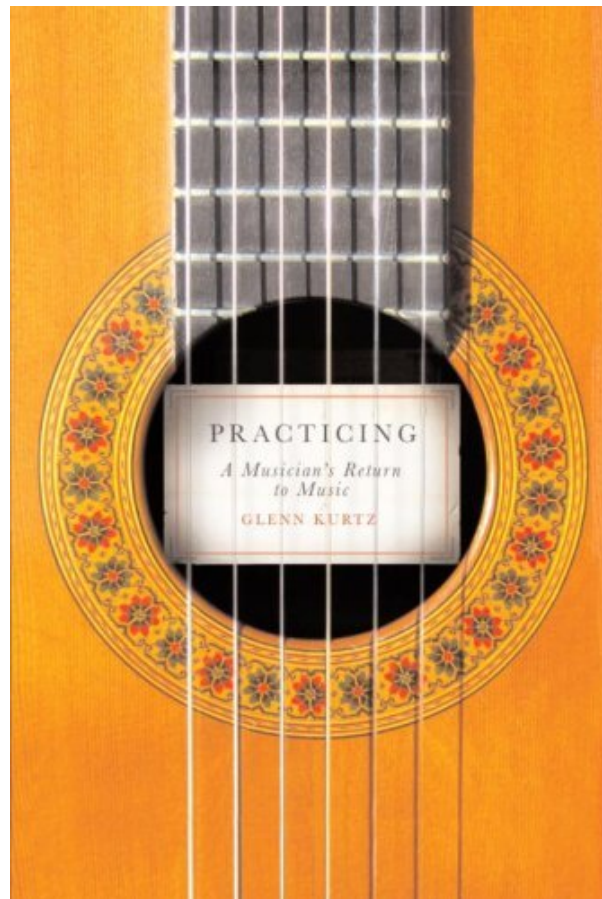
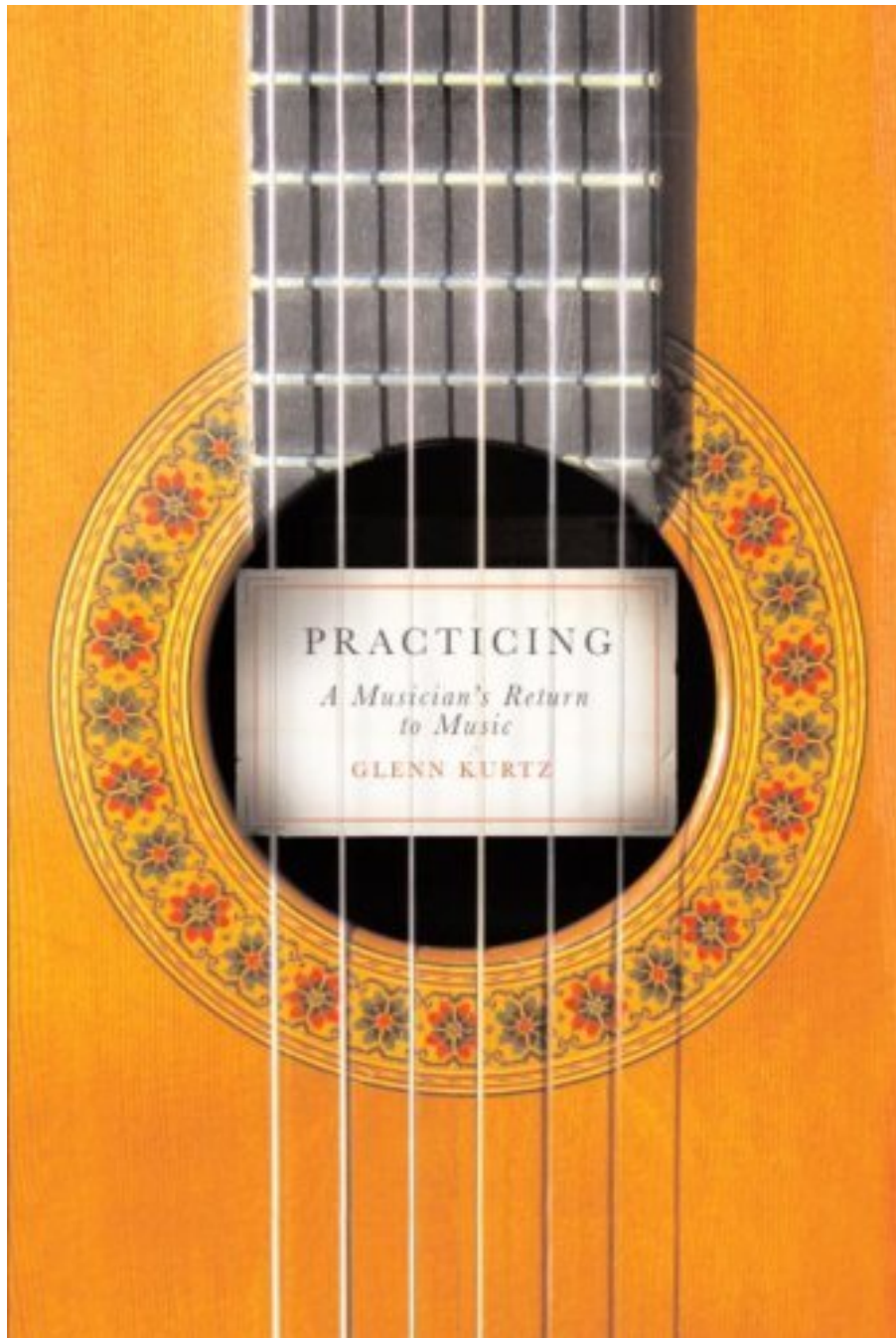


PRACTICING: A MUSICIAN'S RETURN TO MUSIC BY GLENN KURTZ



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From Publishers Weekly

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From Booklist

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From the Trade Paperback edition.

