



The  
Young  
Musician's  
SURVIVAL  
GUIDE

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TIPS FROM  
TEENS AND PROS

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Second Edition

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AMY  
NATHAN



# The Young Musician's Survival Guide

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# **The Young Musician's Survival Guide**

## **Tips from Teens and Pros**

Second Edition

Amy Nathan

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# OXFORD

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For Carl, Eric, and Noah



One of the advice-giving role models you'll meet in this book is flutist James Galway, shown here rehearsing John Corigliano's *Pied Piper Fantasy* at the Aspen Music Festival in 1985.

## Foreword

This is the book I wish I'd had as a kid. Maybe it would have helped me keep on with piano lessons, instead of quitting after nine years of playing when I found myself buried under an ever-increasing mound of homework. If only I had understood back then that playing piano could be a fun, relaxing way to blow off steam, and not just another task on which to be tested, judged, and graded.

It wasn't until many years later, as a grown-up, that I tried music again, with singing lessons. My teacher focused on the joy of music-making, rather than the perfection of the end product, and opened the world of music to me in a way I hadn't experienced as a youngster.

When I had children of my own who showed a flair for music, I searched until I found a piano teacher who could help them discover the joy of playing. They had such a great time that I got up the courage to start piano lessons again with their teacher.

As I observe my slow progress, and the more rapid gains my sons have made, I'm struck by how much fun it is to play an instrument—and how frustrating. Many young musicians keep going despite the obstacles. How do the successful ones overcome the hassles? That's the story this book aims to tell, to aid young people heading off down the exciting, adventurous path of music-making.

For this new, updated edition of *The Young Musician's Survival Guide*, I've rounded up eight additional professional musicians to add their tips to the advice presented by the original edition's team of pros, teens, and teachers. One of the newly featured musicians, Pulitzer Prize-winning composer John Adams, wishes he had known about a few more role models when he was growing up in the 1950s, taking clarinet lessons as a youngster in a small New Hampshire town. Of course, he did have one important role model: Leonard Bernstein, who hosted Young People's Concerts on TV back then. "Bernstein was a kind of movie star to me, who showed that it was OK to be a composer and a classical musician. But today, kids still lack role models in music," laments John Adams. This new edition of *The Young Musician's Survival Guide* tries to fill that gap, jam-packed as it is with fascinating role models: performers, composers, conductors, teachers, as well as talented spare-timers who keep making music even though they've chosen to pursue other careers.

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# The Young Musician's Survival Guide



I LOVE  
MAKING  
MUSIC.

IT'S A  
CHALLENGE—  
BUT IT'S  
COOL.

YEAH, BUT I  
DON'T ALWAYS  
PRACTICE AS  
MUCH AS I  
SHOULD.

MUSIC  
BOOKS  
THAT  
REFUSE  
TO STAY  
OPEN ARE  
SUCH A  
PAIN!

PRACTICE? WHO  
HAS TIME, WITH  
HOMEWORK AND  
EVERYTHING  
ELSE?

BLASTERS WHO ARE  
SO OUT OF TUNE ARE  
S-O-O-O ANNOYING.

WHAT BUGS ME ARE SHOW-  
OFFS WHO THINK THEY PLAY  
BETTER THAN ANYONE.

## Tune In

# 1

**A** MAZING THINGS  
CAN happen when  
you play a musical  
instrument.

Magical sounds, marvelous melodies, and razzling-dazzling rhythms can float right out of your instrument—once you get the hang of how to use it. Figuring out how to do that can be fun and also a bit of a challenge. All kinds of hassles can pop up to frustrate even the most

dedicated student, such as having no time to practice, getting the jitters before a performance, dealing with pesky fellow musicians, or messing with those big fat music books that flutter shut at all the wrong moments.

If only you could find out from other musicians how they handled these problems.

Now you can! This book gathers together a large ensemble of super musicians to share with you the strategies that have helped them deal with the frustrations they've met along their musical way.

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## Hot Tips for Cool Sounds

This book's troupe of advisors includes more than 25 professional musicians, interviewed specially for this project. They include quite a few soloists such as violinists Joshua Bell, Hilary Hahn, and Gil Shaham; flutists James Galway, Paula Robison, and Valerie Coleman; pianists André Watts and Wu Han; trumpeter Wynton Marsalis; saxophonists Joshua Redman and Erica vonKleist; and solo percussionist Evelyn Glennie. Also featured are the members of the Eroica Trio and musicians from several major orchestras. Rounding out the roster are composers John Adams and Steven Mackey, as well as conductors Marin Alsop and Gustavo Dudamel.

As kids, these pros often grumbled about practicing and faced the same hassles that bother any beginner. Even today, they can sometimes grow frustrated when working on a new piece and may even have a touch of the jitters before marching out on stage. However, they have found ways to cope and are glad to pass along their advice to you.

