

Research paper on music theory vs. fun

[Education](#), [Teaching](#)



Often times the question, “ How can music be fun if I have to study music?” is posed in an education program or academic setting. People often view the act of study as something that is negative or something we do not necessarily enjoy. Yet, can one find a way to study music theory and still play music for fun from the heart? Most ‘ great’ musicians of Blues, Country and Rock n’ Roll never studied theory. They learned from family members that passed their art form from generations or by heart. Waylon Jennings said, “ I’ve always felt that blues, rock ‘n’ roll and country are just about a beat apart. However, musical educators argue that a musician must know the standards of music in order to know how to break them (d1music. biz). Educators often believe creativity within music is derived from learning how to technically play an instrument. Theory will then become second nature when writing a piece of music. Therefore, does the ‘ fun’ in theory lie in the type of education you choose, is theory essential in being able to play from a creative place, or can music still be passed down generationally to build a more creative musician from the heart; thus, is music a dying art form because of this sense to avoid it’s study or can educators make a case for theory being fun in an academic setting?

Music theory and education can be a very dry subject. Performing basic chords and notes over, over and over is exhausting, especially when using your fingers to contort around and instrument like the guitar or steel guitar. Theory and music education is often a very repetitious and boring study, and often why so many do not view music as a fun art. Author of Basic Music Theory, Jonathan Harnum, describes music theory as a language used by all Western Instruments. This music theory teacher takes a humorous, fun

approach to teaching theory in the book Basic Music Theory with pictures and chapters called, ' The Chapter Everyone Skips'. Many people passionate about music could care less about the clef, the G and a treble. However, educators will argue that mastering the simple knowledge of these three elements can enhance any musician's musical talent since the language of instruments can be viewed as the same. The book Basic Music Theory by Jonathan Harnum also articulates music in such a comedic any student is sure to remember what used to be ' boring, old' music theory. For instance, to remember the mnemonics of the treble clef (FACE) Jonathan suggests the anagram: Farting Always Causes Enemies. Who wouldn't remember that? His teaching is fun and effective. Also included, are fun study guides for each chapter to help the student commit the theory to memory.

No matter how fun one teacher, instructor, tutor or professor may make music theory, students often learn better from the generational approach. Generational musicians believe that the theory of music can be passed down by simply learning from a master musician, such as a family member.

Country music is one genre that has a large amount of evidence in support of generational education; it is most often handed down through families year after year, like the Carter Family and The Delmore Brothers. Group music playing at festivals or family jam sessions long supports this theory. For instance Grandpa Jones, otherwise known as the famous country comedian ' Grandpappy' of Hee Haw, recalls playing the Midnight Jamboree, Wheeling West Virginia in 1937-38 and seeing his cousin Emmy picking the banjo, " I thought that was the finest thing I ever heard, that thumb string lick she did and I kept after her and finally got her to show me how she did

that.” (Russel 203). Grandpa Jones would hang up his guitar a few years later and play the banjo. Had Grandpa Jones not seen his Cousin Emmy mastering the instrument, maybe he would never have been famous for that flat pickin’ banjo comedy? He probably would have played guitar until his death in 1998.

The Carter Family might be the most infamous of all in terms of the art of music being more creative when passed down generationally. The Carter Family became a type of melting pot that churned out some of the most famous musicians to date with talent and theory passed down for years and years. The original trio spanned American life from the pre-Crash 1920s to World War II (Russel 65). The original trio included Maybelle “ Mother” Addington Carter, A. P. Carter and Sara Dougherty Carter. “ at its core The Carter Family’s music was a rock of old values around which fashion and progress bobbed and ducked without avail (Russel 65). No wonder The Carter Family went on to be so influential in generational music. The Carter Family, not only had a massive influence on Johnny Cash, they went on to influence such generational artists as June Carter, Carlene Carter and Roseanne Cash. Is this enough to say that music can be passed on as a talent and does not warrant theory or music education in an academic setting?

