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ISSUE 31

THE Zine

An open music book with sheet music is the central focus, resting on a wooden desk. The word "Practicing" is written in a large, elegant cursive font across the left page. To the right of the book is a wooden practice block with a metal ring. The background is a dark, textured wall.

Practicing

MUSIC AND ARTS MINISTRIES



CANADA AND BERMUDA

PRACTICE: ELEVATING ARTISTRY AND FAITH TOGETHER

BY JAHRED WARKENTIN

We continue our series on musical fundamentals by exploring the topic of practice. Practice is perhaps the foremost musical discipline. Without it we would have very little music at all. Talent is worthless and moot without hard work and dedicated practice. If you've ever been amazed by a musician or artist, chances are they practiced. Practice is the key to all disciplines. If you want to be a great writer? Practice. A great painter? Practice. A great dancer? Practice. Beyond art, sports teams, chefs, and handymen have all had to practice. As humans, we require practice because we are not perfect beings. We need to go over and over skills we wish to perfect.

The same goes for our faith. Every day, we must choose to practice and live in a way that is holy unto the Lord. The more we do it, the better we get at it. We build our relationship with Christ through spiritual practices and disciplines. 1 Timothy 4:14-15 (GNT) says, "Do not neglect the spiritual gift that is in you, which was given to you when the prophets spoke and the elders laid their hands on you. Practice these things and devote yourself to them, in order that your progress may be seen by all." My favourite part of this verse is that Paul tells Timothy that his progress should be seen. Our development and practice can be a witness. It is not the result of perfection but the journey that is praised.

I would be remiss not to highlight the importance of listening in our practice endeavour. Though this issue investigates a new topic, we do not forget or now ignore the importance of listening. On the contrary, our listening exercises ought to be built into our spiritual and artistic practices. Reflecting on his writings, Paul calls the Philippians to "Put into practice what you learned and received from me, both from my words and from my actions. And the God who gives us peace will be with you" (Philippians 4:9 GNT). This issue highlights practical examples of practicing in musical and dramatic contexts, explores what goes into group rehearsals, and identifies how we can use these skills to practice our faith in everyday life, all while listening closely to our practice sessions.

I hope this issue encourages you to pick up your instrument and practice for the sake of your own musical and artistic betterment. Most importantly, I hope it encourages you to pick up your Bible and direct your ears to God to practice the walk the Lord has laid before you.

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DON'T FORGET YOUR HOME PRACTICE!

This article was first published in the department's Theme Magazine in 1985 by Steve Brown and revised by Jahred Warkentin for this publication.

“Don't forget to practice at home!” How often have we heard our bandmaster or worship leader say this? But how do we approach it? What do we attempt to accomplish by practicing at home?

Home practicing is a very personal activity, mostly done in private. Although it is different for everyone, there are some general principles to be followed that will make the time spent productive. To be most effective, practicing should be done on a consistent, regular basis, preferably at the same time and place every day, as it is easier to stick to regular habits. Consistent practice every day is much more productive than longer sessions done sporadically.

Practicing should be an intellectual exercise as much as a physical one. Be analytical and critical of your own playing, listening for imperfections and things to improve. Practice slowly so that each note has a good full sound, correct articulation, intonation, and that every note sounds exactly as you want it to sound. Once this has been achieved, the speed can be increased.

Practice time varies greatly between people and instruments, due to available time, ambition, and physical limitations. Generally, half an hour is enough to maintain the present level of proficiency. More than half an hour gives a player a chance for real progress.

Whatever the amount of time spent in personal practicing, it should be done thoughtfully so that efficient use is made of available time. Have

a goal! Think of the areas you would like to improve on and then design a plan to help you approach them. This will give some focus to your practice time and help you measure your progress.

Daily practice should be divided into at least three sections. It is easy to concentrate on certain aspects of playing and neglect others, so it is important to discipline oneself to work on all aspects of playing. The three areas are:

1. Warm-up
2. Technique
3. Repertoire

Warm-up

The well-used analogy of an athlete warming up before a game is a good one. Musicians are, after all, “athletes of the small muscles.” We need to warm up for the same reasons that an athlete needs to warm up before exerting themselves. The omission of a good warm-up can lead to damaging the muscles in the embouchure, hands, or vocal cords. A good warm-up prepares the body for the demands that will be placed on them during practice or performance. There are many good warm-up routines available for every instrument; choose one and use it each time before playing. Start slow and always think about the sound you are producing. This is the time to make sure that you are doing all the fundamentals (i.e., posture, breathing, fingerings, articulations, slurs, etc.) correctly.

