

WHAT (I THINK) EVERY MUSICIAN SHOULD KNOW

**WHAT (I Think)
EVERY MUSICIAN
SHOULD KNOW**

John Castellano

© John Castellano 2018
All Rights Reserved

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



John Castellano

John Castellano is a graduate of the Juilliard School of Music where he studied saxophone and clarinet with Joseph Allard, a world-renowned musician and teacher. He also studied flute with Harold Bennett, principal flutist with the Metropolitan Opera Orchestra.

He has been a longtime faculty member at New York University where he currently teaches Contemporary Music Performance. He is also the founder and director of the SOJ Jazz Study Center,

WHAT (I THINK) EVERY MUSICIAN SHOULD KNOW

and is the director emeritus and provost of the prestigious Collective School of Music in New York City.

The material presented in this book and in John's other books is a result of over 40 years of experience teaching thousands of students in the areas of musicianship, sight-reading, and improvisation, and is offered in a sequential, progressive, and most of all, practical manner.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

I would like to express my appreciation for the invaluable work done by my editor, Tracy Donley, and for all the constructive feedback I have received from my colleagues and students.

ABOUT THIS BOOK

This book is written for and dedicated to every young musician who has made it their life's work to become the best musician they can possibly be. The topics covered are those which I consider to be the most important to any young student.

If I were to distill everything I have to say into one sentence it would be this: Be thoughtful and patient and get it right the first time, so that you can build on what you've accomplished and apply all your effort to improving as opposed to correcting bad habits.

The first part of the book is divided into 11 chapters, each dealing with a particular topic. The second part is an appendix, which includes a number of worksheets that may be useful for putting into practice what was presented in part one.

If this book helps even one student it will have been worth the effort. All my best to all music students everywhere.

John Castellano

TABLE OF CONTENTS

<u>CHAPTER / TOPIC</u>	<u>PAGE</u>
1. How To Improve	1
2. How Skills Are Developed	6
3. Practicing Effectively	10
4. A Practical Approach to Musicianship	24
5. Using the Metronome Creatively	30
6. Learning to Sight-Read	41
7. Technique (What It Is and Isn't)	52
8. The Lifelong Student	58
9. The Fine Art of Teaching	63
10. Career Opportunities for Musicians	70
11. Conclusion	73

Chapter 1

HOW TO IMPROVE

In any field of endeavor, understanding how to improve is essential. I have seen too many young musicians struggle unnecessarily because they did not understand the dynamic relationship between the various aspects that influence one's ability to improve.

The following represent what I believe are the important areas to be considered:

1. Natural Ability
2. Quality of Guidance
3. Diligent, Focused Effort
4. Quality of Experience
5. The Passage of Time

NATURAL ABILITY

Natural Ability, or talent, is that combination of innate mental and physical attributes that enables one to perform tasks and develop skills with less effort than someone with less natural aptitude. To be born with natural ability is a gift, certainly. However, it has been my observation that those who are less gifted tend to work harder, have a stronger seeking

spirit, and, often, go further than their more naturally talented peers. In any event, everyone, no matter how much talent they are born with, must work to develop their skills.

QUALITY OF GUIDANCE

Quality of Guidance refers to the quality of both formal and informal instruction and/or advice. As a student, this is an area over which you have some degree of control and responsibility. There are many ways to reach a given goal. You must develop the ability to recognize what works best for you—and this may not be what worked best for your teacher. In this regard, it is my opinion that teachers can be rated by the following standard:

1. **The Poor Teacher**
The teacher doesn't have adequate personal experience, and therefore, is unable to explain how it's done.
2. **The Average Teacher**
The teacher has sufficient personal experience, but cannot explain clearly how it is done—or can *only* explain how it is done in terms of his or her own personal experience.

3. The Excellent Teacher
The teacher has personal experience to draw on, but also has the ability and confidence to allow the student to find his or her own way, even if that way is different from the teacher's way.

You are your own best teacher. No one will ever know you as well as you do. Learn to be objective about your personal strengths and weaknesses and recognize what is required to improve. Never depend solely on the advice of others, no matter how much you may admire them.

DILIGENT, FOCUSED EFFORT

Diligent, Focused Effort is the aspect of self-improvement over which you have the most control. "Diligent" means working at the task at hand consistently until the goal is accomplished. "Focused" means that you identify a weakness and design a method of repetitive exercises which will allow you to overcome that weakness by developing a particular skill. In most cases, you will be faced with the problem of dealing with a number of weaknesses simultaneously; therefore, it becomes important to

organize your practice time in a way that prioritizes goals and allocates appropriate periods to work in each of your personal areas of challenge. Your ability to do this effectively will have a great influence on your growth as a musician. (See Chapter 3: Practicing Effectively.)

THE QUALITY OF YOUR EXPERIENCE

The Quality of Your Experience has to do with input—and that includes everything from what you listen to, to the kind and caliber of music you're playing. You are what you take in. Try to expand your horizons by listening to all types of good music—not just what you know best. You will likely discover things that will help you become a better overall musician. Also, try to seek out and play with seasoned musicians. A more accomplished musician will often cut you some slack if they know you are serious about making good music. At least that was my experience as a young aspiring musician. Being the least experienced person in the band is preferable to being the most experienced.

THE PASSAGE OF TIME

The Passage of Time is simply that. In time, with diligent, focused effort—and depending on your natural abilities—you will be able to improve. Interestingly, skills seem to develop when you're not looking. You wake up one day and you have it. But make no mistake: You made it happen through your own persistent effort. Observing this process over time should develop in you the confidence to know, going forward, that with the requisite amount of patience and determination, you can accomplish just about any goal.

A number of years ago, I caught up with a former schoolmate whom I remember as being a good, but average, musician—especially by Juilliard standards. However, when I heard him play again some ten years later, I was amazed at what a truly fine musician he had become. The passage of time! Keep at it and be assured that diligent, focused effort over time will always produce results.