Many top artists today will agree with instructors who suggest music theory is a necessity in order to play music for fun. So, why should I have to study it? “ The National Assessment of Educational Progress in Arts is the study that revealed our poor standards in artistic education. (top-colleges. com). Clearly, data supports that our creative brain and practical brain must be

developed equally in order to have a more clear understanding that music is both practical and mathematical as much as it is creative. After examining the data and opinions in support of music education, could the 'fun' then lie in your choice of program or school? There are many types of programs to choose from in terms of higher education, from private lessons to college programs for sound engineering and commercial music. For instance identify the university you wish to attend. Maybe you would like to study abroad? Look at the individual course teaching methods. Case in point, Bath Spa University's Commercial Music Course teaching methods are as follows, "Teaching takes the form of formal lectures, instrumental tuition, practical technology/performance workshops, and visiting speakers from the music industry. In addition, you undertake directed study, which includes rehearsal time and recording studio sessions. You have access to industry-standard equipment throughout your course. The Newton Park campus has five fully-equipped digital recording studios, running Pro Tools HD and Logic Pro on Apple Macs. There are three additional Apple Mac Pro Tools/Logic Pro labs, each supporting sampling, synthesis and hard disk recording; a total of 50 pro audio setups. Each of our five band rehearsal spaces includes PA system with microphones, drum kit, guitar and bass backline/FX and performance keyboards. All course resources are networked, so you can access on-line learning materials and the complete syllabus from any Internet link," (bathspa. ac. uk).

Examining whether this type of course seems 'fun' to you; exploring the probability that there is a boring theory lesson in there somewhere, can make a difference. For example, if you do not like classical music you would

probably not attend a program steeped in the study of classical theory. Thus, music can be fun to study if you choose the appropriate medium to immerse your talents. Yet, no matter how fun you make music education or what lengths you go to find the right educational setting, music theory and the academics of it still might just be so boring that you cannot bear to study. With the upcoming musicians of the next generation being so bored with music theory and music education, can we say that music is a dying art form?

While music education is dying on the early and secondary education level it is still worth studying on the college level if it is no longer fun? Music seems to be a dying art form, but is music dying or just the business? “ underneath the glamour, and despite all the hype about the digital revolution, the music business – as represented by the major record labels – is in serious financial trouble. Sales were down 7% last year in the UK and by nearly 10% in the United States, the world's largest music market. Two of the four music majors, Sony – home to Simon Cowell – and Warner Music, behind Cee Lo Green and Plan B, admitted their pre-Christmas sales were down 10% and 14% respectively. It has been a decade since piracy and the arrival of iTunes – which destroyed the notion of an album in favour of single, downloadable tracks – but the music business has found nothing to repair lost CD sales. Many hope that music subscription services, such as Spotify in Europe and Pandora in the United States, can generate new, meaningful forms of revenue. Spotify has more than 500, 000 paying customers to its £9. 99 a month all-you-can-listen-to service – but that £60m-a-year business is still modest when set against a business that still generated \$17bn for record

companies worldwide in 2009, the last year for which statistics are available," (theguardian. co. uk)

Consequently, the ' fun' in theory can lie in the type of education you choose. Theory then becomes essential in higher education, not just a means to being able to play from a creative place. Theory can also be passed down generationally in the methods of our ancestors to build a more creative musician from the heart at a very early age. Some educators will disagree and claim that once a student learns to play by ' ear' they cannot learn theory, but in learning theory the musician can recognize cognitive and cohesive flows of advanced choral pieces. Music as a business may be a dying art form, because of the technological age we are in, but not because young people have a sense to avoid its study. Educators are constantly making a case for theory being fun in an academic setting and justifying that it promotes higher test scores and advanced academic achievement.

In conclusion, you do not have to study music, but music education can be made fun if you choose the right academic program, music mentor or family member to teach you theory. Theory is an integral component in learning music and its language. Charlie ' Yardbird' Parker, a very influential saxophonists and jazz players of the 1940s, said " Music is your own experience, your own thoughts, your wisdom. If you don't live it, it won't come out of your horn. They teach you there's a boundary line to music. But, man, there's no boundary line to art."

So how is music fun if you have to study music? The finished product is fun; not the studying. Studying is not always fun. The piece of music you compose or score to perform for others is where the ' fun' lies. For many

people, a scholarly approach to music is a necessity, thus music education and theory is a correct pathway to 'fun'. However, for people who intend to focus on the art of music, its soul and its underlying mysteries that they want to discover personally, it is advised that they play through self-education (d1music. biz). While it's undeniable that the two go hand in hand, and some people hate to study theory; the simple fact is, theory supports the passion behind music and helps the artist create and play through self-education without thought, without walls, without borders.

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