



# MAKER'S BENCH

## #100 Days of Practice

### How Instagram Became My Accountability Partner

by Angela Thompson

This past May, I started a challenge on Instagram called 100 Days of Practice. I initially got the idea from Hilary Hahn, who would post a video of her practice each day for 100 days. I admired her and although I had the thought for some time but was too intimidated, on May 31 I forced myself through the doubt and posted a video, “Day 1 of #100DaysOfPractice - Violin Making Style.”

For context, I started my second violin last year in June. I would work on it here and there, but never consistently. I went to the Violin Society of America conference in November and had so much renewed enthusiasm and inspiration to finish my instrument, but nothing changed. Throughout the winter and spring months, I would watch my teacher and employer, David Folland, tirelessly make progress on the cello that he was making. I would come into the shop after a few days and see how much work he had done and I was, admittedly, very jealous. I remember a similar feeling when I was in college studying violin performance; my peers would consistently practice and get better and I wanted that for myself, but I had a hard time reaching my goals. I lacked the discipline. I lacked the work ethic. Unfortunately, it translated into my violin making as well. The passion and desire were there, so how could I change this nasty habit?

A 100-day commitment is scary, I know. The key is to figure out a way to conquer the challenge effectively. I decided that in order to be successful, all I needed to do was sit down at my bench and work for as long as I had the time or mental capacity for. If that means that I'm able to work for one hour, two hours or just twenty minutes, that's good enough. I never set a time limit. Let's face it, some days are tough; you're exhausted from work or you don't feel well or there's too much to do and you have little time. I've had a handful of those days during this process. On the especially hard days, I worked enough to produce a decent video and gave myself grace for not accomplishing more. The goal was to create

a new habit, so as long as I did something, it still counted toward that goal. Most days though, I found a groove and ended up working for longer than I intended.

Creating a video and posting every day is what solidified the habit for me. I don't have an incredible following on Instagram. It was never about trying to show off. What I wanted was accountability. I had something to prove and needed tangible proof of my growth. Instagram was the perfect outlet. There was a way that I could see daily improvement and the more I stuck with it, the more I wanted to keep going. The habit started forming because I had the desire and motivation and most importantly, made it a part of my daily routine. That is what I was trying to embody from my teacher. After work, I knew I was dedicating some time to making my violin. I wanted to be closer to finishing my instrument each day.

My confidence started growing exponentially. As I watched myself working in my videos, I could see the development in my skills with my tools. The camera would be zoomed into a corner and I could watch the control I had with the gouge and how cleanly it cut, right in the areas I needed it to. I could also see things from different angles. Sometimes I would think I was done working, start taking a video and I'd notice a spot I wanted to touch up. Because I wanted the content to look good, it pushed me to produce my best work.

I also wasn't afraid to show my mistakes. During the graduation process, I was using

the drill press to make calculated holes to specific depths so that I could see exactly how much I needed to gouge and plane out of the inside of my top. In a transition between depths, something changed and I realized long after I had drilled many holes that I had been drilling deeper than my final thicknesses. [Image 1] These are holes made

with an eighth inch bit, so it wasn't as if large areas would be too thin, but in the end I knew it would leave shallow divots in some important areas, one being where the soundpost sits. So, that day, my video was a confession of my mistake and frustration and showing where I went wrong. The beauty in that public display was that I was able to show how I could fix it in the following days and weeks. Images 2 and 3 show the progress as I planed through the holes. Once I

reached the correct thicknesses and the inside was smoothed out, the holes were mere spots and I made a thin veneer to cover the soundpost area so the post will fit against an even surface. Image 4 shows the exact location of the soundpost so that it will sit in the center of the veneer. The oval shape was transferred from a preexisting template. It's important to note that this is not a soundpost patch. I didn't dig any wood out of the top; the veneer is an even .3mm thick layer glued to the top to cover the uneven surface due to the drill marks. In Image 5, the sound post veneer and cleats at the f holes are glued in and shaped for reinforcement. You can see what is left of the holes. No one will ever see the



Image 1: When I first drilled incorrectly. Here you can see the deeper holes around the ffs, along the long arch and in the sound post area. All the other holes were drilled to the correct depth, although still a bit higher than the final thicknesses

blemishes and I learned some new repairs along the way. I remind myself still that the 100 days of practice challenge is for practice, not performance. I won't be able to do everything perfectly or even to my complete satisfaction, but I am learning and improving and other people are benefiting from that knowledge as well by watching my videos.

I remember my violin professors encouraging me to record myself playing and I tried maybe once or twice. One of the reasons I was so averse to this practice was because I was intimidated and embarrassed by how I sounded. Unfortunately, I couldn't fix that insecurity unless I practiced consistently and diligently—and I didn't—thus a vicious cycle of disappointment in myself. I believe a lot of students feel this way. You may have a student who is passionate, talented and has great potential but struggles with forming good habits. I hope this strategy is inspiring and can be useful in making steadfast improvement. And it doesn't have to be a public display. Having the accountability of an online following helped me tremendously but may not be right for everyone. It could be a commitment between just the teacher and student, through

messenger or even creating an Instagram account and setting it to private so only a select few can view.

As I write this, today is day 75. I am happy to share that by the time you read this, I will have surpassed 100 days. I don't find it difficult anymore to make time for my violin making. I actually look forward to it. It's one of the better parts of my day because it fulfills me to see how far I've come and I'm excited with the anticipation of drawing the bow across the strings for the first time.

If you would like to see this project, check out my Instagram page at [AngelasViolinCorner](#).

*Angela Thompson is a violin maker, repairer and player. She is a 2016 graduate of Belmont University in Nashville, Tennessee with a Bachelor's degree in violin performance, and a 2020 graduate from Minnesota State College Southeast in violin repair, where she is now a substitute teacher. Angela is a member of the Violin Society of America and currently works under the instruction of acclaimed luthier David Folland in Northfield where she repairs instruments and continues the study of violin making.* †



Image 2: planed to .5mm above final thickness.



Image 3: planed to .2-.3mm above final thickness.



Image 4: the veneer placement is mapped out



Image 5: The sound post veneer and cleats at the f holes are glued in and shaped for reinforcement. You can see what is left of the holes.