

**Marc D's 43 (and counting) non-conformist, non-traditional, common sense, logical,
and effective**

Propositions for Learning and Playing the Drumset Musically *

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*** These are not meant to offend anyone, but to encourage us all to think, question, and examine why, how, and what we do as we travel on our paths to becoming better drummers, musicians, and people. They are NOT answers or truths; they are ideas.
Remember, the old ways are sometimes, but not always, the best.**

1. Respect the Music. Know All Styles of Music and Styles of Playing.

Jazz, R&B, Rock, Metal, Hip-hop, 2nd Line, Cha Cha Cha, Samba, Mozambique, Bossa Nova, etc. are not beats – they are styles of music and of playing that are often the result of many decades, or centuries, of development, evolution, and culture. These musics can be part of a religious celebration, social event, dance, custom, or environment that should be understood and studied.

2. Tune Your Drums...before every time you play or practice. The sound of your drums is your sound.

If you're going to spend hours each day practicing to play better, spend a few minutes to make sure what you're playing SOUNDS good.

3. Listen all the time...

- a) to recordings and live performances of all musicians...drummers, singers, guitarists, timbaleros, trombonists, etc.;
- b) to the other musicians you're playing with...pay attention not just to what you're saying, but also to what they're saying, and to the musical 'conversation' you're all having;
- c) to yourself...record your playing often...even every day. Don't just rely on your playing *subjective* ears; learn with your listening *objective* ears and brain, and be brutally honest with yourself.

4. Play to make others sound better, and you'll sound better. Playing in a group or band is about communicating and making music together. Understand how what you're playing fits with, and contributes to, the music being played.

5. Transcribe performances of other musicians; study and analyze them, and try them out for yourself.

6. You already play fast enough; practice to play music better – not faster, louder, or more complicated.

7. Don't think of 'playing the drums', think of 'playing music'. Listen to the melody, the soloist, the lyrics, and especially the form of the song or arrangement.

8. You can't learn how to be a good drummer from burying your head in drum books; you learn to play drums by understanding concepts of playing, listening to yourself and others, and by focusing on the music you're learning and playing. You can certainly read and practice from a drum book, but then stop using it and try to incorporate those ideas, concepts, and techniques into your own playing.

9. Practicing is not the goal – playing is the goal. Don't practice to make your practicing better, practice to make your playing better. Practice smart, and have goals that are musically-driven every time you practice. If you don't practice musically, you can't play musically. Practice things that make you a better drummer and musician, not a better 'practicer'.

10. **The practice pad is not a musical instrument.** Although there are many times when it can be used as a tool to focus on certain aspects of technique, it should never be used as a substitute for playing the drums. Touch, tone, musicality, improvisation, styles, feel, balance, dynamics, interpretation, and your own musical voice cannot be sufficiently developed on a piece of rubber glued to a piece of wood.

11. **You are not a metronome;** you're a drummer trying to make music. Like a practice pad, a metronome when used appropriately is a great practice tool. Playing time that 'feels' and 'sounds' good is not about playing mathematically and metronomically perfect 8^{ths}, triplets, 16^{ths}, etc. Listen closely to great music and great drummers and you'll hear that great feel is not in exact execution of computer-perfect notes, it's in the 'cracks'. Many of our musical and drumming heroes never even owned metronomes - they learned to develop good time and feel by practicing and playing music and drums musically.

12. **And speaking of metronomes...if you're a drummer, a metronome MIGHT NOT improve your time.** Playing with live musicians, music recordings, play-along recordings, sequences, and loops will do more to help your time and your musicality than a click that has no tone and no feel. Learn to be dependent on your own natural internal clock (that we're all born with), not an external non-musical click. If used incorrectly, a metronome can actually hinder the development of your natural time and feel. The more you play to, and with music, the more you'll develop as a musician; the more you play to and with a metronome, the more you may begin to sound like one and divert your attention away from playing musically. Don't get me wrong - a metronome can be a valuable measuring tool to check relative tempos, and mark progress, identify correct tempos for playing various literature and musical styles, and even in developing your ability to play with a click or a click track (something often done in live and recording situations). BUT, learn to rely on, and develop your own musical time and feel and let the music and your playing breathe.