Do nothing strenuous during the warm-up period, as that defeats the

whole purpose of having a warm-up. Do not spend a disproportionate amount of time on the warm-up. Always remember to maintain balance in your practice period.

When practicing brass instruments, buzzing the mouthpiece without the instrument is an excellent means of warming up as it helps focus the lips and gets them buzzing. Buzz various things such as a siren up and down in the register, arpeggios, and simple limited range melodies. Aim for a “rich” buzz with and without the use of the tongue, producing specific pitches accurately. This will help in producing accurate tones and clean articulations when the horn is used.

On the guitar, practicing picking or strumming patterns without concern for the left hand (by muting the strings or holding an easy chord) is beneficial to warm up the right hand. Similarly, playing scales or arpeggios slowly can help warm up the left hand when using a simple picking pattern.

Similar isolations are available on any instrument. Find one that works for you and add it to your routine.

Technique

The area of technique covers many aspects of playing, all of which could not be covered in the average practice session. This is where refining the art of practice habits is very important. There are, however, fundamental areas that must be worked on continually to maintain good technique and production.

The important areas across pitched instruments are scales, arpeggios, and articulation. In working on technique, the use of a metronome is invaluable (there are many free metronome apps. [Google even has a web-based one](#)). Start each exercise slowly, at a tempo where each note can be played perfectly, and gradually build up the speed. The metronome makes you maintain a steady pace, play note values

accurately, and helps measure your progress.

Do not just practice in the keys with which you are familiar. Challenge yourself with scales outside your comfort level. For brass players, this may include scales where the third finger is used - chromatic scales in the low register are particularly helpful in strengthening the third finger. For others, it may include practicing modes outside the common Ionian (major) and Aeolian (minor). Practice in all registers, trying to maintain a consistent sound across the board. Experiment with different fingerings to make difficult patterns easier, or to improve less developed fingers.

Scales are important to maintain evenness and accuracy of technique, as well as improving sight-reading ability through instant recognition of patterns already learned.

Articulation is another area of great importance. The attack is the first thing heard when playing a note, so its importance is obvious. Especially in the brass band world, various articulations are used across styles of playing. Good articulation is a combination of correct movement of the tongue, supported by a steady column of air. The tongue should work as a release valve for the air by pronouncing the syllable "too" (tongue placed slightly above the upper teeth).

Other instruments may want to focus on arpeggios, scales in thirds and sixths, chord or voice leading exercises, tonguing and bowing techniques, stick control, and rhythmic patterns.

But in all areas of technique, have a goal. Don't just whip through different exercises each day to appease your conscience in the vague hope that you are improving. Consider which aspects of your playing you would like to improve, select the appropriate exercises, and work on them every day. Once again, start slowly and increase the

speed as development warrants.

It is a good idea to keep a written record of your practice routine, i.e. what you practiced and at what metronome markings. You can find several practice journal templates online!

Studies and Etudes

Studies and etudes are an excellent way to apply the aspects of technique just studied to actual playing. It is a useful and enjoyable exercise to sight-read straight down the study without any stops. Once this is done, it should be rehearsed slowly and methodically until all difficulties are overcome. You can then record yourself playing on video or audio to analyze your sound, posture, and how well you are incorporating the techniques you are working on. Be critical, but not cruel. Your recordings will not be perfect off the bat, but through slow and methodical work you will notice old difficulties disappear and new focus points emerge.

Repertoire

This section of practice time can be devoted to ensemble parts that need to be practiced at home, solos, and other material that interests you. It is your responsibility as a member of an ensemble (worship team, band, orchestra, etc.) to work on the parts with which you have trouble. It is not the ensemble leader's job to teach these parts during rehearsal.

When working on repertoire, don't dwell on the easy parts that you can play, and conversely, don't just whip by the bits that you can't. Work at the difficult sections slowly and methodically (again, with a metronome), isolating the problem and finding an intelligent approach to overcome it. After you can play the trouble spots, make sure that you can play them in context. It is of little use to be able to play a difficult run without being able to work into it or out of it.

