



The Music Lesson: A Spiritual Search for Growth Through Music

Victor L. Wooten

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From Grammy-winning musical icon and legendary bassist Victor L. Wooten comes *The Music Lesson*, the story of a struggling young musician who wanted music to be his life, and who wanted his life to be great. Then, from nowhere it seemed, a teacher arrived. Part musical genius, part philosopher, part eccentric wise man, the teacher would guide the young musician on a spiritual journey, and teach him that the gifts we get from music mirror those from life, and every movement, phrase, and chord has its own meaning...All you have to do is find the song inside.

The Music Lesson: A Spiritual Search for Growth Through Music Details

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Diane says

I wasn't sure what to expect. I'd never heard of Victor Wooten before (his musical world and mine don't often intersect), but the title of the book caught my eye and the blurb made me buy it.

It could all be made up, incredible people that mysteriously appear (but aren't frightening) and insist on showing Victor a piece of the puzzle that is making music and how it fits into the world. Then they all disappear and he is left wondering what happened.

Many of the lessons and aspects of music and making music are familiar to me. But it was presented in a fun and interesting way with great narration and music throughout.

Highly recommended, especially to anyone who enjoys making music.

AlmieMeg says

I had never heard of Victor Wooten until, completely by accident, I stumbled upon an internet discussion of him giving a commentary on his book. I was so captivated by the genuineness of his personality that I knew I had to read this book. It's a very unique and insightful story, as much about life, as it is about music. As for the story part, it was like stepping into a fairy tale that I desperately wanted to be true. However, the life lessons, as well as the music lessons, really gave me something to think about and to carry with me. I found myself laughing aloud at some of the metaphors because they were so true and easy to relate to. His personality really comes through in this story to the point that I found myself wishing that he and the main character whom he created in this story were in our circle of friends. I look forward to his next book, irrespective of topic. This is a delightful, deliciously eccentric, insightful and unique story with many life lessons. It's one of those books that you'll probably either like or you won't, with no in between. I really liked it!

Gary Bryan says

I had been a passable metal guitarist for around a decade, practising just enough to keep up with my bands and knowing the minor scale just enough to kludge together a riff or a solo, but very aware of my musical limitations. I wanted to move beyond this plateau and become a real Musician like my peers whom I envied, those who simply played what they wanted with little conscious effort. Overwhelmed by everything I still had to learn and unsure of where to begin, however, I just lost motivation and continued to tread water.

I asked these accomplished musicians for advice, but received meaningless generalities with no specifics on their application - "just play the notes man", "just feel the groove", "I've always known how to sing" - and in asking for detail I was told I was missing the point and overthinking it. These well-meaning platitudes were a product of unconscious competence: they had spent decades studying and applying technique and theory (or playing by ear and developing an unconscious understanding of them) to the point where it had become natural, so by that logic I shouldn't have to think about it either. Needless to say, what got me out of the plateau was not their input, but putting more structure into my practice and addressing the gaps in my knowledge.

This Michael character reminded me of these patronising experts and their advice: if it's easy to him, it's easy to you too, and all you need to overcome your limits is a simple shift in perspective.

There were some genuinely insightful ideas, for example that many focus too much on notes (including scales and harmony etc.) to the exclusion of equally important components like dynamics and phrasing, and some of the anecdotes did elucidate how abstract concepts like "the groove" can be understood and applied, but overall I found little to help to my own performance. The big obstacle between my ability and Michael's is still simply practice and application of theory.

The idea of giving music and life advice through a spiritually-themed story was a clever one, but I felt that the author didn't quite have the writing skill to pull it off so it mostly came across as cheesy and pretentious. Michael's supernatural powers, while obviously intended as a metaphor, just contributed to the idea that good musicians have something innate that the rest of us lack - the opposite of what a book like this should be teaching.

The Music Lesson could provide some great insight to somebody who is quite competent but feels like something is missing: they're playing their instrument but not really playing Music. A beginner or intermediate musician who wishes to avoid falling into that trap could also get something out of it, but it's to take with a large pinch of salt and the understanding that its abstract advice should complement, not replace, conventional practice and study.

