

PEARLS OF MORE-OR-LESS WISDOM

... the reading for today is from Zouki's Epistle to the Hibernians, chapter 3, verses 4 to 260.

Following presented in no particular order. If one occurs to you, you can cut-and-paste to your heart's content without fear of offense to ol' Zouk.

= For melody types: you're ready to play at a session when you can play five of each particular species of tune through with reasonable confidence in the privacy of your kitchen (or basement, or doghouse, or garage, or wherever). If you screw them up at the first few sessions you attend, no biggie (as long as you're playing quietly) - you'll get more confident as you continue making the effort.

= Corollary to above: unless you're playing a trombone or it's a very tiny session, nobody is paying much attention to you anyway (unless your Ego is really overheated and you unwisely call attention to yourself). Relax and have fun (and later congratulate yourself on dealing so well with a stressful learning experience!)

= Zouki has encountered a recent phenomenon having to do with a talented younger musician attempting to bypass the Beloved Chestnuts (capitals are significant) in favor of the Perhaps Tasty But Nonetheless Obscure works from various recent recordings. While such initiative may be laudable in a more experienced musician, it makes zero sense for anyone wishing to become a session player. As the novice's musical career continues, there should be sufficient time and development of interest to enable him eventually to wander far beyond the Land of Beloved Chestnuts. For a fledgling session player, however, it's probably a better idea to confine one's learning curve to tunes that are most usually played in your area.

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= If you don't know the name of a tune, or if you have other questions specifically related to the music, ask someone who seems to know. If you consistently receive answers that you find not helpful, go somewhere else. Musicians who manifest intentional ignorance with regards to the "passing on" aspect of traditional music are probably phonies not worth your time or anyone else's.

= Don't ever underestimate the work/labor/love that the older musicians have put into their craft. The vast majority of them are anonymous non-geniuses who do what they do because it's part of their life's happiness. You may be technically more competent (and you should always get second opinions about that!) but that doesn't mean you are entitled to plunge right into a session situation. "Soul" is as much a part of the Irish traditional musical experience as it is of any other kind of music - let yours grow gradually. Just as you wouldn't (or shouldn't) expect to have Frankie Gavin's or Joe Burke's technical abilities after three months of playing, you ought not to mistake your current enthusiasm for ITM for the real sensitivity that you will need to become a first-rate IT musician. Like True Love, if it's to develop, it will do so gradually - don't push it.

= Like most other positive human experiences, what you get out of ITM is directly proportional to what you put into it. Lots of hard work and dues-paying cannot make you anything but a better musician eventually, so keep at it.

= By the Way Dept: discouragement and disappointment are part of the learning experience too. Great quote: "Success is not one of the names of God" (Martin Buber).

= Don't waste time on fripperies like FEEBDEB tuning and jumping from instrument to instrument. Energy and time you devote to peripheral activities is energy and time you don't spend

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on the important aspects of learning ITM, i.e. the tunes and how to use them to relate to your fellow musicians. Later on in your career you can go back to experimenting, but in the hard years at the beginning, the discipline of adhering to one goal will be crucial to your success.

= The ears are an integral part of the musical experience. Learn to use them.

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(Not a typo - just very important.)

= If you don't know how to read music, find some way of learning. (ABC is a great tool - see below.) Your ITM horizons will be expanded logarithmically (and that's a good thing). Corollary: respectfully pay no attention to anyone who alleges that "real IT musicians don't read music". Most often this phrase can be interpreted to mean "I myself can't read music" and is entered into the Book of Eternal Verities under the "misery loves company" heading.

= Same applies to classical training. If you have it, figure out how to use it for ITM and pay no heed to various grumbling sounds you might hear coming from the dark smelly corner where Jealousy and Ignorance lurk. Technique is a tool. The result that the tool produces is what's important, not the tool itself.

= In your thin-skinned early years of playing, don't mistake the fact that certain musicians like playing together for a conspiracy against you. You are however entitled to determine for yourself by observing as objectively as possible whether or not what you're seeing is Camaraderie or Exclusivity. C is good and presents no

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threat to you. E is a pain in the arse and has no excuse for existing in a supposedly session context. If E is all you can find in your local sessions, consider taking up Uzbeki death chants until your local ITM gang grows up.

CAVEAT (Latin for "I'll have a few more of those fish eggs, Gaius"):

The exclusivity may have come about as a form of protection, as some recent posts seem to have been saying. This doesn't make it any easier for you as a novice, but it might help to keep in mind that such an attitude might only be a temporary one until the Unwelcome Ones are exorcised. A quiet chat at an opportune time with the session leaders might help clarify the situation so that you can figure out how much time you want to spend Sitting at the Next Table (a figure of speech, rather elegant if I do say so myself).

= Find out about ABC. Familiarity with an abc program - if only from the standpoint of being able to open someone else's file - will also be a tremendous asset to your growing abilities (and can in fact assist you with the music-reading suggested above). Mike Eskin's online *abctools* app is great, so have a look when you can. (**URL at bottom of page 5.)

= No backup player on any instrument should presume to commence his ITM career without the ability to play a melody instrument of some sort. The fact that notes and chords are strangely related seems to come as a complete shock to a lot of folks. The only way you as an accompanist are going to move past the Three-Chord Guessing Game is to learn the melodies. (It's always fun - well, most of the time - to hear what a novice backup person will do with a harmonically oddball tune like "Rakish Paddy" or "Blarney Pilgrim"!)

= If God in His infinite Mercy and Wisdom has revealed to you that the bodhrán is really your instrument of choice, have no fear. But

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PLEASE understand that you have an obligation - perhaps greater than any other ITM's - to treat your chosen tool as a **REAL INSTRUMENT**, not just a goat-skin-covered Ticket of Admission to all the sessions in town. Run, do not walk, to the nearest teacher or relevant YouTube videos and begin treating your instrument with the respect it deserves. From that respect will inevitably come respect for you from other musicians. You may never be a Mance Grady or Ringo McDonagh, but neither will you be a scorned outcast who gets drinks mysteriously poured on him and has anonymous but sincere threats left in his mailbox.

= If it ain't fun, you shouldn't be doing it, unless you're one of those strange folks who in 1215 A.D. would have been Session Alpha for the local Flagellant Society.

If other people get in the way of your enjoyment, you have three options: get totally pi**ed off with them and raise your blood pressure to unheard-of levels (= useless), spend time with them and try to figure out why they hate you and everything you hold dear (= equally useless), or identify others in the group who feel about the situation as you do and suggest that you seek your enjoyment in quiet surroundings elsewhere. If the Unwelcome Ones follow, move again. If you play in a pub, manager may not be happy but what has he done to help minimize the problem? ("Isn't this Exclusivity?" some will cry. "No, it's Survival," I reply.)

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*** <https://michaeleskin.com/abctools/abctools.html>