There are several Salvation Army variation solos which are an excellent practice tool, whether you consider yourself a soloist or not. They contain melodic passages, articulation, scale work, flexibility, range, and any number of aspects of playing that can be worked on in one piece. Besides, they are fun and challenging. Find music that you enjoy playing on your own that will push your playing to a new level and that excites you.

The practice room is the place to develop good habits. If you cannot play something well there, you don't stand a chance in performance! Remember to practice in all registers, and at all dynamic levels. Try to simulate performance conditions in practice so that you aren't startled or thrown off by them on stage.

Get into the habit of doing things as well as you can, all the time. Don't settle for anything less.

Don't let practice become a drudgery. Always challenge yourself. Make your routine your personal challenge and look forward to the time with your instrument. Remember, your ensemble depends on it.

Some points to remember:

- Have a goal
- Practice slowly and accurately
- Use a metronome
- Develop good habits in the practice room
- Maintain balance in your practice period
- Practice in all registers, and at all dynamic levels

Most of all, HAVE FUN!



Have You Practiced Today?

by Alison Moore

When I was a child, my home was filled with the sound of live music: singing, piano, cornet, trombone, or euphonium. My parents, three brothers, and I took time each day to practice for our music lessons or to be ready to participate in worship on Sunday. “Have you practiced today?” was a common question in our home, often accompanied by the phrase, “Practice makes perfect, only if practice is perfect!” We learned early on that regular practice was important but only if the way we practiced was effective.

When I hear the word practice today, I think of it both as a verb (to perform or exercise a skill repeatedly or regularly to improve or maintain one’s proficiency) and as a noun, in this case, a spiritual practice. Richard Foster explains, “[A] spiritual practice is simply a way for us to position ourselves so that Christ can dwell within us.” When on earth, Jesus participated in spiritual practices to receive strength and guidance by connecting with God. All the Gospels record Jesus going up a mountain to pray and be alone with His Father; two of the spiritual practices still used today.

The concept of exercises or practices is common to both music and spirituality. When practicing their cornets, my brothers often played exercises from a book called *Arban’s*. Compiled by Joseph Jean-Baptiste Laurent Arban (1825-1889), it’s a comprehensive list of drills covering articulation, tonguing, slurs, tone, and range. My brothers worked through the book and often jumped to the most difficult piece at the end, “The Carnival of Venice.” ([I’m listening to this arrangement of it now. The cornetist, Brindley Venables is magnificent!](#))

Just as there are many methods of practicing music, there are also many ways to connect with God. Three centuries before Arban, St. Ignatius of Loyola compiled a book of spiritual practices. His book, *Spiritual Exercises*, includes types of prayer, ways to engage with the Bible using your imagination,



meditations, reflections, and directions. Its practices have informed many Christians, including Salvationists, throughout the years as they have spent time with God. He founded his exercises on the practices of Jesus and the saints; those who engaged in prayer, solitude, worship, teaching, and leading others in spiritual truth. Many of us engage in some of these same practices. ([Click here for a longer list of practices](#)). The variety of spiritual practices provides ways to meet God in different seasons of faith, for different personalities, or on different occasions.

In addition to the variety of methods, music practice and spiritual practices have other things in common. Both require a commitment of time. Both can be done alone or with a group. And both are necessary for improvement in effectiveness. However, as I thought about it more deeply, I discovered that there are also a few key differences.

The goal is different. Apart from the obvious, that one is about making music and the other about spirituality, the foundation of these goals is different. We practice music to be able to play or sing a selection perfectly; to perform a piece of music at a specific time with the least number of errors in pitch and the best portrayal of the intended message. Perfection is the goal. In contrast, the goal of spiritual practices is a lifelong relationship with God through Christ and the Holy Spirit. Like playing with wooden blocks with a toddler, the goal of spiritual practices is not to have a perfect outcome (i.e., a tower that never falls down), but rather to benefit from the time spent together, when the tower falls and when it's being built up, as they enjoy each other's company. It's not about perfection; it's about relationship.

