



# **The Perfect Wrong Note: Learning to Trust Your Musical Self**

*William Westney*

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## **The Perfect Wrong Note: Learning to Trust Your Musical Self** William Westney

(Amadeus). In this groundbreaking book, prize-winning pianist and noted educator William Westney helps readers discover their own path to the natural, transcendent fulfillment of making music. Drawing on experience, psychological insight, and wisdom ancient and modern, Westney shows how to trust yourself and set your own musicality free. He offers healthy alternatives for lifelong learning and suggests significant change in the way music is taught. For example, playing a wrong note can be constructive, useful, even enlightening. The creator of the acclaimed Un-Master Class workshop also explores the special potential of group work, outlining the basics of his revelatory workshop that has transformed the music experience for participants the world over. Practicing, in Westney's view, is a lively, honest, adventurous, and spiritually rewarding enterprise, and it can (and should) meet with daily success, which empowers us to grow even more. Teachers, professionals, and students of any instrument will benefit from this unique guide, which brings artistic vitality, freedom, and confidence within everyone's reach.

## **The Perfect Wrong Note: Learning to Trust Your Musical Self Details**

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# From Reader Review *The Perfect Wrong Note: Learning to Trust Your Musical Self* for online ebook

## Genni says

This is one of the most helpful books I have found on both practicing and teaching music. The title is catching, as I was always taught to avoid mistakes at all costs. You begin a piece by practicing VERY slowly, avoiding all mistakes. You slowly increase your speed, again, at all times avoiding mistakes, until you reach the desired speed. This seems to work in the practice room, but why is it that outside the practice room, everything you thought you knew vanishes? Another result of this type of practice is an almost stilted way of playing, unless one is of the lucky few that flourish in spite of this fear of mistakes.

Obviously, Westney encourages mistakes in the classroom, not at the expense of accuracy, but with accuracy as precisely the goal. He makes a convincing case that pushing oneself and sabotaging oneself (something I also recently heard Daniil Trifonov talk about) while practicing reveals exactly where gaps in knowledge of the music lie and are the perfect learning opportunity. Knowledge is fluid, in some sense, and practice has to make room for that.

Another thing he focuses on is the physical act of playing music. He gives the example of walking. Just as one learns to walk by trial and error until the body just “gets” it, music making has a similar aspect of learning to it that I have almost completely ignored since I was a kid. I have been equating learning with memorizing notes, chord progressions, musical architecture, etc, etc. The truth is, every piece has a different physical “feel” to it, different hand positions that feel completely different from even other similar pieces in that they begin and end somewhere different. Different jumps or techniques are things the body doesn’t learn one time “for good”, but are something that have to constantly be reassessed in new contexts. This has made a huge difference in how I practice, and also how I teach. And in some ways, this physical aspect is something that cannot be taught to another. His example of “Helga” was one that I found especially enlightening:

“Helga’s odd, counterproductive arm movements had seemed vaguely familiar to me, as if I’d seen someone play like that before. Now I remembered; her famous teacher used exactly the same technique. But with one great difference: when he did it, it worked beautifully.”

If you have a musical background similar to what I have described, I can only recommend picking up this book immediately. There is a lot of food for thought.

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## Beverly says

I was afraid this would be a touchy-feely self-help book, but I picked it up as a nervous beginning piano student and found that it's a delightful exploration of how we interact with music, especially as students of any musical instrument or the voice. Westney helps us think productively about our stumbling efforts to get the beautiful sounds in our heads to express themselves physically and to find joy doing so. For example, here's how to approach the dreaded piano lesson: roll up your sleeves, plunge in, and think, "What can I learn today?" Basically, we need to think of our music lessons not as performances but as interesting experiments

in figuring out how to do something new. My favorite quote involved a violin student in his 80s: He awoke each day "happy to know I have so much to learn today."

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### **Xiaoyu Li says**

Good book, not just for music, but for other things.

If we want do our best, please feel our heart, let our body know what we want, go ahead, even in a mistake.