**“Music is like magic. It can make you laugh, cry, fly.”**

Also sharing the secrets of their success are more than 150 talented teen musicians. They ranged in age from 16 to 19 years old when they filled out questionnaires for this book, telling how they handled all kinds of practice and performing problems. The questionnaires had been sent to several prestigious music schools around the country, as well as to a few summer music programs and youth orchestras. The teens you'll meet in the book are the ones who volunteered to take time out from their practicing and rehearsing in order to jot down their ideas and suggestions on these forms. (A list of their schools, summer programs, and youth orchestras can be found at the end of this book.) Most of these



young advisors filled out their questionnaires back in the late 1990s when the first edition of the book was being put together. A second group of teens participated more recently, offering input on how music students can make the most of some of the new electronic and Internet resources that have surfaced since this book first appeared. All the quotes from teen musicians in the book come from the comments they wrote down on their questionnaires when they were teenagers. Their tips are practical, creative, and right on target with the kind of advice that music educators give.

Also offering suggestions are more than two dozen music teachers and other musical experts. To pick topics for this huge troupe of advisors to deal with, the author pored over many books and articles on music education, while also sending 200 beginning music students (ages 10 to 14) a “Gripes Form,” on which they could list what bugs them about learning to play an instrument.

In addition, the book introduces several spare-time musicians. These are people who still find time to make music even though they are busy with other careers, such as cartoonist Gary Larson or astronaut Ellen Ochoa, deputy director of NASA’s Johnson Space Center. She took her flute along with her on one of the flights she made on the Space Shuttle, as you’ll see when you turn the page.



Astronaut Ellen Ochoa brought her flute along on her 1993 Space Shuttle mission. Notice the foot loops holding her in place. Without being held down like that, blowing into her flute in the low-gravity environment onboard the Shuttle would have sent her floating around the cabin. Check out the book's Resource Guide for a link to a video clip of another astronaut who loved making music so much that he too took his instrument with him on a mission to the International Space Station.

## Magic Time

“You have the opportunity, every time you breathe into your instrument, to make the world a more beautiful place than it was before,” notes professional flutist Paula Robison in her *Flute Warmups Book*. Even with instruments you don’t breathe into, the same holds true. Basketball star David Robinson made time to tap away at his piano nearly every day while he was playing in the NBA because, as he says, “It gives me joy.”

Making music brings joy to our teen advisors, too, who explained on their questionnaires why they’re glad they learned to play an instrument:

- ◆ “Music is like magic. It can make you laugh, cry, fly.”  
—*Janet, piano, flute*
- ◆ “I like the energy you feel playing in a group.”  
—*Justin, sax, guitar*
- ◆ “It helps me relax when I’m upset.”  
—*Frances, sax*
- ◆ “I love all the people I’ve met through music.”  
—*Jenny, violin, piano*
- ◆ “Music lets me express myself in a way words can’t.”  
—*Antony, piano*

**Singers, Too** “I learned piano to help my singing,” says Charenée, who also plays flute. Teachers feel it’s wise for kids to hold off on taking serious singing lessons until the mid-teen years, after voices have matured. But while waiting to begin voice lessons, future divas can learn a lot about music by joining youth choirs and playing an instrument.

## Tune into the Talk

Pretend that all the pros, teens, teachers, spare-timers, and other advisors are gathered in a huge, imaginary practice room. What a crowd! They're waiting to show you that mastering an instrument is well worth the effort. Pull up a seat and listen to these eager-to-help musicians. Tune into their music talk, to help you make the most of tuning into your own instrument.

### Spotlight On...

#### **GARY LARSON—Cartoons & Guitar**

**Food for Thought:** “I try to practice guitar every day. If I don’t, I feel like I’ve gone without a meal,” says *The Far Side* cartoonist Gary Larson, who started guitar as a kid. “Practicing guitar is a truly enjoyable part of my day, when I can forget everything else and just concentrate on one thing. Even when it’s difficult and I feel I’ve made little headway, I take satisfaction in that I’m still pushing myself. Eventually, I know I’ll hear results. It’s a little like cartooning. When I started drawing, I could ‘see’ in my mind what I wanted to draw, but my hand had other ideas. It took drawing a little every day for quite some time before I was able to capture a certain image. But the mistakes I made—the really bad, embarrassing cartoons—were an important part of my discovery process. I try to remember that when I play jazz; when I find myself fighting wrong notes, I recall that this is *supposed* to happen. Playing music is just about the most important thing in the world to me.”



**Worth It** A nationwide Gallup survey in 1994 found that about 62 million Americans play musical instruments; most are glad they do.