With these differing goals, the approach of the player and the pray-er is also different. Musicians achieve their goal through hard work to gain control over their body and mind to produce a better outcome. It is their effort that brings about change. Christians reach the goal of spiritual practices by relinquishing control of the outcome. We achieve the goal of spiritual practices (to connect with God deeply) as we let go of our own agenda and allow the Holy Spirit to work in us. Our work, when engaging in a spiritual practice, is to turn our mind to God and be willing to receive what He has to give us through His Spirit. Like a leaf floating down a bubbling stream, we benefit from spiritual practices as we rest in the power of the Spirit with the outcome of our prayers, fasting, silence, or worship.

Richard Foster writes, "The testimony of the Scripture is that God has already gotten a life for us in Christ. We need only participate in the life already offered to us. We may rest with relief and freedom in the knowledge that it is not up to us to create a spiritual life through spiritual practices. That would be like asking a child to create her own family life by amassing enough childlike actions to make it come true."

Sometimes we don't get this aspect of spiritual practice right, though, do we? We think it's about our ability to keep up the practice of something like "daily devotions." Or we try fasting and last about an hour before giving in. Silence or solitude seems to be impossible with the barrage of noise around and within us. So, we give up on the spiritual practices thinking that they must have worked in some ancient time when life was less busy and less complex. Or we think that perhaps they are just for the "spiritually elite" and not for a regular person like us (which is like saying only virtuoso musicians need to practice – huh? Of course not!)

The reality is no one can be 100% consistent in any spiritual practice. It is more important to be willing to connect with God rather than to be consistent or perfect. How you do that will be unique to you, but what is universal is God's invitation to connect with Him.

God invites us to join Him in living out His Kingdom in this world and we are equipped to do this as we spend time with Him. Through Paul, God also invites us to "Sing and make music from your heart to the Lord." There is a deep connection between spiritual practices and making music in The Salvation Army. Our spiritual health impacts the effectiveness of the music we share in worship. As we deepen our relationship with God, His Spirit works in our bodies to help us play or sing to the best of our ability, and at the same time He uses the outcome of our performance to enliven the music with His message.

As you take time to practice music today, what motivates you? As you engage in a spiritual practice, what motivates you? Jesus invites us to meet with Him. He never coerces or forces but rather waits for us to choose to take time to meet with Him. As we individually take time and grow in our relationship with God, we become more like Him. As a community of people becoming like Christ, we are built up into a great harmonious, unified Kingdom of God, bringing glory to Him by sharing His message with the world. Each of us is a vital part of this Kingdom. You are vital! God desires to use you and music to proclaim His love to others.

Have you practiced today? Additionally, have you shared in a spiritual practice with Jesus, talking to Him, listening for His voice, through the Word, through music, through silence? The spiritual practice is perfect when we simply take time to intentionally focus on Christ. Jesus invites you. "Draw near to God, and He will draw near to you." He's waiting for you to join Him. Take a moment now, if you can, to be still before God. Feel free to click on the QR code to listen and pray.

Draw Me Close to You



<http://www.usbeadles.com/alison/IComeBeforeYouLord.mp3>

Vocals - Deliah Williams

Music, Lyrics & Piano - Alison Moore

Singing With Purpose

A Discussion With Cathie Koehnen on Rehearsals,
Spiritual Practice, and *A Choral Convocation*

by Jahred Warkentin

On April 6, 2024, six staff songster brigades from Canada, the USA, and the UK gathered for a history-making concert and a program of epic proportions. The Canadian Staff Songsters (CSS) welcomed the staff songsters from the USA Central, East, South, and Western territories as well as the International Staff Songsters (ISS) from the UKI territory for the first time for a convocation dedicated to worshipping the Lord through song. Each songster brigade took turns showcasing individual pieces, and together they sang in four massed numbers. This event was also supported by the Canadian Staff Band. Highlights included the massed performances of the *Hallelujah Chorus* from Handel's *Messiah* and Len Ballantine's *Behold the Tabernacle of God*, both under Ballantine's leadership as former staff songster leader for both the ISS and CSS. You can read more about the night [here](#) or watch and relive the concert [here](#).

I sat down with CSS leader Cathie Koehnen to discuss the rehearsal preparations involved in putting on a concert of this scale, and how faith is interwoven with the fabric of choral rehearsal. Outside of her work as a soldier in her corps and CSS, Cathie is a retired high school music teacher and brings her years of experience working with school ensembles and teaching to craft productive and inspirational rehearsals.

