

Absorbing Recorded and Live Music

"My first relationship to any kind of musical situation is as a listener." -- Pat Metheny

Learning how to listen to recorded and live music is one of the most valuable tools a musician can have. If you approach listening correctly, the results are much like taking a private lesson or attending a master class.

Recorded Music

"Jazz is not background music. You must concentrate upon it in order to get the most of it. You must absorb most of it. The harmonies within the music can relax, soothe, relax, and uplift the mind when you concentrate upon and absorb it. Jazz music stimulates the minds and uplifts the souls of those who play it as well as of those who listen to immerse themselves in it. As the mind is stimulated and the soul uplifted, this is eventually reflected in the body." -- Horace Silver

Learning to properly absorb recorded music is important to those who do not have easy access to high quality live performances. This is especially true for those who do not reside in or near a major metropolitan area.

For getting the most from recorded music you need to create an environment where you will not be interrupted, where you are relaxed, and where you can concentrate. Too many times a player will bring home a new recording, maybe have friends over, start the music, and only **half** listen to it because of a number of possible distractions (like your friend... "Dude.") Under these circumstances, that person may grasp only a small portion of the true musical essence the artist(s) were conveying.

What I suggest is the following: decide upon an artist who has recorded music available that you might like to study with. Setup a listening "space"

From Chapter 2, “It’s All About the Music”

in your apartment, trailer, house, presidential palace, teepee, or wherever. Do your best to eliminate distractions (like “Dude.”) You may want to eat something first, so an empty/growling stomach doesn’t distract you. I recommend listening to music with a good set of headphones, but if this is not possible, make sure you have enough volume on your exterior speakers so as to not miss a single note or nuance.

Get comfortable, start the music, and close your eyes. When you start listening, visualize yourself in the setting where the music was recorded. Listen, be open minded, and concentrate. Also, hold your instrument while you listen, and finger along.

Now imagine the musicians you’re listening to are listening to **you** play. In a sense, this helps you become part of the recording. (Also, listen for any mistakes **they** may make.)

Doing this, you’ll get much more from recorded music than the average listener. After a while play along with your favorite artists. It’s a nice experience to sit in with for example, John Coltrane, the Chicago Symphony, Stevie Wonder, or William Shatner’s Greatest Hits.

Casual listening (with “Dude”) is certainly okay. However, if you wish to grow as a musician, use your recordings as a learning device.

From Chapter 2, "It's All About the Music"

Live Music

"I'm too busy playing. When I'm playing I don't pay attention to who's listening. When I was listening I listened to symphony orchestras, Beethoven, Bach, Brahms, Stravinsky. You don't listen to one instrument; you listen to music." -- Charles Mingus

Going out to hear live music can be lots of fun. As with listening to recorded music, try to visualize yourself as part of the group. In your mind, see yourself on stage with them (minus the hair-care products, of course.) You can do the same process I recommended for your personal listening space at home while in a club, concert hall, or theater (with the exception of fingering and playing along.)

Also, one of the benefits of attending a live show or concert is being able to **see** and study the artists. I've learned so much from watching other musicians. It's also exciting to see your favorite artist(s) at work, doing what they do best. You might want to go to a live concert as if you were attending a master class. The price of a single CD or concert ticket could be as beneficial to a student as the cost of 10 lessons.