

The Process of Progress – by Mike Overly

There are many reasons why students quit their bass lessons. Sometimes it's because the teacher doesn't inspire them, or because the lessons aren't focused enough on their specific goals. In some cases, it could be that the teacher isn't qualified and really doesn't know how to help the student become the musician they would like to be. Then again, it could be that the student's relationship with the teacher and the teachings aren't as focused as they need to be in order for the student to progress.

Having taught fretboard music successfully for many years and to many students, I have come to realize that the way in which a student relates to the teacher has a very meaningful effect on the student's development. Different students get varied results from the same teacher and teachings. This is because different students approach the learning process uniquely. For example, one student might believe to know better than the teacher and eventually quits, while another student learns and applies everything that is presented and becomes a world-class bass player. We all understand the wonderful attitudes and behaviors of the student that goes on to become a world-class player, however, let's look more carefully at different types of behaviors commonly displayed by students who can easily become frustrated and quit their bass lessons.

I want to be perfect.

Some students want to master everything that is presented in a lesson before moving on to something else. This may seem like a good idea, but in reality, it is not the most effective way to progress. Music is best learned when many elements are worked on simultaneously without worrying about mastering any one given component. For example, the student must work on the technique of playing the bass, while at the same time learning the theory of harmony, improvisation and composition. The point is, after learning something new, don't hesitate to begin combining it with everything else you have previously learned. Application and integration are essential elements that must be developed from the very beginning.

By proceeding in this way, the student will not let one aspect of their learning get too far ahead of the other things that they know. Approaching music and the bass in this multi-tasking manner will keep the student in balance.

I only want the new.

Some students think that each lesson should consist mainly of new material. However, this isn't necessarily the best approach. The simple reason is that too much new information leads to the feeling of being overwhelmed. This is because there is not enough time to integrate this new information with past information. Being overwhelmed is what causes most students to become frustrated and quit. Here's an important point, simply learning new information will not improve technique. Technique takes time to develop. Remember, technique demands more than just simply being aware of a new musical concept, it also takes practice to acquire the fluency of technical skill to play the bass proficiently. Remember, you can buy knowledge, but can't buy technique -- technique must be earned!

Said again, the student may think that learning something new in each lesson is a good thing. But as time goes by they will notice that they are not making significant technical progress. At this point, the student may want to quit because they think lessons aren't effective, but that is really not the reason for their lack of progress. While it's true that learning new information is an important part of lessons, if the student is only interested in learning the new, they probably will not continue with lessons and will miss out on one of the most important aspects of taking lessons which is unfoldment of knowledge. Unfoldment being the order in which the information is

presented. It is this in-order presentation of knowledge that makes bass lessons so valuable. The student will need to practice patience to realize this and gain the benefits of unfolding lessons over time.

I know what's best.

Some students have been playing for awhile and perhaps have studied with other bass teachers. These students may have preconceived ideas about what their lessons should be and may wish to control what and how they are taught. Asking questions and expressing goals to the teacher is a good thing, but trying to direct the teacher as to what and how to teach is not. If the student seeks help from a qualified teacher, they should trust the teacher and accept the fact that the teacher knows more about music and bass than they do and therefore can successfully teach the student.

With that said, all bass teachers are not the same, some are more qualified than others. This is why the student needs to clearly communicate their goals, and challenges to the teacher. That way, if the student is not receiving what they communicated, then they should seek a different teacher. What's important is that the student needs to have faith and belief in the teacher they have selected and commit themselves to the lessons.

If the teacher has helped others to succeed, then probably that teacher will be able to help you as well. Just remember, the teacher's ability to help you will be limited and delayed if you constantly question everything that is taught. Working with a qualified teacher is the fastest and most efficient way for you to achieve your goals. So, if you truly want to accelerate the process of progress, then you should think about your relationship with your teacher to see if there is any room for improvement.

There are many factors that affect the rate of progress when learning music and the bass. But if you study with a qualified teacher, follow the most effective music method and develop rewarding practice habits, then you will become the musician playing bass that you have always wanted to be!