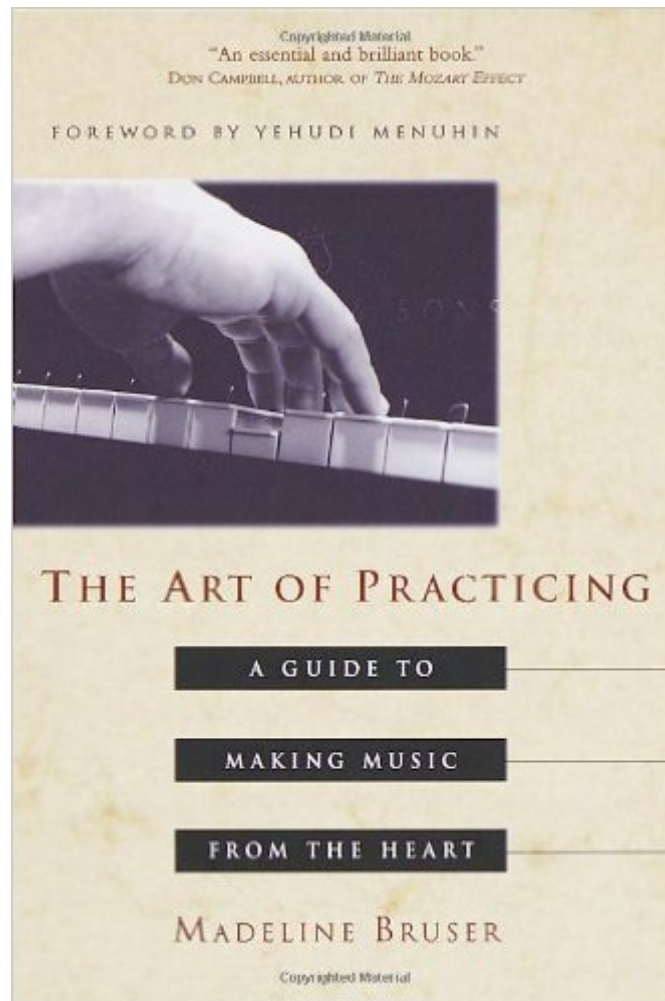


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# The Art Of Practicing: A Guide To Making Music From The Heart



## Synopsis

This landmark book enlightens amateur and professional musicians about a way of practicing that transforms a sometimes frustrating, monotonous, and overly strenuous labor into an exhilarating and rewarding experience. Acclaimed pianist and teacher Madeline Bruser combines physiological and meditative principles to help musicians release physical and mental tension and unleash their innate musical talent. She offers practical techniques for cultivating free and natural movement, a keen enjoyment of sounds and sensations, a clear and relaxed mind, and an open heart and she explains how to Prepare the body and mind to practice with ease Understand the effect of posture on flexibility and expressiveness Make efficient use of the hands and arms Employ listening techniques to improve coordination Increase the range of color and dynamics by using less effort Cultivate rhythmic vitality Perform with confidence, warmth, and freedom Photographs show essential points of posture and movement for a variety of instruments.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

After earning a masters degree in piano performance from a major conservatory, I struggled for years with debilitating performance anxiety and frustration, to the point where I changed careers and moved into the corporate world for 15 years. The practice techniques and disciplines which Madeline Bruser so clearly describes in this book enabled me to recapture my earlier love and enthusiasm for music and performing, and have put me on a path toward "playing from the heart," which has led me among other things to a decision to return to teaching and performing again as a

career. This book is written in a simple and straightforward style. The author is not dogmatic about her ideas, but rather, deals with the physical and emotional aspects of playing music at a basic and fundamental level. Ms. Bruser's own credentials as a pianist and teacher are impressive. The research she cites -- interviews and collaboration with numerous professional musicians and teachers, experts in posture and movement (Alexander, Feldenkreis), and medical professionals, are partly what attracted me to this book, as did the praise for this book from musicians such as Peter Serkin, Yehudi Menuhin, and Richard Stoltzman -- all impeccable sources in my opinion. When I first found this book, I couldn't put it down. I felt like I had found an oasis from my musical struggles, and hope for resolving them. If you are a musician, former musician, or aspiring musician, this book will be a source of encouragement and creative ideas. I highly recommend it!

Madeline Bruser's book offers the pianist a chance to rethink the business of practicing. Instead of seeing time spent working at the keyboard as onerous and exhausting, you can change your approach to one of exploration and pleasurable work. This doesn't mean that you smile all the time or that everything suddenly becomes easy. Bruser's emphasis on "mindfulness" means the focus shifts to the process rather than the manic acquisition of more works, more speed, more technical fireworks. These will come as a by-product to paying attention to the actual playing at hand. Shifting that focus is not as easy as it sounds (or reads). Try sitting silently at the keyboard for two minutes before you start playing. It can seem like an eternity to those of us who are used to rushing up and getting going (and then getting mindful after we drive the piece into the wall). The book is really keyboard-focused in spite of its claim to help all musicians. And it's not sparkling reading; it's rather slow and serious and the photos are dull. The business about a foreword by Menuhin is silly since the comments are vague, leading one to wonder whether he even read the book. So don't consider that a reason for purchase. The publisher should drop the foreword for subsequent editions. There is a fair amount about the mechanics of playing and proper alignment. While less than riveting, that can be a useful review for those who take their technique for granted. It certainly was for me, as was the discussion of various types of bodywork that can help musicians. Bruser's book provides an initial way to rethink the approach to the piano for the serious musician. It will help some more than others. When you think about it, the ratio of time spent practicing to time performing is about 100 to 1. Anything that enriches those hours is worth a read.

This book relieved me of so much anxiety and negativity! Though I spent years studying the piano, I always viewed practicing as a chore and would drive myself into a nervous, sleepless, frenzy of

practicing before every recital. My final recital was twelve years ago -- I had worked myself into a horrible state, had come to despise the piece I was preparing (Beethoven's Six Variations), gave a lousy performance, quit my lessons and got rid of my piano. When a friend asked me to store his piano in our home I started playing again and was amazed to find that I still felt anxious although I was not preparing for any performance. My son's violin teacher loaned me this book and I must say if I'd read it twelve years ago I never would have given up the piano. Using this book I analyzed my physical approach to playing for the first time and realized my posture was horrible and I was actually clenching my teeth when I played! Now I am enjoying myself so much more and I feel so comfortable that I have started playing as an accompanist. There's much that's useful in this book though you may (like me) skip a lot of the technical information or parts that seem geared more toward professional musicians. I especially recommend this book for anyone with performance anxiety.

The strength of this book lies in its ability to inspire and offer some very practical approaches to becoming more self-aware both in practicing and performing. I liked the chapter on stretching and also the question and answer sections. I enjoyed a lot of the stories that the author shared - one in particular on page 61 ... "Once, when the conductor Arturo Toscanini and the cellist Gregor Piatigorsky were about to go onstage to perform, one of them said to the other, "How are you feeling?" "Terrible," he answered, "because I'm no good." "I'm no good either," the first said, "but we're no worse than the rest of them. Let's go." The weakest parts of the book for me as a professional musician and pianist (BM and MM in Piano) were those parts dealing with specific piano repertoire, musical analysis and technique. The writing pertaining to technique and analysis is very dry, unclear, and misleading in parts. Most of that could have been left out with no harm done to the book. There is nothing like a good teacher to make things clear, direct, and straightforward. That aside there is much in the book that can point the way to more freedom and inspiration in practicing and playing.

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