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In a remarkable memoir written with insight and humor, Glenn Kurtz takes us from his first lessons at the age of eight to his acceptance at the elite New England Conservatory of Music. After graduation, he attempts a solo career in Vienna but soon realizes that he has neither the ego nor the talent required to succeed and gives up the instrument, and his dream, entirely.

But not forever: Returning to the guitar, Kurtz weaves into the narrative the rich experience of a single practice session. Practicing takes us on a revelatory, inspiring journey: a love affair with music.

From the Trade Paperback edition.

- Sales Rank: #390817 in eBooks
- Published on: 2008-11-19
- Released on: 2008-11-19
- Format: Kindle eBook

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Most helpful customer reviews

45 of 47 people found the following review helpful.

Thoughtful Story of a Dream Denied

By Tom Poore

A book about failure isn't an obvious candidate for enjoyable reading. Factor in the potential for sour grapes, coupled with the title “Practicing” and its whiff of hairshirt self-laceration, and you have a book that fairly screams that it's a downer. But author Glenn Kurtz, a reformed musician, has conjured a minor miracle. His book is surprisingly readable, a quick and breezy look at one who tried hard and failed.

This breeziness, however, conceals a deeper feel that leavens the narrative. Though Kurtz wears his learning lightly, he casts a wide net, encompassing the likes of Pliny the Elder, Rainer Maria Rilke, Arthur Schopenhauer, and Harpo Marx. No reference point seems too high or low in his musing on meaning, and this enriches his exploration.

Kurtz's focus is determinedly self-centered—no other characters in the book are as fully developed as he. Rather than being a defect, this rings true. Even the most well-adjusted of aspiring artists are consumed with themselves. Artists must look within for the aesthetic capital to create and sustain a career. It's an unavoidable part of their craft. Fortunately, Kurtz is varied and interesting enough to sustain his book's narrow focus.

Is this a great book? Perhaps not, and it may be too parochial to appeal to a wider audience. But it's a treat for guitarists. Familiar names like Sor, Giuliani, and Tárrega dot the narrative. Here we have one of our own writing about the many of us who fell short of a dream. Kurtz wisely avoids the bromide of a happy ending. Success may make a brighter story, but failure is more universal. It's good to be reminded that our own rejected thoughts can return with a certain alienated majesty.

30 of 31 people found the following review helpful.

Practice As Life

By Len Moskowitz

Superficially this book is an account of a young boy who takes his love for playing the guitar and nurtures it into the entry to a professional performing career, only to find that his unrealistic dreams of true artistry are beyond him; realizing this, he abandons his art.

On another level, it's about practice as life, independent of the specific activity.

If you're a folk or rock guitar player who grew up in the 60's or early 70's you'll probably resonate with Kurtz's recollections of the genre's famous names and hit songs.

If you are a classical musician, you'll identify with his descriptions of how the music you create has the potential to be so much more than the notes, and how who you are at the moment you perform is deeply expressed in the music. He also describes the promethean challenge of earning a living as an performing artist.

If you are a classical guitarist you'll recognize the challenges that guitarists face in a world overwhelmingly dominated by the piano and violin.

If you ever went to an arts conservatory you'll recognize the way of life and the personalities he describes in Boston and Vienna.

And if you wanted to learn how the classical guitar repertoire came to be, Kurtz does a fine job of describing the personalities and times of both the important composers (e.g., Bach, Tarraga, Sor) and performers (e.g., Segovia).

Lastly, his description of his return to the guitar after abandoning it for ten years due to the emotional pain he associated with the instrument, is wonderful for its offering us a description of how the possibility of growth and change is available in our relationships to others, ourselves and the things we love.

Recommended!

29 of 31 people found the following review helpful.

Solfège

By Grady Harp

Glenn Kurtz' meditation on music, an extended history of the origins of the guitar with biographies of the great composers who wrote for the instrument and even the history of the development of the ancient and modern forms of the stringed guitar, makes for some of the most rewarding reading on a topic of surprising ingenuity.

The 'story' outline of the book is brief: Kurtz recounts his childhood fascination with the guitar, his extended sessions of study and practice as he prepared his career by attending the New England Conservatory of Music, eventually gaining performance time in this country and in Europe, and his decision that his talent was not of the class that merited a successful career in music that brought him to the point of giving up the guitar, to the final reason for writing this book - practicing is not a chore but a means to finding the soul of music and the soul of self in the process.

But such a short 'plot summary' in many ways defeats the purpose of this immensely satisfying book, a book that will not only be deeply admired by musicians of every rank, but a book that is so poetic and elegant in style of writing that it will entertain those whose lives have been touched only tangentially by music. 'Like every practicing musician, I know both the joy and the hard labor of practice. To hear these sounds emerging from my instrument! And to hear them more clearly, more beautifully in my head than my fingers can ever seem to grasp. Together this pleasure in music and the discipline of practice engage in an endless tussle, a kind of romance.'

From his stance as a 'returning musician' Glenn Kurtz has the retrospective edge on restating all the beauties that surround the subject of music and music making. His diversionary paths into many related subjects as

listed above make this a book that is not only tender and entertaining, but also a book full of rich information for every reader. Highly recommended. Grady Harp, February 08

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