Cathie first explained that she spends hours in preparation for each rehearsal. This involves reviewing recordings of previous rehearsals and performances and notating what changes and musical decisions she wishes to make. For Cathie, her rehearsal begins alone at home with a pencil, score, and a closely tuned ear. The best rehearsals are thought-out and methodical, especially when they involve many participants. CSS rehearsals always begin with a warm-up and a piece the choir knows well. After that, she tackles the harder repertoire—the pieces that need the most work. The beginning of practice is an important time because it is when you are most focused, and especially with singers, when your voice or body is the least strained, making it ideal for working on difficult passages.



Even during this time of rehearsal, Cathie is careful to balance fast and slow songs and ensure the choir does not burn out too quickly. At the midpoint of their 2.5-hour rehearsal, the songsters break for devotions, focusing on building community, relationships, and spiritual development. The second half of the rehearsal focuses on polishing newly practiced works, maintaining repertoire staples, and memory work.

Cathie lays out a great guide that can be used in both personal practice and when scheduling your own rehearsals. Whether it be rehearsing for a big event like *A Choral Convocation*, or smaller events like corps ministry weekends, Cathie and the CSS take their rehearsals very seriously. For this event, there are three levels of practice: individual practice by each singer, group practice by each songster brigade, and over two hours of practice with groups for massed selections and pieces with the band. Continually and throughout these separate but unified practices, each person and group will be “tweaking” aspects and perfecting their performance.

While talking with Cathie, she brought together several aspects of musical practice that are reflected in our walk with God. “We do actually have to practice as Christians. I think sometimes so many people become a Christian and they do the thing... they go to church, and they do the thing. But it's really that internalizing and looking within that changes us.” Much like our musical rehearsals, she says, “We need to look within to see the spots where we need to work on the things that God is really showing us in ourselves, in our quest to be Christ-like.”

This spiritual practicing starts the same as CSS preparations. She says, “Likeness, holiness, all of that is a journey, just like how we look at the whole piece of music first, and then we break it down and see where the weak parts are.” Constant tweaks and occasional overhauls are required to live a life that is for Christ. If this is the beginning of your journey walking with the Lord or practicing, take each phrase and moment slow, ensuring you are in tune with the Spirit or with the band. In both personal devotion and in the CSS, Cathie places an emphasis on prayer. “We pray a lot in rehearsals. Prayer has become an important focal part in our ministry.”

“Music itself is alive... it's the marriage of the text with the melody and the harmony. And then you get this beauty of sound, but it's alive, like you. You sit in that sound, and it's a spiritual experience itself, because it's always moving. It's doing. It's not just stagnant; it's moving.”

-Cathie Koehnen

And so, too, do we worship a living God, read the living Word, and practice a faith we ought to bring to life! Certain rhythms are required to stay alive: nourishment, sleep, shelter, etc. Practice and rehearsal keep our music in tip-top shape, and our spiritual practices continue to lead us closer in step with the Lord.

So, go practice. Practice your instrument. Practice your prayer. Practice your listening to God and to intervals. Practice reading your Bible and sight-reading. Continue to strive to get better, so you can convene with other believers and lift His name in the most beautiful way.





