

Chapter One

The Class as a Song

Without music, life would be a mistake. — Friedrich Nietzsche

Imagine you are going to a concert. You find your seat, the lights go down. There is a moment — just before the music starts — where the entire room shifts. Everyone who came in carrying the weight of their day sets it down. Something is about to happen, and the audience knows it before a single note is played.

Now think about the best yoga class you have ever been in. Was there a moment like that?

There should have been.

A yoga class is not a practice session. A practice session is something you do alone, at your own pace, following your own internal rhythm. A class is something that happens between a teacher and a room full of people. It has a beginning, a build, a peak, a resolution. It has dynamics. It has moments where the volume drops to almost nothing and the silence itself becomes part of the experience. It has a score.

The teacher is both composer and conductor. The score is the dialogue — the specific, intentional language that moves bodies through space and holds the room together for 60, 75, or 90 minutes. The conducting happens live: reading the room, adjusting the tempo, knowing when to push and when to pull back, knowing exactly when to cut the music and let the silence do the work.

Most teachers lose the room without knowing why. They were taught poses, adjustments, anatomy. They were given a sequence and told to cue it. What they were not told — what almost nobody tells them — is that knowing the sequence is the least of it. The sequence is the sheet music. What matters is whether you can play it.

The Score Exists Whether You Know It or Not

Every class has a structure. Even an improvised class has one — the opening, the warm-up, the standing series, the floor work, the closing. The question is not whether your class has a score. It does. The question is whether you understand it well enough to conduct it deliberately.

When you understand the score, you stop winging it and start performing. This is a fundamental shift. Winging it means you are responding to what is happening in the room moment by moment with no larger sense of where you are in the composition. Performing means you know exactly where you are in the piece, what comes next, what the room needs right now to be ready for what comes in ten minutes.

A musician who improvises well does so because they understand harmony so deeply that they can invent within it. The same is true of a great yoga teacher. The dialogue — learned, internalized, made your own — becomes the foundation from which you can read a room, respond to what you find, and hold the experience together even when something unexpected happens.

The Principle

Winging it means responding moment to moment with no sense of where you are in the composition. Conducting means knowing exactly where you are, what comes next, and what the room needs now to be ready for what comes in ten minutes.

The dialogue is not a script to recite. It is the foundation that makes real-time responsiveness possible.

Without that foundation, there is no true improvisation. There is only reaction.

What the Song Requires

A song has essential elements: melody, rhythm, dynamics, and silence. A yoga class has exactly the same.

Melody is the dialogue — the through-line of language that carries students from the beginning to the end. Not random words. Specific, active, deliberate language chosen because it works on the body directly, below the level of conscious thought. *Exhale* before any movement instruction. Short sentences. Verbs first. Active always. The melody of a great class does not make students think. It makes them move.

If the room is thinking, you've already lost it.

Rhythm is pacing — how fast you move between poses, how long you hold, how you breathe your voice into the room. New teachers tend to rush. They are uncomfortable with silence, with the moment just before something happens. Learn to love that moment. It is where the room collects itself. It is where the next instruction lands with full weight rather than disappearing into noise.

Dynamics is the variation in intensity — physical, energetic, vocal. A class that stays at the same volume for 90 minutes is exhausting in the wrong way. Peaks need valleys. Hard

moments need recovery. The teacher's voice gets quiet just before something important, so when they speak again, the room leans in.

Silence is the most underused instrument in the yoga teacher's repertoire. Music cuts out and the room focuses. The dialogue pauses and students go inward. Silence is not empty. It is the most intentional sound in the composition, and the teacher who has learned to use it has found something most teachers spend years missing.

The Teacher Is Not in the Song

Here is the thing that takes most teachers years to understand: you are the conductor, not the soloist.

The students are the music. You are not performing *for* them — you are performing *them*. Your job is not to demonstrate, to impress, to show what your body can do on a mat. Your job is to direct the energy of 30 or 50 or 80 people so that for 90 minutes they forget they are individuals and become a room.

When you are watching yourself, you are not watching the room.

The teacher who is thinking about their own body, their own form, whether they look correct in the pose — that teacher has left the room. And the students, who are tuned to the teacher's presence the way an audience is tuned to a conductor, feel the absence immediately. Not consciously. In their bodies. The energy drifts. The song loses its thread.

A room without a conductor is just people doing yoga. Stay in the room. Watch the room. The class is the song, and the song is theirs.

Practice: Listen to Your Own Class

Before you go further, try this. Record your next class — audio only. Do not listen immediately. Teach it, come home, let a day pass. Then sit with headphones and listen as if you are listening to music.

Where does the rhythm rush? Where does the melody lose its thread? Where does the silence feel like absence rather than intention? Where do you drop out of the room — into your own head, your own planning, your own discomfort?

You will hear things you cannot see while teaching. You will hear the moments when the room is completely with you, and the moments when it is not. That gap — between where you are and where you want to be — is the beginning of craft.

The class is a song. Learn to hear it.

Chapter One — Key Points

- A yoga class is not a practice session — it is a composed experience with a beginning, build, peak, and resolution. It has a score whether you know it or not.
- The teacher is composer and conductor: the score is the dialogue; the conducting is what you do live with it.
- Melody, rhythm, dynamics, and silence are all active tools — not things that happen around the teaching, but the teaching itself.
- The sequence is the sheet music. Understanding why it works is what separates performing it from following it.
- When you are watching yourself, you are not watching the room. The class belongs to the students. Stay in the room.

Reflection

1. Think of the best class you have ever taught. What made it feel like a song rather than a sequence?
2. Where in your class does the rhythm consistently rush — and what are you avoiding by speeding up?
3. In your last class, were you watching yourself or watching the room?

The class is the song. You are the one playing it.

From Why Most Teachers Lose the Room — Gabe Yoga