



Beginning Music as an Adult - Are Private Music Lessons Right For You?

by Christina Thompson

If you're an adult who wants to study music for the first time, or are picking up your instrument again after a long hiatus, taking private music lessons can help you improve steadily and can lead to years of musical enjoyment. While lessons can be very helpful for growing musicians, there are several important things to consider before getting started, like your commitment level, the amount of time you can devote to music, and the availability of a quality teacher. By reading this article and learning the facts about private music lessons, you'll be better equipped to decide if lessons are right for you.

What is a Lesson Like?

When you sign up for a private music lesson, you're reserving the undivided attention of a master musician who understands the processes of teaching and learning music. In lessons, you can expect to play for your teacher, talk about music, learn new skills, and leave with assignments to practice. Every music teacher has a different approach and style, but the best teachers are skilled at diagnosing your playing problems and recommending practice exercises to strengthen your abilities. One of the biggest myths about private lessons is that if you take one or two lessons, your playing will automatically improve. Not so! Lessons help you understand the musical challenges you need to overcome. Progress happens when you work on these challenges outside of lessons.

Do You Have Time?

Before you begin lessons, make sure you have time to practice regularly. Practice solidifies the knowledge you gain in lessons, trains your mind and body to make music, and helps you improve at specific musical skills. Without practice, you'll find that you make little progress and lessons become less enjoyable. Practice doesn't have to be a major time commitment--working on your lesson material for even 15 minutes each day can make you a much better musician. Ask yourself this question: "With my other commitments, do I have time to practice at least several days per week?" If your answer is no, private lessons may not be ideal for you at this time. Instead, you might consider joining a community band or choir, where expectations for practice may be more relaxed than in private lessons.

Another consideration involves making time to attend lessons. As mentioned above, many people falsely believe that taking a few lessons brings astounding musical progress. In reality, progress takes place over time--people spend years perfecting their musical technique. When you consider taking lessons, a good rule of thumb is to plan to take weekly lessons for a year. This may seem like a long time, but if you make a commitment to a year of lessons and stick to it, you'll find that your commitment helps you persevere through rough patches and build a solid musical foundation. If your child signed up for choir and begged to quit after the second week, you'd likely reply, "Keep trying! Don't give up!" Treat your own musical journey the same way. If you can't commit to lessons for at least several months, you might want to put them on hold for the time being.

Finding the Right Teacher

Private lessons are one-on-one experiences during which you'll work closely with your teacher to achieve your musical goals. Because you'll develop a close working relationship with your teacher, it's important to find an experienced teacher whose company you enjoy. There are a variety of ways to find music teachers, like asking around at music stores, calling your local musicians' union, or searching online. As you search, keep your musical goals in mind. Do you want to make music your career, or do you just want to learn some songs to entertain your friends? What style of music do you want to learn? Make note of teachers with experience

that relates to your goals and a teaching approach you think you'll enjoy, and contact them to discuss lessons. Good teachers will be approachable, open about their expectations, and willing to help you achieve your goals.

Are You Willing to Learn?

Many adults choose to take lessons so they can achieve their musical goals efficiently; however, a surprising number of adult students hamper their own musical development by being unwilling to listen to their teacher. As an adult, you may spend much of your time in a leadership role; as a result, returning to "student" status during your music lesson may feel quite unsettling. Before you sign up for lessons, ask yourself if you're willing to follow instructions and trust your teacher's expertise. It may be helpful to consciously shift your mindset to "beginner" mode during lessons, and practice being willing to listen and try new things. When you trust your teacher and follow his or her suggestions, you will find yourself making excellent musical progress.

Greatness Takes Time

Lastly, remember that learning music takes time. When playing music, you use your body and mind differently than you do in everyday life, and you must train yourself to be able to do these new activities. It's normal to become impatient or have occasional negative thoughts about your progress, but don't give up! Instead, practice accepting your progress and allowing yourself to learn at your own pace. Instead of looking for major leaps in your abilities, listen for subtle changes from day to day. Your teacher can be a great resource for helping you overcome the little frustrations of learning music.

If you're able to make a commitment to regular practice and attendance, private lessons can be an excellent resource to help you learn music. Even if you decide that lessons are not a good fit right now, you can easily plan ahead to make lessons part of your life in the future. Whether you decide to take lessons or use another approach to learning music, you have started on a rewarding path. When you learn to make music at any age, you develop an exciting skill that you can enjoy for the rest of your life!



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