13. **You can't see music, and it's not on a page,** or in a chart, or in a part; you need to MAKE the music. What's not on the page is more important than what is on the page (taken from a quote by Miles Davis). Stop looking at the page and start listening - music is not visual, it's aural.

14. **Don't play to impress other drummers...**by learning tricks and playing licks. The people you need to impress are the musicians you'll be playing with, and you impress them by playing musically. Remember, they're the ones who will be hiring you to play the gig, the tour, and the session.

15. **Drumming is not a competition...**don't try to be better than anyone else, try to be the best YOU that you can be. There is plenty of room for all of us, so develop your own style and sound.

16. **Sing what you play; play what you sing.** The most valuable part of your body to help you play the drums better is not your hands or your feet, it's your ears. Hear the music, hear the ideas, and internalize the music and the feel. Then it will be easy to play that way.

17. **When you're practicing...practice; when you're playing...play.** There are few situations that are more frustrating than playing a gig or concert, or jamming with someone who is practicing, and who just wants to use you as his/her accompaniment to experiment and work on their licks.

18. **The Tyranny of Tradition.** Drumming does not happen in a separate universe. The laws of physics (sound, gravity, bounce, rebound, volume, speed, mass, etc.), physiology (how our body moves, how our muscles, joints, tendons, and ligaments work), neurology (brain function, 'plasticity' and laterality, handedness, neural systems and pathways), and genetics (personality, cognition, and perception, memory capacity, curiosity, social interaction, auditory aptitude) apply to everything and everyone, drummer and non-drummer alike. Sometimes, I hear drummers explain grip, stroke, rebound, motion, and sound in a

way that is completely false and contrary to the laws of physics, neurology, and kinesiology; in other words, don't make up your own laws of nature, and don't bend these laws to conform to your own notions of how things work. I've seen many drummers harmed by misconceptions, misunderstandings, myths, and handed-down half-truths. Much of what is currently advocated & employed in the drumming industry is not based on science or research. Instead, it's based on what teachers have been implementing for decades, not because it's best but simply because it's how they were taught and how their teachers before them were also taught. Study everything and understand how it applies to drumming, and question *everyone* and *everything* you hear and read; don't make stuff up and don't allow others to do so either.

19. Dynamics...use them wisely and often...they help to color, shape, and structure you playing.

20. Practice doesn't make perfect...it makes permanent. Whatever you practice is what you will become skilled at doing. If you keep repeating mistakes without correcting them you'll get very good at them; if you practice unmusically and without frequent contextualized practice using musical accompaniment you'll play that way. Practice to develop your sound, touch, feel, musicality, expression, versatility, and your ability to listen and understand, and that's how you'll play – like a musician.

21. Select and use quality musical instruments – drums, heads, sticks, and cymbals. It's better to assemble your drum kit slowly with the highest quality equipment you can buy. Use professional equipment and keep it in perfect playing shape - good drums and heads tuned properly, good-sounding cymbals, and sticks that are not chipped or cracked.

22. Consult your best friend - “What If” - often. “What If” – the question that lets you imagine the possibilities of what you can do and to take that to the next level and make it your own. In other words, What If I tried playing this way; What If I tune or set up my drums that way; What If I reversed that sticking, etc. You get the idea...use your imagination and develop your own voice and style.

23. Let it breathe...rests are music, too. Try not to fill up every eighth note, triplet, or sixteenth note in the song...the other musicians with whom you're playing have important things to say, as well. Use space and air wisely. Don't call attention to the quantity of notes you're playing but to the quality of what you're playing.