Practicing Drama in the Church

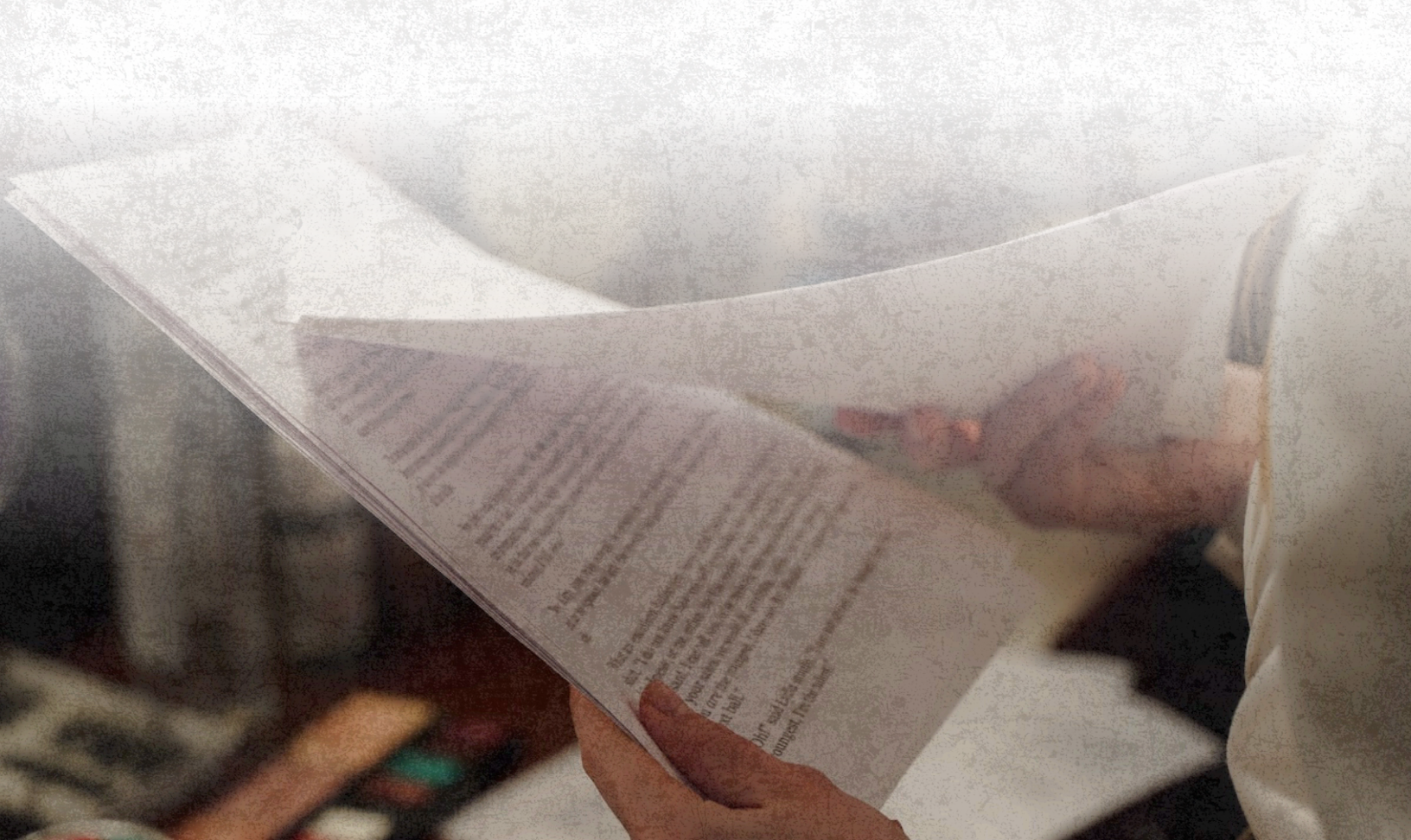
by Major Heather Samuel, BA, BTS, MTS

Practice is a discipline that affects every aspect of our lives. Church life is no different in this. From the music to the reading of Scripture, to presenting a sermon, practice is important. Words matter. Actions matter. Intonation matters. This is where practicing techniques used for drama are quite useful. Using words, our voices, and bodily actions all contribute to the presentation of drama and aid in other aspects of church life as well.

But how does one practice for drama? Isn't that just learning words written on a page? To try and answer these questions, let's begin by looking at the "how" of practicing drama. After the "how," we can then look at the "why."

How does one practice drama?

To start, all items used in a worship service should be covered in prayer. Prayer is essential to life as a believer, so it only makes sense that this is where to start when practicing drama for the church as well. Pray over the words that are being said. If the drama is being written, pray over inspiration for the message of that drama. Ask God to be at the centre of the practice and of the drama that is going to be presented. Pray for the presentation, that it will point to God, that it will help the participants to worship God, and that it would lead people back to God. Whether an individual presentation or a group effort, pray that God would be at the centre. If the drama is a group presentation, pray together at the start of each rehearsal and performance. Pray that any disagreements would be handled with grace and love.



