

## **5 Ways to Get the Most out of Music Lessons**

These guidelines will help you to have a successful, rewarding experience learning an instrument. These are practical tips that we have discovered from years of teaching and our experiences with students of all ages.

### **1. Starting at the right age**

Adults of any age can start any instrument at any time. Their success is based on how willing they are to commit to practicing.

For children, starting at the right age is a key element to the success of their lessons. Some people will tell you “the sooner the better,” but this attitude can actually backfire and be a negative. If a child is put into lessons too soon they may feel overwhelmed and frustrated and want to stop lessons. The last thing you want to do is turn a child off music just because they had one unpleasant experience that could have been prevented. Sometimes if the child waits a year to start lessons, their progress can be much faster. Children who are older than the earliest suggested starting age usually do very well. The following are guidelines we have found to be successful in determining how young a child can start taking music lessons.

### **Infants through 5 Years Old**

Early Childhood Music programs are a wonderful introduction to music and usually feature singing, movement, rhythm activities, and playing instruments. These classes provide a great foundation for music studies in a fun, game-like environment. In addition to musical benefits, these programs also influence other areas of development, including speech and language, aural and listening skills, motor skills, creativity, and overall self-confidence. At our school, we offer Music Rhapsody, which has classes for all ages ranging from birth through age 5. Each class is developmentally appropriate for each age group and are attended by the child and a parent or caretaker.

### **Piano**

5 years old is usually the youngest age that we start children in piano lessons, although generally starting at 6-7 years old is often better. At this age they have begun to develop longer attention spans and can retain material with ease. In addition, they need to have already developed some fine motor skills which are necessary to physically play the instrument without too much frustration. The best starting age really varies from child

to child, depending on both their innate interest level as well as where they are developmentally. As everyone learns differently, we offer traditional (reading-based) and Simply Music (play-based) methods for children and adults.

For younger students, we offer classes in Play-a-Story, an age-appropriate and creative way to learn basic piano skills in an improvisatory setting. These classes are designed specifically for children ages 4-6 and are taught in small groups of 2-3 children.

### **Guitar, Bass & Ukulele**

8 years old is the earliest we recommend for guitar or bass lessons, as they require a fair amount of pressure on the fingertips from pressing on the strings. Children under 8 generally have small hands and may find playing uncomfortable. Ukulele can be a good choice for younger students. Bass guitar students generally are 10 years old and older, as the strings are thicker and harder to play.

### **Voice Lessons**

10 years old is recommended as the youngest age for private vocal lessons. Due to the physical nature of voice lessons (proper breathing techniques, development of the vocal chords and lung capacity), the younger body is generally not yet ready for the rigors of vocal technique.

Because younger children are interested in singing, we do teach children younger than 10. For these students, we focus on how to use their voices safely and confidently in addition to building skills in rhythm, pitch-matching and more.

For students 5 and under, check out our Music Rhapsody classes which include lots of singing!

### **Drums**

The average age of our youngest drum student is 8, although this varies greatly depending on the size of the child, as they need to be able to reach both the pedals and the cymbals.

### **Flute, Clarinet and Saxophone**

Due to lung capacity (and in the case of the saxophone, the size of the instrument), we recommend that most woodwind beginners are 9 and older.

## **Violin**

We accept violin students from the age of 5. Some teachers will start children as young as 3, but experience has shown us the most productive learning occurs when the beginner student is age 5 or older.

## **Trumpet**

The trumpet requires physical exertion and lung power. Age 9 or older is a good time to start the trumpet.

## **2. Take lessons in a professional teaching environment**

Learning music is not just a matter of having a qualified teacher, but also having an environment that is focused on music education. In a professional school environment a student cannot be distracted by TV, pets, ringing phones, siblings, etc. With only 30-60 minutes of lesson time per week, a professional school environment can produce better results, since the only focus at that time is learning music. Students in a school environment are also motivated by hearing peers who are at different levels and by being exposed to a variety of musical instruments.

In a music school, teaching music is not just a hobby or sideline for the teacher but a responsibility which is taken very seriously. All of our teachers are university-trained and are passionately committed to providing the best musical education experience possible for each individual student.