24. Play with other musicians often, as often as possible. Surround yourself with positive people with good habits who want to improve just as you do, and you'll all help each other grow together.

25. Play with great feel...*HOW* you play is often more important than *WHAT* you play. Concentrate on playing to make the music feel good and come to life. This starts with realizing that The Quarter Note is King. Everything, including good time and good feel, flows from that.

26. Fills and Solos – maybe, maybe not. If the music calls for, then do it, but do it according to the consistent feel of the music. Not all songs or arrangements require drum fills, and when you do play a fill don't try to impress someone, or yourself, with what you can do. Ultimately, the musicians whom you play with, and who want to play with you, will be the most important judges of your playing.

27. Play inside the volume of the band...not louder. 'Nuff said.

28. We're not the first, and we won't be the last...drumming is a centuries-old aural tradition with a very rich history. Learn much about who and what has come before us, and pass it on the next generation of students of the instrument.

29. **The tempo of every song is not 120 beats per minute.** You can't develop a good feel for playing slow tunes or very fast tunes if you never practice at those tempos. Make sure to vary the tempos at which you practice. And remember, just because a groove, fill, or musical idea sounds good at 110 beats per minute, it doesn't mean it will work at 80 or 175 beats per minute. Different tempos require different things to be played, and also different ways of playing.

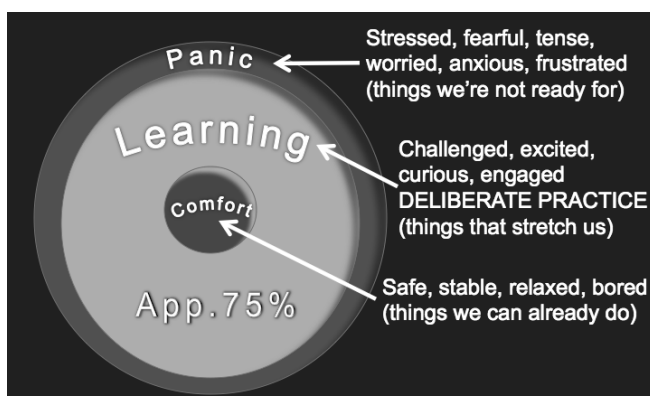
30. **Drumming has evolved - dramatically**...and so has everything associated with it, including the demands on the drummer – student, amateur, professional, and instructor. New/emerging learning & practice aids, equipment, techniques, digital kits, and science all provide a wide range of methods enabling us to learn quicker, wider, and deeper, and to apply our skills more effectively.

31. **It's really not about 'talent'.** There is no distinct 'music center' or 'drumming talent gene' in the brain, but rather a coalition of neural tissue virtually all of which predate drumming, and are distributed in both hemispheres of the brain...everyone's brain.

32. **Your most valuable assets are not your hands or your drums...they're your ears.** Protect them while practicing, performing, listening, and attending concerts.

33. **Build a practice routine that works**...practice is a goal-oriented, deliberate, methodical, systematic, regular, and highly repetitive but intervalled activity designed to maintain and improve your skill and ability. It is not merely playing. It consists of a plan, time at task, commitment, emotional engagement, concentration, consistency, perseverance, and patience.

34. **Get out of your comfort zone**...and into the learning zone. This will create more challenges and result in more errors which cues the nervous system for error correction and opens the door to neural plasticity, which is the brain's ability to custom modify itself in order to learn and perform anything better.



35. **Don't practice too little, and don't practice too much**...it takes time and repetition to build and embed neural memory – practice can be effective even if it's just 20 to 30 minutes each day, IF you're practicing the right things the right way. Once you've worked on one particular element (a small building block) for 15 to 20 minutes, move to a different one. If you practice the same exact thing for more than 40 minutes your level of development decreases. Practice different elements in blocks of between 10 and 30 minutes. Your overall practice sessions should not last more than 90 minutes each; it's much more effective to practice for two 90-minute, or three 60-minute blocks of time with long breaks in-between, than it is to practice for one 3-hour block of time continuously.

