



## A conversation with Jeni Taylor

with Greg Crowe

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Born and raised in Winnipeg, MB, Jeni Taylor began her music studies in middle school. She went on to study trumpet performance at the University of Manitoba, earning a Bachelor of Music degree. She also holds a Master of Music degree in trumpet performance from the University of Nebraska at Lincoln, where she was a Graduate Teaching Assistant in jazz and brass, teaching large jazz ensemble and trumpet lessons. Her main teachers have included Dr. Richard Gillis, Lisa Norris, Dr. Darryl White, and NY freelance player and teacher Laurie Frink.

Clutching a stack of index cards that had to have been 8 to 10 inches thick, Jeni sat down with me in the summer to give me a first-hand look at the manuscript for her forthcoming book. Her work will explore the links between music and sport – in practice, execution, history and psychology. Being a practicing music educator and a huge sports fan myself, I jumped at the opportunity to spend some time with Jeni and her copious pile of notes to soak in her creative process and wealth of knowledge. Incredibly well read and well spoken, Jeni was happy to share with me what she has learned:

**GC: Can you tell me a little about your process? How did the idea of writing the book come about?**

JT: It came about through doing clinics and working with students. I had always noticed that there was a small contingent of students in any session that weren't engaged in the way I would have wanted them to be. I found that sports was a common thread. I was able to talk about any sport, and through that commonality I was able to engage many fringe students by establishing that common connection. From there I really started to notice the similarities between sports and music. The way that Phys. Ed teachers and Band teachers assess their students is incredibly similar, for one example. Another would be fundamental routines – professional baseball players warm up by hitting off a tee. How can we as teachers use information from the sporting world to help us teach practice habits and organize our rehearsals?

**GC: I heard from a colleague of ours that you are incredibly well read. How many books have you read through the course of your research?**

JT: Hundreds. I've read a lot of John Wooden (basketball coach at UCLA). One author I really love, who I call the Mr. K (Bill Kristjanson) of basketball, is Coach K (Mike Krzyzewski) from Duke – a person who approaches sports from the heart. He's incredible. I've also read works from Pat Summitt, who sadly passed away this summer, was the winningest coach in female basketball history. I take a lot from coaches, but I've also read lots of bios written by athletes and musicians.

**GC: You've mentioned a lot of basketball personalities. Has that been the primary sport of focus in your research or have there been others?**

JT: Mostly basketball, baseball, tennis, body building and the fitness industry.

**GC: A lot of our colleagues have raved about Timothy Gallwey's *The Inner Game of Tennis*. What's your take?**

JT: That was the very first book I read on sports. When Gillian MacKay came to Winnipeg for the first time, she told everybody in her TEMPO presentation that this is a book that all musicians and music educators have to read. It speaks on the act of performing in time. Andre Agassi spoke on the feeling of being isolated in the performance and the mind games that tend to come along with such situations. It's very similar to what we go through as musicians, especially in an audition.

**GC: I'm fascinated by your stack of cards that you have brought. Would you consider this your manuscript?**

JT: Yes. I found that recipe cards worked best for me. I discovered that once you start writing things down, it's hard to move the information around. Having the recipe cards allows me to find different ways of organizing my research. At this stage of the game I have so much 'stuff', that I needed to find a way to keep it all organized in a way that makes sense to me.

**GC: How do you have it organized now?**

JT: Originally it was going to be organized by sport, that is, "What can we as musicians learn from baseball? What can we learn from basketball? etc." I found there was too much overlap, so I reorganized it by routine – starting with what I call "The Pre-Game Warm-up", moving on to "Game Time Mindset" and then "Health & Maintenance." It's amazing how just a small injury in either field can be potentially career ending. On a positive note, I think it's great that the term we use for what we do in both fields is called "play." Where did we come up with this term? What does it really mean and what's its significance? If "play" is so integral to our fields, why don't we call what we do in the classroom (be it the band room or the gymnasium) "play?"

JT: I also worked on a segment related to racial segregation and how music and baseball were key players in beginning to tear down those barriers. I've also found similar documentation on gender segregation. The unfortunate part in my findings is that even though music and sports have played a significant role in that change, when you look at society as a whole I think we're actually falling behind. It's sad.

**GC: Have you found a person or two that crosses over really well?**

JT: Yeah, I have a bunch, actually. Locally, we have Michelle Sawatzky-Koop. The Lincoln Center Jazz Orchestra will play baseball on their days off when they are on tour. My teacher in Nebraska had a back-up plan if his 'music thing' didn't work out – he had been drafted by the Cincinnati Reds. Bernie Williams (former center fielder for the New York Yankees) went back to school after retirement and studied guitar and composition. Shaq and Kobe have recorded rap albums. There's quite a bit of overlap.

JT: You find a lot of overlap in terms of fandom. In my musician circle of friends, most of them are passionate fans of some sort of sport. Die-hard fans! You, yourself are a big West Ham United fan, Tyler Yip has his love of tennis and Matt Abraham with curling. Musicians have these loves that are not often discussed amongst one another. I'm not sure why.

**GC: What do you have in mind for an ending or conclusion to your book?**

JT: I call it “The Wrap-Up.” It’s a reflection on the similarities & differences and asks the question “what does music give us that sports doesn’t?” Then there’s the section I call “Overtime”, where now that I’ve pulled this information together, I have to ask myself “So What?” in hopes that the reader and myself keep exploring the relationship between sports and music.

**GC: Is there a projected date of release?**

JT: Not at all. It’s difficult to say when I’m going to be done. At some point I will have to say, “okay, enough is enough,” but as long as I’m getting something out of it, I want to keep conducting my research. Even when it is “finished”, it will never truly be “done.” The second printing will be so much more in depth than the first (laughs). I want to do some more research away from reading. I have some classroom observations and interviews that I would like to see through.

**GC: Are there any people who have inspired you along the way to perform, teach and write?**

JT: Bill and Jacquie (Bill Kristjanson & Jacquie Dawson). They were very inspirational in terms of how to teach and how to teach well. Bill was working at Glenlawn when I was in high school at Fort Richmond. There was a rivalry between those schools, but I saw it as a positive thing. Coming back to the sports references, would Larry Bird have been as good without Magic Johnson and vice-versa? I think it’s the same kind of thing and I have always had a huge amount of respect for Bill Kristjanson. In terms of trumpet teachers: Richard Gillis, Gillian MacKay, Jens Lindemann and Darryl White.

**GC: Is there anything else you’d like to say about your book?**

JT: Trumpet was an original Olympic sport! There’s a ‘higher, louder, faster’ joke in there somewhere. (laughs)

**GC: Is there anything that you’d like to offer to the new teachers in our province?**

JT: Be sure to connect with every single student on a personal level. Every student needs to hear their name spoken in class and every student needs to feel valued. This is one area where sports and music don’t meet very well and the similarities tend to break down. We don’t have a bench. Everyone plays in what we do and therefore everybody’s contribution needs to be acknowledged.

**GC: Is there anything else you’d like to share with the MBA? Any final words?**

JT: I would like to say ‘thanks.’ I’m proud to be part of the MBA. Thanks to them as an available resource to people, I have always had calls for private lessons. It’s been a huge support to me in that regard. Going through my public schooling, I was very grateful for the MBA’s organization of the Provincial Honour Bands in the 90s, in which I participated. We have something special here in Manitoba, and the MBA has played a huge role in that.