

Welcome to the Introducing Bodhrán course at Waltons New School of Music.

This course is designed to teach you the basics of playing this great Irish instrument and introduce you to the main rhythms of Irish traditional music (polkas, hornpipes, slip jigs, etc.). We ask you to keep two important things in mind as you begin:

1. **The more you put into the course, the more you will get out of it.**
2. **Communicate with your teacher** if there is an area you're having difficulty with or something you don't fully understand. Your teacher is here to help you, so don't hesitate to approach him if you're having difficulty with anything.

### Practice

Practice is an essential aspect of any music course, and we all know the phrase 'practice makes perfect'. Yet even the most eager learner might cringe when told to practice daily. Perhaps the most challenging aspect of learning a musical instrument is developing a healthy, productive approach to practice. Your teacher will give you guidelines on how and what to practice, but the real work is up to you, and mostly on your own time. Here are a few tips:

- **Aim to practice every day.** Even a small amount of daily practice is much more effective than a long practice session the day before your next class. Make practice a part of your daily routine. Determine when is the best time for you to practice. If you like practicing in the morning, get up 30 minutes early so that you won't be late for work. If you're an evening person, do your practice before going to bed or before you become sleepy.
- **Make your practice area comfortable.** Is the room well ventilated? Is there good lighting? Is your mobile switched off or on silent? Make sure that your practice area is comfortable and free from distractions so that you can concentrate when practicing.
- **Practice for at least 20 minutes.** Why 20 minutes? We find that this is a manageable time for beginners. As your interest and skill level grows, you will find that your daily practice time will also increase.
- **Reward yourself.** If you have just learned to play something that you've previously had trouble with, by all means reward yourself! You don't have to splurge; just doing something you particularly enjoy will give you a morale boost and further inspire you to learn.
- **Focus on your practice.** Effective practice requires concentration and focus. If you are rushing to do it or are distracted by other things that need doing, you won't get much out of it. Try spending a few minutes in silence before you begin in order to take a few deep breaths and clear your head of other concerns.

### Bodhrán Care

A well cared-for bodhrán will last for many years. Most bodhráns are made with goat skin, which is quite sensitive to humidity and temperature. If the weather is hot and/or dry then the skin can shrink and tighten, resulting in a high, 'pingy' tone. If the weather is humid then the skin can sag, resulting in a low, 'boomy' tone. Since we need something in between, adjustments to the skin are sometimes required. The standard way to soften a dry drum is to apply moisture (usually water), which loosens the skin and deepens the tone. Alternatively, when the weather is damp, heating/drying may be necessary, and this can be done by placing it near (but not too near!) a heater or using a hair dryer.

The more modern way is to purchase a 'tuneable' or adjustable drum, which lets you tighten or loosen the skin by turning screws or levers or pushing cams. The Waltons Bodhráns provided to students as part of the Course + Instrument Package for the Introducing Bodhrán course are tuneable.

It's important to remember that repeated applications of water or hot air will generally deplete the natural oils in the skin, making it dry and brittle. So you will need to moisturise/condition the skin occasionally. Waltons Music stocks bodhrán conditioning cream that is specifically formulated for this purpose; alternatively, you can apply some form of lanolin (an oil that occurs naturally in goat hair and skin).