36. Many other things impact the effectiveness of your practice and learning...including sleep (get 8 hours every night), nutrition, and exercise. Create sensible and healthy habits.

37. Focus intensely, then rest...once you begin to practice something correctly, or close to correctly, your brain will generate neuro-chemical 'rewards'. When this happens, you need to do nothing and close your eyes for 1 or 2 minutes. In other words, do not bring in new sensory stimulations (social media, email, phone, conversation, TV, etc.). This non-sleep deep rest, known as NSDR, allows your brain to replay the motor sequence you've just practiced (on its own) and begin to consolidate it into procedural (long-term) memory.

38. There are many ways to practice and develop motor and musical skills (coordination, timing, feel) and improve...these include practicing on a drum set (acoustic and electronic), playing on a practice pad drum set, or on a practice pad, on your legs with your hands or fingers and moving your feet or toes, listening to lots of music, watching (quality) drumming videos on line, transcribing and writing drums parts and charts, checking out drum company web sites (reading about how the products are made, the different types of drum shells, different wood and other materials used in making sticks, different types of cymbals), and reading drumming magazines and interviews. And don't forget about mental practice and visualization; physically playing will always be better than visualization alone, but those two things combined are the best.

39. Your practice sessions can be short...you can practice and learn in very short periods of time, whenever and wherever you can - even numerous 5 or 10 minute sessions can be effective if done correctly.

40. Neuroplasticity...is the brain and nervous system's ability to change in response to experience - practice, studying, learning, playing.

The Neuroplasticity Super-protocol (Dr. Andrew Huberman):

- 1) be alert (non-negotiable for adult learning; alertness is the door to focus)
- 2) stay focused (non-negotiable for adult learning)...where you look, what you pay attention to, and your ability to concentrate creates a heightened state of focus and alertness in the brain...visual focus is the primary way by which you anchor your cognitive focus.
- 3) generate repetitions (as many as possible)
- 4) expect and embrace errors - they generate an increase in focus
- 5) randomly insert micro-rest intervals (10 to 30 seconds - stop, close eyes, no motor commands or movements)
- 6) use random intermittent rewards or no rewards, especially when expected - don't work for rewards (intrinsic vs. extrinsic motivation...dopamine reward/prediction error)
- 7) limit your learning trigger sessions to 90 minutes or less followed by NSDR (see below). Space your 90-minute practice session 2 to 3 hours apart.
- 8) incorporate 5 - 10 minutes of NSDR (non-sleep deep rest) post-learning sessions
- 9) maximize quality and optimal duration of sleep, especially after practice (when much of plasticity and learning takes place)

41. Errors are the key to learning. During a lesson with a teacher there needs to be a period whereby the student can simply pay attention to their errors without the teacher cueing their attention to the errors or

their corrections. The teacher needs to allow the student their own error recognition, and their errors will identify for them what to focus on.

42. **Be patient**...learning to play an instrument is a mind, brain, and body-altering endeavor. Correct practice is challenging and can even be frustrating. If you set a goal to improve just 1% each day, the cumulative effects over months or even a year will be dramatic. Embrace the process.

43. **None of us have ever, or will ever, graduate...we're all 'students' of the instrument, and need to be lifelong learners.** I believe some of the best drummers are not the ones who have been *playing* the longest, but the ones who have been *learning* the longest, and who continue to learn throughout their entire lifetime. We all have an incredible potential every time we play, and our greatest limitation is not a lack of blazing technique or the shortcomings of our equipment, but the breadth of our imagination. Keep an open mind to explore your endless capability for expression through the drums, and remember to stay fresh, creative, unique, and a student for life. **We're lucky** to have found something we love so much, and to be part a large brotherhood of like-minded people around the world who share our enthusiasm and spirit for the instrument. Let's take the time to learn from each other and to help others through this gift we've been given.