” this proverbial castle with all of the practice tools at our disposal. Past successes are not necessarily guarantees of future results, and every new approach gives us a fresh perspective on the challenges at hand. One should take a targeted approach when it comes to specific details, but I have always found attacking my overall objectives with “shock and awe” usually yields the best result. To beat the “castle” metaphor into the ground, just because the battering ram worked last time doesn’t mean your current conquest won’t have a stronger door. Send in the ram, the archers, the infantry, cavalry, fire-breathing dragons from the air (if you have them), and overwhelm your objective from every angle and leave no walls standing.



Two contrasting strategies for framing an overall approach to practicing could be compared to Geology and Archaeology. This is not meant to be a literal application of these 2 disciplines but more to give context to how different approaches are defined by different objectives. For this example, the Geologist would be concerned with the specific composition

of a very small area of soil. Taking a core sample would give the Geologist information about the history and contents of a particular section of Earth. The details of the different strata would give information about materials, history, presence of valuable natural resources, etc. In a musical context this could be one phrase, one bar, or even one note. This restriction of scope gives us the opportunity to focus intensely on every aspect of the material under observation. This could include:

-Physical Approach

-efficiency and not exclusively technique

-Pitch

-Clear concept and choices

-Vibrato

-presence or absence, contour, range, etc.

-Point of Contact

-Type and quality of sound

-Bow speed

-Interaction with point of contact, dynamic

If more than one note is involved:

-Legato

-The connection between the notes

-Articulation

-Quality, consistency

-Sustain

-The direction of the middle of a note

-Release

-Taper, space between notes

-Resonance

-Quality of left hand contact

-Character/style

The two most fundamental ways of simplifying material in a practice context is either to play slower or to play less music. The musical “core sample” gives a snapshot of things as they currently are and is designed to be an in context, at tempo rendition of the smallest building blocks.

Our Archaeologist in this example has different objectives. They might section off into grids an area of interest in order to do a site survey. This method meticulously removes a small amount of material over a larger area in order to understand more fully the relationship between elements that are present in the same layer. The idea is also to avoid unintentionally disturbing artifacts and items of interest. The scope of the musical “dig” would be on a larger scale than the Geologist. We would use a phrase, an excerpt, or a movement in order to explore a single concept over a larger area.



-Play for pitch without indicated rhythms

-Play pizzicato to highlight left hand connection

-Play right hand alone to solidify coordination of string crossings

-Play with limited dynamic range

-Play under tempo to focus on incorporating details uncovered during “geological” approach

It should be clearly evident at this point that while practice should be methodical, it is at its essence a creative process. We need to be continually responsive and reactive to the results of our efforts and not blindly adherent to a cookie-cutter approach to learning. It is your choice whether it is a rewarding process of discovery or...



FRACTAL FRIDAY TOPICS!

Please submit comments or suggestions for future topics to davidallenmoore@fractalbassist.com

FRACTAL FORUM: Friday Forums are on “pause” for the moment

NEXT FORUM:

1/10 10 AM PT

Continuing our multi-week “deep dive” into Fractal Fingering that started on January 3rd.

Every SUNDAY on Zoom at 10AM PT!

Visit www.fractalbassist.com to get the invite(s). Everyone is welcome.

FRACTAL BASSIST Channel on YouTube (Coming Soon!)

This invite-only YouTube channel will be a continuation, development and place to share these ideas and principles. Although the entire Fractal Fingering course and samples are available online and at DiscoverDoubleBass.com, this channel will provide a forum for more in-depth content and to address questions on a more individual basis.

If you have any questions, comments, ideas you'd like explored, or inspiration you'd like to share please email: davidallenmoore@fractalbassist.com.

With Love,

D