Russell says

This is influential bass guitarist Victor Wooten's response to numerous requests he's had to write a music instruction book. Rather than writing a traditional method book, however, Wooten chose a far more novel approach to music instruction. He creates a sort of personal mythology in which strange characters appear to him out of nowhere and take him on unpredictable journeys in which weird little miracles happen. These events are all for the purpose of teaching him how to be a great musician.

The book's main strange character, Michael, divides music up into ten components: Groove, Notes, Articulation, Technique, Emotion, Dynamics, Rhythm, Tone, Phrasing, and Space. He then takes Wooten on various adventures that help to teach him about each of these components.

It's difficult to tell how seriously Wooten wants us to take some of these strange stories, which often involve psychics, telepathy, and other such mumbo jumbo. But in spite of the weirdness of the whole thing, there are some very important and insightful music lessons here. And, of course, this is the point of the book. Therefore, I can recommend it to any musician, whether a beginner or advanced player.

Eleanor says

I found this book and Victor Wooten separately but both completely by accident. Someone recommended Bela Fleck's Christmas album last December and I loved that. From there I found Wooten and bought tickets for his February L.A. show. Before that rolled around Audible had a sale on a few books and The Music Lesson was one of them. I thought "Woah Victor Wooten wrote a book!" Otherwise the trite-sounding title probably never would have made it into my shopping cart. The title and even the first couple minutes of this

book can be a little off-putting. A spiritual journey? How many times have I heard that phrase before?

This may have been one of the most worthwhile books I've read in months. Victor Wooten shares his musical wisdom with the world in the form of a story that starts in reality (Bass player down on his luck, not getting gigs, tired of practicing) and slides into a magical fiction filled with a cast of characters that each has their own lesson to teach our narrator. I love the form of this book- if Wooten had just made it a dry lecture on musical advice it would have been boo-ring. Instead he chose to tell a story and the lessons carry a greater impact because of it.

The book is divided into about ten parts: Groove, Notes, Articulation, Technique, Feel, Dynamics, Rhythm, Tone, Phrasing, and Space. Each section is not just discussed but demonstrated through analogy. My favorite analogy is the one he used for articulation- the mysterious teacher takes our narrator on a trip into the mountains where they look for animal foot prints. The foot prints show us what kind of animal it could have been, where it was going, what it was feeling, and where it came from. If only we thought of our notes in the same way! Notes and foot prints both leave behind a message- what kind of message would you leave?

The whole story is filled with poignant analogies like that and a memorable cast of characters to help you separate out the different topics. One of the biggest points I got from this book was "Don't play your instrument. Play music!" So refreshing to hear. I improvise for fun occasionally but even as a classical musician I found a lot of heart and wisdom in this book.

I highly highly recommend the audiobook version. Not only are there musical demonstrations of the things he talks about but also musical filler in each chapter that makes the whole book like a song. Hearing different voices for each character is great, too. If I were a teacher at a university I would require all my students to read this book. Of all the books I've read on becoming a better musician, this is one of my favorites.

Thor says

The common complaint I've heard about this book is that it is too "New-agey" and though I understand where people are coming from, this book is a really fascinating look at the elements of Music, and, therefore, life. Take the new-age stuff with a grain of salt, if it isn't your thing, but as a professional musician, it has helped me to return to the source of why i do this.

Joe says

I am glad that I began my summer reading with the book "The Music Lesson" by Victor Wooten. This is a summer that I plan to begin to focus intensely on music or Music with a capital M as the author refers to it in The Music Lesson. This is a strange book at first. Wooten sets it up with an encounter with a mysterious music teacher named Michael. It is written much in the spirit of Carlos Castaneda's works in that Michael is able to do incredible things by manipulating music and sound such as find a particular CD in a huge collection simply by "feeling" the music (without seeing) and pulling it out. He along with another musical mystic are able to heal a man injured in an automobile accident by using sound to realign energy. There is much more in this book about playing Music or more appropriately having Music "play you". I recommend this book to anyone interested in Music and spiritual pursuits. I intend to revisit this book at the end of the summer to reassess my feelings regarding the book and the ideas contained within.