## **3. Choose a school that offers lots of performance opportunities**

Performing in recitals can be a nerve wracking experience for some students, especially if they only perform once a year. At our school, we offer a variety of opportunities for students to get comfortable performing:

- **Halloween Howl** - a fun & festive evening in our recital room. Students perform for each other in costume and receive a goody bag at the end!
- **Holiday Recital** - a more formal recital, held every December in a local church. Students perform seasonal tunes and other favorites for their family & friends. A great way to get into the holiday spirit!

- **Open Mic Nights** - casual performance events held throughout the winter and spring in our recital room. Students may perform any piece of their choosing for a supportive audience of family and friends.
- **Workshops** - interactive learning & performing experiences presented by world-renowned musicians & educators.
- **Musical Happy Hours** - strictly for our adult students. Held twice a year (January & June) in our recital room. An opportunity to perform in a fun, laid-back environment, and a chance to chat with other adult students over wine & cheese.
- **Spring Recital** - our formal, end-of-the-school year event, held off-site every June. This recital showcases all of the hard work and progress our students make each year. A joyous setting to share your talents with family & friends!

All events are optional (and free of charge!) While we encourage all our students to perform, we never require them to do so. If you or your child prefer not to participate in any recitals, that is okay by us. Come to one of our events as an audience member to enjoy the music, and who knows, maybe you'll be inspired to perform next time!

#### **4. Make practicing easier**

As with anything, improving in music takes practice. Sometimes sitting down to practice is a bigger struggle than actually doing the practicing. Here are some tips to help incorporate practice into your life.

##### **Creating a routine**

Set the same time every day to practice so it becomes part of habit. Having a practice routine is really important to success, so that even on days when we “don’t feel like it,” it’s already automatic and engrained, like other daily activities that we don’t always “feel like” doing, but do anyway, such as brushing our teeth.

##### **Time of day**

Generally the earlier in the day that practicing can occur, the less chance there is for procrastination. When possible, practicing in the morning seems to work well, before going to school or work for the day, even if it’s just 5- 10 minutes of attentive practice. Sometimes practicing at night can be more difficult when you’re worn out and less motivated at the end of a long day, although understandably so, sometimes there is no other option, so again, having a regular time will help establish a routine.

Another great option for children is to practice before homework, right after school. Although school work is obviously of utmost importance, the amount of homework given each day by teachers usually varies, and oftentimes homework seems to expand to fill the time allotted to it, which can crowd out other important responsibilities. All of a sudden, after homework it's dinner time, then it's time to wind down and maybe watch TV before getting ready for bed. A whole week can very easily go by without practicing in these situations, which only leads to feelings of guilt and frustration. This situation can easily be remedied by creating a regular routine of practice, preferably in the morning or before homework, or at the very least, at the same time each day.

### **How long to practice**

For young children, practicing just 10-15 minutes a day is usually plenty. Even older beginners shouldn't need much more time than that in the beginning. Quality is always more important than quantity. 5 minutes of intensely focused practice can be more beneficial than 30 minutes of unfocused practice, which can actually have negative effects by ingraining mistakes and bad habits that take more time to undo. During shorter intervals of practice time, focus on just small sections of material that need work, rather than simply playing through each piece. (Playing is different than practicing). Even on an exceedingly busy time, squeezing in 5 minutes of effective practicing can still lead to progress or at least ensure that ground is not lost.

### **5. Be patient and enjoy the journey**

Music should be something that you enjoy for a lifetime. So, try not to put unrealistic expectations on yourself or your children to learn too quickly. Making progress in music happens gradually over time, and everyone learns at a different pace. The key is to be able to enjoy the journey and trust in the process. While we believe learning and playing music should be fun, realistically there may be times when it does not feel 100% "fun." As with anything in life, there are going to be plenty of ups and downs along the way, which is very normal. Riding these waves and not giving up is crucial to the process; over time, you will reap the benefits of your perseverance and patience. In the meantime, enjoy the ride!