

# So Your Child Won't Practice

By Grace C. Nash

The last round of applause could still be heard in the small concert hall where three freckled-face boys were putting away their instruments. "Gosh, we did all right!" said Stan, the eleven-year old, to his brothers. "Fun, too," said Gale, a year younger as he tossed his music into a folder. "I say it was neat," said Roy, snapping the lock on his half-size violin case. "And now, refreshments." He followed his brothers out to the reception lounge.

The program for the local Sunday Evening Club was over. My husband and I were being surrounded. The gentlemen nearest my husband beamed. "I bet you never have to make those boys practice!" he said. "Indeed we do," replied my husband. The pleasure on the man's face changed to surprise and curiosity. "But the way they play, I thought-" "They're regular boys, full of the 'old nick'. And practicing doesn't come any more natural to them than washing their ears," answered my husband. "But both are part of their daily schedule."

Others crowed in, congratulating us on our three sons' performance as if it had been something spectacular. I couldn't understand. Was our family concert so unusual-playing music together and in solo? This could have happened in our living room most any evening.

"How do you get your boys to practice?" The question seemed to come from several people. I looked up at them, wondering how to answer, when my husband spoke. "We teach them to practice, the same way we teach them any habits-by daily repetition."

"Yes," I added, "most boys and girls have to be told to go to bed, to take their baths, and to practice. Our children are no exception." "But they play as if they enjoy it," said the woman at my left. "They do. After all, it's a form of self-expression. And playing for others gives them an added sense of achievement. But that doesn't mean they like to practice. It's our job to see that they do practice. We help them."

"How?" came the blunt question. I thought of how difficult it would be for a child to read and write by himself. Only through daily help and practice does it become easy and natural for him. Music is no different. But there are ways to motivate this daily practice. I tried to explain.

"First of all," I said, "we establish a regulation: one hour of practice each day, to be finished before 7:30 pm. I feel that if children know what is expected of them, what they may and may not do, they have something concrete to hold to. It gives them a feeling of security, which is essential to their happiness.

"Each of our boys has different hours for working beat. With Gale, the one who played piano for you, it's early morning. As soon as his breakfast is finished, he practices until school time, getting most of it done then. He doesn't like to practice, but twenty lessons marked good in his music notebook, brings reward. This year it will be some special fishing tackle.

"With Roy, six years old, it's a little different. He has many after-school sports. He practices best after dinner. Radio and television programs come only after his hour is finished. A composition well mastered merits a Saturday movie, hamburgers for the gang, or a new baseball bat.

"If their Saturday practice is finished before noon, fifty minutes instead of the usual sixty is the rule. But failure to complete their practice may prevent a family outing, a trip to the beach, or a game of Canasta."

"Do they watch the clock while they practice?" came the question. "We have no clock in the living room. They check the time when they start. And after fifteen or twenty minutes, they call out, 'What time is it, Mom?'"

"If they waste time, I simply add an extra five minutes and tell them it has been added. After the first few weeks, it seldom happens." "But I thought children should never be forced to practice. It might kill their love for music," said a feminine voice in the group.

Let us look at it this way. Children are not mature in their judgment. We, as parents, must enforce what is right for them. If you review the early life of Haydn, Mozart, Beethoven, and many others, you will find their training was part of their daily schedule, and not because they chose it to be. Free choice, in most things, is not for children.

We know our boys are not genius material. They're normal, mischievous youngsters, full of energy and curiosity. And we want to give them as much preparation for a good and happy life as we can. This means not only

opening the doors to the many experiences ahead, but taking them by the hand and leading them. And one of these doors leads to the enjoyment of music.

Music, a language of the feelings, goes beyond the printed or spoken word. It holds no barrier of race, creed, or nationality. One of the finest forms of self-expression for all ages, music is relaxing, uplifting, and always worthwhile. What better means of expression can we give our children?

But to teach children music requires patience and daily supervision. The latter is our job, as parents-just as it's our job to enforce a reasonable bedtime whether they approve or not. Yet many parents indulge in the belief that it is wrong to hold a child to a daily practice period. If he wants music, he must do his practicing on his own. Is it because they, as parents, are content to take the path of least resistance?

Let's look at it objectively. In a recent survey of our penal institutions, it was found that only a scattered few among the thousands of criminals had ever received any regular musical instruction or participated in an orchestra or chorus during their childhood. Music and delinquency seldom mix.

To make the daily practice period more enjoyable and worthwhile to pupils and parents, here are some suggestions based on the seven notes of the musical alphabet:

**A**ssist your child with practicing.

**B**e generous with your interest and praise.

**C**redit each achievement with some form of recognition.

**D**evelop the habit of daily practice.

**E**ncourage note reading, rather than playing by ear.

**F**acilitate note reading by a new, piece to reach each day.

**G**ive interesting pieces, folk tunes and musical literature written for children.

Each practice period will then hold a continued interest and not so much time will be spent on one tiresome piece. It may take all seven keys to unlock your practice problem, but try them before giving up. Music is one thing your child will cherish forever!