Marcus says

I've played the banjo for a couple years now. My only prior brush with playing music was piano lessons in the 4th and 5th grade. I'm glad I took them, i learned the basics of reading music and where middle C is, but apart from that, they didn't go so well. My younger brother and I were enrolled together and the piano teacher, Mrs. Blackburn, tried to keep us at the same level but he picked it up a lot quicker than I did and I was holding him back. He learned faster and played better. He did then and he does now.

When I was a kid in church I was honestly asked in so many words if I was trying to sabotage the song we were learning and would I mind singing a bit quieter? It's safe to say that my ability to carry a tune was, and is, minimal.

For me, the ability to play music has always felt inaccessible. It's a membership in an exclusive circle that you are either born into or obtain access to by selling the invisible part of your dual nature at a midnight meeting on a dusty crossroads in the deep South.

Needless to say, I wasn't born into the club and my soul remains firmly ensconced in my body.

I don't think it's because I don't have the genes. I often fell asleep listening to my dad jamming on the piano or making up songs on the guitar. He'd even whip out the viola at family reunions and treat us to a duet with grandma on the piano.

Whatever the reason for my lack of musicality, I really, really want in. I want to be able to pick up the guitar and strum a few chords with a friend or play backup banjo in an informal bluegrass jam session. I want my playing style to shift from being something that resembles computer programming to being organic and emotional. Regrettably, after two years of picking the banjo daily, I don't feel I'm a lot closer to that goal and, as rewarding as the learning has been, it's a bit disheartening at times.

The Music Lesson is probably geared more towards people like my dad or my brother; musicians who are already competent but want to take it to the next level, but I found it incredibly helpful in my personal mission to extract the music that I hope exists somewhere in there.

The writing is more metaphysical than technical and more abstract than concrete, but I found the way it teaches you how to think about music and life enlightening. Wooten talks about music as a language and how you should go about learning it the way you learned English. To learn English, you practiced, but didn't think of it as such. You simply found yourself immersed in the company of expert speakers and in order to communicate with them you had to follow their example.

At this point, I think learning music will have to be something closer to the process I used learning Spanish: intense study and explicit practice combined with immersion. Immersion meaning playing along with experts, in person if possible, but with recordings when the Avett brothers aren't available to come over and jam. As simple and obvious as that sounds, I hadn't really thought about it that way before.

The Music Lesson is full of insights like that. There are lessons on how to trust yourself when you play, how to combine the elements of music in ways that sound good and how to play along with others.

I think the book was meant to be listened to, not read. The audiobook is narrated by Victor Wooten and a cast of several actors. It's full of music and sound effects and it makes the conversational writing style that might seem forced or naive on paper feel completely natural. Quite a bit of it is "out there," but I think the hyperbole is purposeful, it drives home the lessons and makes them memorable. Listen to it with an open mind.

I still haven't found my music, but after reading this, I feel like there's finally progress in the search.

Trisha says

Victor Wooten is a Grammy award winning musician whose quirky little book isn't just about music. As the subtitle suggests it's also about living intentionally and while I was less than impressed with Wooten's writing which can be a little too trite and cutesy the book was not entirely without merit. It's structured around a set of lessons intended to illustrate 10 important characteristics of good musicianship as explained by a mysterious cast of over-the-top characters who appear and disappear as the narrative progresses. Despite what felt like an overabundance of metaphors, analogies, parables and anecdotes, I liked the way Wooten kept using his knowledge as a musician to talk about what it means to live in a mindful way (I suspect he's a Buddhist!) Instead of worrying about the mistakes they've just made or the difficult passage that's about to come up, musicians need to simply focus on what they're playing at the moment. Notes aren't the most important things -- it's the music that counts. Instead of thinking about playing an instrument it's better to concentrate on making music. It's all good advice regardless of whether we're musicians or not.

