

## Hans Jensen: On Practicing With the Mind, Not Just the Fingers

### Description

Eavesdropping without permission is not cool, of course, but if you were to sit on the practice floor of most music schools and just listen, what's the one thing you probably would NOT hear very much of?

Silence.

When I was going through school, I thought practicing meant making sounds come out of my instrument. And that silence didn't count.

In fact, if there were too many pauses or silences in my practice as a child, my mom would get suspicious and ask what I was doing (though to be fair, she was right to be suspicious, as in those days, silence usually meant I had gotten distracted).

However, when you're no longer an easily distractible 8-year old, one of the telltale signs of poor practice is actually the lack of silence. Because a lot of the most crucial aspects of practicing – like planning and reflecting – is accompanied by silence.

Umm...so...what sorts of things should we be doing or thinking during these silences, anyway?

### Meet Hans Jørgen Jensen

Cellist and distinguished pedagogue Hans Jensen is on the faculty of Northwestern University, The Royal Conservatory in Toronto, The Meadowmount School of Music, and The Young Artist Program at the National Arts Center in Ottawa.

Many of Hans's students have gone on to hold positions in leading orchestras, teach in prestigious music schools around the country, and win prizes in top competitions.

Hans has also recently published several acclaimed books on practice and pedagogy – [PracticeMind](#) (practice strategies), as well as [CelloMind](#) and [ViolinMind](#) (both on intonation).

In today's episode, we'll explore...

- 1:54 – The moment that sparked Hans's love for the cello
- 4:31 – How does Hans help to spark motivation in his students?
- 6:28 – Is it possible for a young student to go from unmotivated to motivated at some point down the road? Or seemingly untalented to talented? Unmusical to musical?
- 11:03 – How does one go from being a mechanical player to a more expressive player?

- 13:14 – Hans explains how one of his older students went from being unable to play fast to being able to play very fast.
- 16:36 – How important is it to get feedback from others? Is it possible to give yourself feedback, or does it also have to come from more experienced musicians?
- 20:28 – Can one learn to become a better teacher as well, even if you may not be a good teacher at first? How? What exactly changes, that enables them to become a better teacher?
- 23:15 – Hans explains why he thinks many musicians “play way too much when they practice,” and why the key to better practice is not in the fingers but in the mind.
- 25:10 – How do you decide what to do with a phrase, when you have many different options or ideas?
- 28:22 – What Hans learned from Joseph Silverstein, that changed his teaching.
- 32:39 – Hans shares some thoughts on how YouTube has impacted learning – is it a good thing? Bad thing? How can we listen to others without feeling bad about ourselves?
- 35:05 – Why is it important for us to understand the connection between rhythm and technique?
- 41:55 – What is the difference between inner pulse and outer pulse?
- 44:22 – Why is it so important to practice octaves? Hans also shares a great trick on how to play them better in tune, and explains why this works.

NOTE: There are a few parts during the interview where Hans illustrates a concept with hand motions. So a video version of the interview is available below for added clarity.

<https://vimeo.com/804747830>

## Notes

25:53 – Hans references a number of different cellists with regards to playing Bach – here are a few, if you’d like to do a deeper dive and listen to what he was alluding to:

- [Pierre Fournier](#)
- [Pablo Casals](#)
- [Janos Starker](#)
- [Lynn Harrell](#)
- [Daniil Sharfran](#)
- [Erling Blöndal Bengtsson](#)

28:11 – Hans also mentions [D.C. Dounis](#). You can see a short video about one of his bowing concepts, as demonstrated by violinist [Daniel Phillips](#):

- [Dounis Violin Principles: Bow Changes - @tonebase](#)

31:19 – I reference a TED talk about dance – here it is:

- [In the Internet age, dance evolves](#)

49:42 – We start talking a little about intonation, and Hans mentions harmonic vs. melodic intonation. For more on this, check out the podcast episode with cellist [Minna Chung](#), Hans's [CelloMind](#) co-author:

- [Minna Chung: On the Mysteries of Intonation and How to Play More in Tune](#)

## More Hans Jensen

The PracticeMind Instagram has a ton of tips:

- [PracticeMind @Instagram](#)

The PracticeMind YouTube channel also has exercises and tips to level up your practice:

- [PracticeMind @YouTube](#)

And here's the Ovation Press website, where you can get weekly practice tips, and a copy of [PracticeMind](#), [CelloMind](#), or [ViolinMind](#):

- [Ovation Press](#)

### Date Created

March 2023