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### **Sophia says**

So so so so helpful as a musician and music teacher--reminds me that the real reason I play is for the music not for the competition.

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### **Ruth says**

I loved this book. It's a musician's practical and psychological guide to music-making, and how to approach both the learning AND teaching of music, turning aside from approaches that exacerbate perfectionist self-criticism and celebrating approaches that free the musician to learn from and even enjoy those "juicy mistakes" in the practice room and in the performance hall. Really, in many ways, this book is applicable to life as much (and maybe more) than it is to music. It's just as great as 'The Inner Game of Tennis' or 'Full Catastrophe Living,' which I also love a lot. Great book! I'll continue to refer to it, I am sure.

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### **Valarie M. says**

I had lessons once...this book holds true to the thought that music that is made naturally, not with pretense or strain, brings forth fascinating, pleasurable, worthwhile results.

I've gone back several times to re-read just to keep me on point!

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### **Kat says**

I think the only bad part of this book is the title, which makes it sound like a self-help book. It's a lot more academic than that, and is probably more useful to music teachers than music students. It does have really fabulous suggestions for effective practicing though, minimizing frustration and time spent by paying careful attention to the specific mistakes we're making and what information the body is trying to convey through its choice of mistakes.

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## **Joe says**

Interesting. I'm looking for and reading books on music practice and music theory. This one explores some of the more psychological aspects of music performance and practice. It has brought the "Delacroix" method to my attention.

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## **Sidi says**

This book is on my reading list from my Juilliard piano class. I only read last two chapters: it's not about academic teaching and philosophy of self practice. Amateurs are mucks lovers with maturity and experience, sense of change and understanding of patience. Let it go and let it happen.

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## **Becky says**

An insightful rethinking of music lessons, practice time, and masterclasses with the goal of more musicality, enjoyment, and healthy playing.

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## **Jeffrey says**

This book is a game changer, read it. I feel a new freedom in my approach to practice. Westney really gets it.

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## **Sarah says**

I appreciated reading about William Westney's approach to music lessons. The book is meant as a counter/reaction to the common attitude in standard music lessons that mistakes are bad and to be avoided at all costs. Westney points out that learning to play an instrument is a physical thing akin to sports, and that mistakes are an inherent part of the body learning the right movements. Trying to avoid making mistakes to begin with leads to tension and tentative playing. He presents a solid overview of how to approach practicing in a fun, mindful way that helps you learn from mistakes.

While I resonated with much of what he said about how to approach learning music from a body-based, mindful perspective, I didn't feel like I was exactly the target audience for the book because I mostly improvise/compose rather than learn fixed pieces. That said, the principles behind his approach certainly still apply to my context. I think the target audience for the book is probably adults who had music lessons as children and are either professional (but perhaps have issues with tension and performance) or are wanting to return to music as adults but don't want the same experience they had as children. Music teachers could certainly benefit from the book as well.

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### **msjoonee says**

A mind-clearing, thought-provoking look at how to make an honest, positive connection with music and how to come to terms with ourselves when we sit down to embark on that most humbling of experiences...practicing a musical instrument.

The perfect book to pick up when you feel that you are starting to lose the joy in music making and are instead dreading the thought of practicing. An important addition to the library of any musician or music teacher (of which i am both).

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### **Bunnydozer says**

I tutor regularly, and this book gave me a new perspective on how people learn and teach. I wasn't all the way through when the new Harry Potter came out. Me being a big dork, I put this one down to start the new book. I've been distracted since but I definatly want to finish this one.

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### **Hannah says**

I started this book for my own practice, but quickly incorporated the ideas into my own teaching as well. This book began my informal study into physical learning and self-expression, and I am still at the very beginning of this exploration. There are a lot of problems with the way music is generally taught, which has a lot to do with the fact that many students become discouraged and quit. Returning to an exploratory and not-judgmental approach to learning is ultimately more satisfying, and more effective.

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