Brian Hutzell says

Wooten has some valuable tips to offer but I found his advice diluted by the corny New Age framing story.

Suzanne Moore says

I knew of Victor when I lived in Nashville. He used to frequent the music store where I worked. He is a friendly, peaceful, humble sort of guy, and always had words of encouragement when I began learning to play the banjo. After leaving Tennessee and moving to Texas my banjo stayed in the case more and life got busy. Now I'm living in North Carolina's High Country and surrounded by all sorts of old-time, bluegrass talent .. still a struggling amateur plucker.

Victor's book inspires me to relax and feel the groove rather than getting hung up on tabs and rolls. One day I hope to be able to do this in a group setting rather than just joining in with random riffs. Until then I keep practicing these lessons on learning to glide along and feel the music.

The chapters on Groove, Notes, Articulation, Technique, Feel, Dynamics, Rhythm, Tone, Phrasing, and Space are uniquely taught with a connection to life itself. Music comes to life and all its elements surround us in concrete ways. I think this book teaches 'mindfulness' of mystical melodies that are buried in our souls. For musicians and music lovers ... there is more than just listening ... feel, smell, taste, and see. Experience it!

KrisAnne says

Pretty dang woo-woo. I wish he'd just taken the important points and made a bulleted list instead of writing a whole book with this weird mystical-teacher-appearing-from-nowhere conceit. I could only read about 5 pages at a time, and I only read it because some of my students have to do a book report on it. And the ones who were assigned to read it will likely get something out of it, so fine, give this book to your serious late-teens music student who is just learning how to have deep thoughts.

pianogal says

This book is kinda crap - or maybe I was simply too sober to fully comprehend the genius of Michael. All I needed was a bag of shrooms and a patchouli scented candle and it might have made sense.

Is the stuff being taught worthwhile? Sure, but for me the lessons were SO obvious that it was hard not to laugh out loud at his various unveilings of "genius". You mean music's not just about the notes?!?! Really?!?! I guess I spent too many years in reputable music schools to really appreciate this 'enlightened' (ahem) form of the music learnin'.

I thought about finishing this book (I got to about page 80 or so) but then I thought about all the other, better things I could do with my time...including actually playing music.

Maybe newbies will appreciate this book, but anyone who is a seasoned musician with an ounce of sense could just sing Kumbaya once and move on with his/her life.

Amy "the book-bat" says

I just don't know what to say or how to rate this one

Dexter says

Over the summer, I went to Victor Wooten's music and nature camp in Nashville, Tennessee. This camp was recommended to me by the leader of a band I play trumpet in who teaches at the camp sometimes. This camp was my first sleepaway camp experience, and I thought it was the best camp I had ever been to. During that weeklong experience, I learned more than I have ever learned in a regular month of my life. The camp improved my social skills, and my musical skills. Once I returned home from the camp, I decided I may as well read Victor Wooten's book, *The Music Lesson*, after having had such a great experience at his camp. The protagonist in *The Music Lesson* is Victor Wooten, but lots of the story is not actually things that happened to him, so the book is a fictional memoir. He uses fake events to communicate his ideas about music. This creates drama and draws the reader into his philosophy. In the beginning of the book, a mysterious character named Michal appeared in Victor Wooten's house. He claims to be Victor's "teacher." From then on in the book, Michal shows Victor many things, each one relating to a specific element of

music. With each thing Michal shows him, I always found myself reading a little slower so I could learn the most. Overall, this book is a story of an ambitious bass player who is lead onto the path of what music can really be. As I journeyed with Victor along this path full of spirituality and excitement, I found myself always wondering if I, too, could discover and follow this path.

This is a book about someone who changes. He moves from musician to teacher, and questioner to believer. It pulls the reader deep into a mysterious and beautiful world. It offers to change the way the reader thinks about music in every way, shape, and form. The Music Lesson is one of the best, most transformative books I have read, and is definitely much more than just a music lesson. I recommend it to everyone ready to dive deep into an eye-opening world of music.
