

Peggy Taylor Piano Studio



Why is Practicing Slowly So Important?

Practicing slowly is essential in order to develop and maintain a high level of piano playing. There are actually several different components I'm going to discuss when it comes to the magic of slow practice. Even pieces that you have polished and are on performance level will benefit from the reinforcement of going through slowly. This means playing the piece slowly and definitely looking at the musical score, using no pedal and most often using the metronome. Practicing like this will help solidify your memorization and your fingers. I find this is the best thing to do in the final practice for a performance you are well prepared for.

There is another form of slow practice that you might not have heard about before. I find this to be incredibly important. Let's say you sit down to practice and have a whole piece to work out. Perhaps it is partially learned but the piece is not up to performance level yet. You could try to power through and keep working trying to improve it. However, a much better approach is to not worry about the whole piece at all at this point. Simply start at the beginning of the piece; the first phrase. Play it slowly – slower than you are used to – until you have complete comfort and satisfaction with that section.

If you do this you will undoubtedly spend a lot of time working out that first section. You will probably wonder how you will even get through the whole piece learning so slowly! You will be very tempted to move ahead to the next section before you should. However, if you stay with it, the results will be remarkable.

Continue working slowly on the first section of the piece until it is absolutely perfect and it feels very comfortable. Then begin working up the tempo with the metronome one notch at a time. The good news is that most sections of the piece will not require such intense practice and you will get them on a high level without spending much time at all. However, there will be a few sections that will definitely benefit from this slow practice routine. It comes down to the 80/20 rule:

You should spend 80% of your time on the hardest 20% of the music!

And spend 75% of your time at 75% of the finished tempo!

Most pieces are not written with equal difficulty throughout. By taking sections that are difficult and practicing them slowly until they become comfortable (and then increasing the speed), your practice sessions will become much more productive. Slow practice is an incredible tool to advance your piano playing. Just practicing a piece slowly and definitely without incrementally speeding it up will be tremendously beneficial. Try these techniques out and see how it works for you. I would love to hear your comments.