

Spotlight on Amy Cottingham

ITP Tulsa Group Co-Leader and Mastery Graduate

I live in Tulsa, Oklahoma, where I teach, perform, compose and promote my music and the music of others. My visionary mother enrolled me in piano and violin lessons at the age of three, but it wasn't until the age of 11 that I made it my own, deciding to practice by myself and to do my very best. My mother, also a piano teacher, started giving me her over-flow students when I was 14, and my then piano teacher gave me his over-flow gigs as soon as I could drive.

I started arranging music in middle school, started composing music in high school and competed in many piano and composition competitions throughout those years and into college, where I earned a bachelors degree in Piano Performance. While working on a Masters in Orchestra Conducting, I found myself burned-out and felt the need for depth, honesty and community. When I finished the degree, I focused on discovering my true identity, calming down, reading, finding people that had what I wanted, and seeking, seeking, seeking.

It was during this time, about 5 years ago, that I found ITP. Or, it found me. My life looks very different now than when I began the ITP journey, even very different than a year or 6 months ago. The outer things look the same, but internally, it's all shifted. I experienced a great amount of inner growth this last year when I was given the extraordinary gift of the Mastery training.



In the first few years of attending ITP meetings, I felt like it was all I could do to just show up. There seemed to be a huge, immovable wall between where I was and where I knew I could be. I understood the concept of already having within yourself the fullness of your potential, but all that really did was frustrate the hell out of me. It wasn't until I absolutely forced myself to figure out a way to do my daily physical and spiritual practices that I began to start living what had previously been stuck in my mind.

Last summer, a presence hit me, surrounded me, held me, entered me, was absolutely beyond anything that I could ever have imagined. I woke-up! It was instantly apparent to me that THIS was the real, the core, the lifeblood, the essence of me and all sentient beings. I dropped, crumbled, died, was reborn.

But what do I do when the experience of the great presence departs? What then? I wanted it back! It felt like someone had given me the greatest gift of my life then taken it away. Oh, how I longed for it, and still do, even though, of course, I know it is still there, that it is me, I am it. Regardless, I was left flailing-about, wondering what to do next.

I started meditating all the time, and communing with whatever it is that is beyond my immediate felt experience. I was sent new helpers, people and experiences that made me realize I was not alone. Silence Heals by Yolande Duran-Serrano and Laurence Vidal was invaluable. I started a blog about my spiritual journey (www.amycottinghamswritings.wordpress.com), and was asked to present several programs to our two Tulsa ITP groups. I started sharing my experience and newfound overwhelming desire with anyone that cared.

I was creating a river. Every time I gave, spoke, led, posted a blog, it energized me and seemed to create more room for me to receive. My ITP practice and community held me and comforted me while challenging me. I don't know what I would do without ITP.

I weave my ITP practice into my daily life all the time. It is all the same thing. I learned this with music long ago; during my practice sessions alone, I practice performing. You are a light all the time, whether you are alone or with people. Everything is the same thing. There is only one thing. Walking through the Kata and my other practices before I do all the other things that need taking care of each day is rooting something in me that is solid, unshakable, foundational.

I'm seeing that the discipline and repetition of these practices is as necessary as food and water. Over time, taking this centeredness into life is becoming seamless because there really is no separation between personal life, professional life and practice life. It is all presence, intentionality, energy, honoring the Self, feeding true identity and making decisions that serve the authentic self instead of clinging to old relationships and patterns that no longer serve truth.

Another natural outgrowth of my musical and ITP practice has been the creation of a monthly house concert series called Monthly Musicales ([view 10 minute YouTube](#)). Each concert features a variety of music and local musicians, with 4 to 5 performers or groups at each concert, purposely chosen from a wide and crazy variety of genres. In one program, for instance, we'll feature a bluegrass band, a classical viola concerto, a jazz singer and a rock band. This serves to bring together a group of musicians and music-supporters throughout the community that would never normally encounter each other.

Endless connections between artists and listeners have been created since these concerts began taking place 3 ½ years ago. I often ask college professors and symphony musicians to perform alongside high-school students, children and struggling artists.

As with my ITP community, we are all one and the same, and it is endlessly exciting to watch people come alive when given a connection to a new world that was right here in their town all along. I'm excited to see what unfolds for me next on this amazing path of practice.