Once prayer has infused the process, and assuming that the script has been chosen, rehearsals or practice can start. The practice, however, does not yet turn to the script, as warm-ups need to take place. Warm-ups are essential to practice as they allow for your whole body, as well as your voice, to give its best. To prepare the voice, use breathing and vocal exercises to optimize usage. To prepare the body, stretch as you would for warm-ups before intense exercise. Combine breathing exercises with stretching exercises. Practicing a script should be an intense exercise, learning vocal inflection, pauses, breaths, as well as movements, so warming up is essential to the practice of drama.

Once stretching and vocal warm-ups have happened, continue your warm-up by using the script. If you are presenting a solo item, such as a monologue or dramatic Scripture reading, read the script over a few times to get a feel for the words on the page. Read the script again to try and distinguish the breaks, the inflections in the voice of the character, and the meaning behind the words. Look at the nouns, adjectives, and verbs to explore how they are functioning within the sentence.

If you are practicing in a group for a group presentation, read the script over together a few times and then discuss the script. What do you think are the main points? Where do you think the author wanted to take the characters? Again, as a group, analyze the script to find the meaning behind the words. Look at the nouns, adjectives, and verbs to see what their function is, both in the sentence and to the overall aesthetic of the drama.

Once this analysis has happened, start practicing the script together as you would if you were performing the drama in front of an audience. Decide where characters should be standing, sitting, or moving to, unless this is indicated in the script, in which case, please follow the direction of the writer as there is likely a purpose for that movement to occur. Practicing as a group will help to gel the group together in both the dramatization and the desired outcome.

If you are practicing a solo piece, read it over, and practice the movements that you feel are important. Always heed the direction of the author in the process. Make sure that you practice more than one run-through each rehearsal, as this will help to solidify the movements, words, and overall presentation of the piece. Try using different voices, different accents, and different styles to challenge you in what you have chosen. This can help to determine the voice of the character, providing more of a sense of the meaning behind the words.

Once the piece has been practiced a few times, sit down as a group and discuss the practice that has occurred, using questions such as:

How natural did that feel?

Is the intent of the author getting through in our interpretation?

Is God being glorified?

How can we improve on this as a team in order to present the best that we can to God and to the congregation around us?

Finish the way that you started the practice: pray together over the drama and over the group, addressing any prayer concerns which will help to bring the group even closer in fellowship together.

Another practical tip is to record the drama, either through video or audio. Play this recording over to aid in the memorization process. This helps to keep the words in your mind which not only helps you memorize, but also aids in keeping the focus of the character in mind.

Having looked at the “how,” let us now turn our focus to the “why.”

Why is it important to practice drama?

There are a few very good reasons for why we practice. First, and this is a reason for practicing anything within the church service, we want to make sure that we are glorifying God in all that we do. While this might seem to be obvious, sometimes this point can be forgotten in the “doing.” We also want to make sure that we are showing our best to the congregation so that they too may be able to fully worship God through the presentation. Not knowing lines, sloppy movements, and a lack of understanding around the drama can all lead to distraction and take away from the primary intent of why the drama is being presented in the first place.

Ultimately, God should be at the heart of everything that is done or said in the church. Practice allows us to give our best to God in everything that we do and say. This is what we should all strive for in the church, whether it be through music, Bible reading, sermons, or dramatic presentations. To God be the glory!



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Scholarships are available by application

TRAVEL SUBSIDY

Travel subsidies are available to students travelling from outside Ontario and Quebec



<https://salvationist.ca/music-and-arts-ministries/tms/>

COMMENTS & SUGGESTIONS



Feel free to send us your ideas, articles, videos, posters and pictures. This newsletter is meant to cover all music and arts ministry types from across the territory, and we need your help to reach every corner. Forward any information to Jahred.Warkentin@salvationarmy.ca and we'll do our best to put you in our next issue!

Maple Leaf Brass

Recent Maple Leaf Brass titles:

No. 127	Hymn Setting	Pass Me Not	[Harold Burgmayer]
No. 128	Song Arrangement	Consecrated	[Philip Rayment]
No. 129	Festival Arrangement	Shout Aloud!	[Michael Cooper]
No. 130	Song Arrangement	The Wounds of Christ	[Dale Pittock]

<https://salvationist.ca/music-and-arts-ministries/publications/maple-leaf-brass/>

