

# **EFFORTLESS MASTERY**

**LIBERATING THE  
MASTER MUSICIAN WITHIN**

**BOOK AND ONLINE AUDIO**

**BY**

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## **Dedication**

*For my father, who said that he loved to give advice and always wanted to write a book entitled If I Were You!*

*For my mother, who exemplifies selfless service and never offered me anything but encouragement.*

*For my beautiful daughter Katheryn — may her brashness never be thwarted.*

*For my wife Lorraine, who has taught me the meaning of Dharma, or righteous action — one of the most soulful and selfless people I've ever met. We're all lucky to have her!*

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Gurumayi Chidvilasananda,  
for continually leading me along the  
path towards the heart and reminding me  
about “the inner music.”*

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## **Effortless Mastery**

### **TRUTH: INNOVATION *IS JAZZ!***

Louis Armstrong, Duke Ellington, Bix Beiderbecke,  
Fats Waller, James P. Johnson, Jelly Roll Morton,  
Scott Joplin, Charlie Parker, Dizzy Gillespie, Miles Davis,  
Bud Powell, Bill Evans, Ornette Coleman,  
Billie Holiday, Ella Fitzgerald,  
Thelonious Monk, John Coltrane.

Can we agree that this is a fair representation  
of the tradition of jazz?

What do these people all have in common?

**THEY WERE ALL INNOVATORS!**

**INNOVATION IS THE TRADITION**

## Preface



The realm of the gifted has always seemed to be an exclusive club. The common belief is that, “Some of us have it, some of us don’t.” Implicit in that statement is the assumption that “most of us don’t.” The way music (and, I suspect other subjects as well) is traditionally taught works for those who “have it.” Only very gifted or advanced students absorb the language of music in the way it is usually taught. Perhaps two percent of all music students ever attain anything. Many others struggle with the various elements of playing or improvising and as a result do not become performers.

Most people fall by the wayside. We don’t seem to have given much thought to this discrepancy, simply accepting the old adage, “some of us have it and some of us don’t.” In cultures less intruded upon by “civilization,” everyone is a musician. It has much to do with how music is introduced into our lives. This book will look at that subject and offer hope as well as practices to those who think they “don’t have it.” These practices will also increase the effectiveness of those who believe they do.

My belief is that, if you can talk, you can play. There are many reasons why the so-called less gifted don’t get it. There are also methods of obtaining “it,” which this book will discuss.

Many people have what I call musiphobia: fear of playing music. To a person afflicted with musiphobia, touching an instrument is like touching a hot stove. This is irrational, since one cannot get burned touching an instrument—yet it is a common problem. Though there are absolutely no negative consequences, most of us are afraid. It is not our fault. We have been programmed to *fear playing*. All too often, our relationship to music is doomed to failure.

A person might give up playing for reasons of insufficient talent, when upon closer inspection it becomes clear that the problem was the mode of study, or the lack thereof.

Many people are crippled by an inability to focus and by a sense of being overwhelmed. These problems are often mistaken for laziness or lethargy. There is a grand paradox in why we can't focus. This subject will be explored and many other paradoxes as well.

The exercises will help people on different levels in different ways. For example, there are good players who, for some reason, have little impact when they play. Everything works fine. They are “swinging” and all that, but still, something is not landing in the hearts of their audience. They are trapped in their minds. There is no nectar, because they are merely plotting and planning an approach along acceptable, “valid” lines of jazz style. The same thing commonly occurs to classical performers. They don't know what “channeling creativity” is because they, too, are dominated by their conscious minds. One must practice surrendering control to a larger, or higher force. It's scary at first, but eventually liberating. In Sanskrit the word is *moksha*, which means liberation. *Moksha* is attainable through the surrender of the small self to the larger “Self.” I will introduce exercises for achieving that goal in music. After one taste of *moksha* through the medium of music, one will never want to return to a life of “thinking music.” As one moves beyond the acceptable to the inevitable, creativity flows. Personal power will increase manifold.

One truth for all players to contemplate is this: *learning new kinds of sophisticated jazz theory is not necessarily the key to freedom.* Once new theory is mastered, it is recited with the same dreary predictability as the old. If you are inhibited playing with the toys you have now, you will not play differently with new toys. Also, many jazz players feel that there is an experience in improvisation that they are not having, or not having fully enough. Classical musicians also report a “dryness” in their renderings of the great composers. It's like the priest who secretly has no love for God. The customs are observed, but there is no

true feeling. If the lamp is not lit, music can be as dreary as anything else. Along with the desire for a deeper experience comes an intense drive to be a better player. These aspects often work against each other. True musical depth is not about better playing, but about more “organic” playing.

It’s very hard to let go in the combat of performance, but the exercises here will help you expand your “intuitive self.” Over time, this intuition will emerge naturally without sabotaging the technical part of your performance. Assimilation into the whole is very much about “forgetting” one’s self.

People who meditate or do tai chi will recognize many of the principles in this text. Even to them, it may be a revelation to know that one can live in the meditative state while playing an instrument. The mind is the chief culprit in most playing problems, and so any discipline that aims to control the mind is complementary to the process described here. Music can shoot through the musician like lightning through the sky if that music is unobstructed by thoughts. Therefore, the elimination of thoughts is a very relevant issue.

To dysfunctional learners, of which there are many in the jazz educational system, these exercises will cut through loads of books and exercises. It will help them get in touch with the next step in their development, putting aside all the theories, politics and fashions and instead focusing on their lives and the personal meaning that music has for them. In many cases, the decision to *study* music has robbed them of the ability to *play* music. They have lost respect for music that comes from within because they have been programmed to feel “unworthy.” Some parts of this book will help these individuals get back to loving and honoring themselves, *with or without music!* Even many great professionals suffer from low self esteem and other negative illusions.

For those who practice things that never surface in their playing, (and there are many such musicians), I offer reasons for why this happens, as well as a way out of this dilemma. This book also contemplates the relationship of belief systems to

effectiveness and how we “practice for mediocrity.”

In addition this book delves into the nature of artistry, and quite extensively into the nature of mastery. I will discuss how to effortlessly play what you already know and reach a depth you didn't think you were capable of.

There are certainly artists who can enjoy music in a positive way, artists who always know how to become inspired and how to execute effortlessly. But the percentage of people who do this is small. Much of this book is for those who are not succeeding in their efforts to fulfill their hopes and dreams musically, and for musicians who feel tense and constricted while playing. Some of the ideas contained here are radical. They challenge institutions to change and individuals to move from the comfort zone of limitation and blossom into their higher selves. If you've been playing for thirty years and hardly ever enjoyed it, if you've constantly pointed to other players and thought that they possessed something you didn't, or if you've practiced for years and never really improved, read on.