



# Slow Practice

Joel Smales



**H**ave you ever been in a situation where you needed to learn a great deal of music or just one very difficult piece of music in a very short time? Have you found yourself making the same mistake over and over in a solo you are working on? Is there a sticking passage that you just can't get in your hands? Want to fix it? Try practicing slow.

I don't like eating cabbage, being stuck in traffic, cleaning windows or...practicing slow. Well, at least I used to not like practicing slow. I never liked practicing slow because I thought I wasn't getting anywhere musically. I thought that if everyone outside my practice room door hears me practicing slowly, they won't think I'm any good! If I am practicing slow, how will I be able to play the music up to tempo in just a few days?!

I no longer think that way. I have discovered that if I practice slowly, I will learn the material more quickly, efficiently, and with more accuracy and attention to detail. Practicing slow allows my hands and mind to learn the material and internalize it, so that later my hands and mind work more on "auto-pilot," rather than hanging on for dear life.

I have a motto: **The slower you practice, the faster you learn.**

It's true. Practicing slow allows me more time to learn a specific sticking pattern, pay attention to dynamics and phrasing, play the

correct notes with more accuracy and hear the music in its correct form. When all of these elements fall into place by practicing slow, I learn the music much faster. Once my hands and mind know the music, I can plug in my fast chops and play the music up to speed.

I never liked practicing slow until I discovered the tangible results slow practice provided. When I started practicing slow and saw how quickly I learned the material, I was convinced. I became determined to teach my students to practice slowly. Many students don't want to. They want to play

the music either as fast as possible or as fast as they hear their favorite musician playing it. However, it doesn't take long to convince them. I choose a particularly difficult section of music (music I know they can play with some practice), and ask them to play it. They start and then make a mistake. They start again, same tempo, and usually the same mistake. Start a third time, more mistakes. I ask them to take it slower and they usually either stay at the same tempo, not realizing they haven't slowed down, or take it only slightly slower and continue to make mistakes. At this point, all that is happening is the student is getting frustrated and reinforcing mistakes. When I point out that they haven't actually slowed down enough and give them a new slow tempo to play, they have much more success, often playing the entire section correctly the first time when practicing slowly. New converts to the school of slow practice.

Use a metronome and write down the different m.m. you use. You will slow down more using a metronome rather than just "trying" to slow down.

Remember, "The slower you practice, the faster you learn!" Practice slow and you will learn the music in less time and with greater accuracy. You will have less frustration, more positive music-making, and reinforce the good, rather than the mistakes.

Now about that cabbage...