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INTRODUCTION

Practice is the be-all and end-all for every musician. It is therefore important to be equipped with an excellent concept of practice exercises. This book explains the **how**, the **what** and the **why** of practising. Here you will find a list of captivating ‘tutors’ which you can use for advice. By experimenting with practice ‘recipes’, you will learn to approach music with creativity. Franz Liszt highlights the importance of practising well: *Die Technik des Übens ist wichtiger als das Üben der Technik*. (The technique of practising is more important than the practising of technique.)

Nowadays, interesting research is being carried out into methods of study for musicians. Insights such as ‘Rotierende Aufmerksamkeit’ (revolving focus during practice), a more brain-friendly approach as well as an improved understanding of mental processes are particularly inspiring. Practice is the most time-consuming activity of any musician. It never finishes and demands daily adjustments. Musicality has nothing to do with existing talent but with learned talent. Qualitative practice is the quest for efficiency, refinement and expression. Practising is a mentality! It is unfathomable that many music schools do not offer how best to practise as a standard subject.

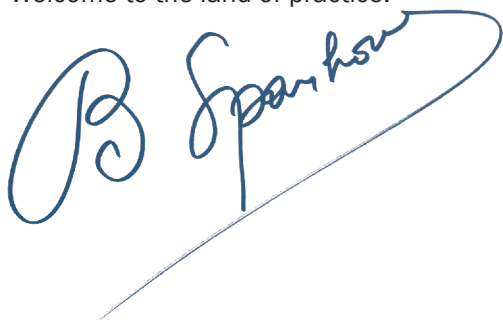
Everybody knows that taking a purely mechanical approach, practising to appease your conscience, lacking in concentration, making music without expression or quickly playing through a composition add no real quality to your playing. Unfortunately this type of poor practice is very common. This book is intended to inspire and motivate you to reach a better way of practising that also instils the joy of music making. You have undoubtedly been in this situation: you practise for a whole week, you arrive at your lesson full of enthusiasm and yet, your playing falters. You convince your teacher that you have nevertheless worked hard. Countless distinguished musicians affirm that they are ‘stuck’ every day whilst practising.

Practise practising is designed for everyone who has a passion for music: teachers, concertgoers, conservatoire students, music lovers, artists, parents, children. Principles of practising that are ‘brain-friendly’ apply to young and old, to amateurs and professionals. Choose the ‘recipes’ that are best for you and apply them to the true meaning of ‘the amateur’: ‘one who loves something immensely’.

Aut viam inveniam, aut faciam. (I shall either find a way or make one.) No magic trick exists to conquer a piece of music. There are always many solutions. Words such as ‘right’ or ‘wrong’ do not have their place here. The one truth does not exist. Learn from many different sources and enrich your studies with engaging strategies.

At the end of a music lesson, you will be told frequently: *practise well for next week*. Every pupil will need to figure out for himself what this means precisely. This book outlines a good approach to practising and selects 30 recipes, seasoned with tips, quotations, exercises and testimonials. Participants at workshops look for top tips that guarantee quick success in their practice routine. They expect a unanimous response. Impossible! However, if you still insist, I will put ‘learn to learn’ first. Enjoy that learning process.

Welcome to the land of practice.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, reading "B. Sparhawk". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, decorative initial "B". A long, thin horizontal line extends from the bottom of the signature across the page.

6. MENTAL PRACTICE

Jack Niclaus, American golfer (b. 1940)

I never hit a shot, not even in practice, without having a very sharp, in-focus picture of it in my head.

Robert Schumann, German composer and pianist (1810–1856)

Spielen Sie nicht eher ein Stück, als bis Sie es genau inwendig gehört haben.

(Do not play a piece of music until you have imagined it in detail in your head.)



What you need

a strong power of imagination and a quiet place that exudes tranquillity

‘Mentally’ means ‘with the mind’. Practise with your mind. This type of practice stands in stark contrast to practice without thought. You interrupt the practising on your instrument to reflect and analyse. When practising mentally, you visualise the following elements:

- The movements:** without using your instrument, you can imagine the movements that you will make.
- The sound:** written-down notes conjure pitches, vibrations, emotions and colours. You can imagine the sound accurately. You ‘hear’ and ‘feel’ intonation, sound colour, dynamics, articulation, harmony, rhythm, pitch...
- The notation:** you ‘see’ the score in your mind.

I will describe in a nutshell the three steps that the Russian pianist Tatjana Orloff-Tschekorsky enforces in her music school in Bonn, Germany, when teaching mental studying:

- First and foremost: **relax!**
- Imagine the notes in **sound** and **movement**.
- Play** the fragment once or twice. If the previous steps have been carried out well, this will succeed automatically.

Countless musicians experience the combination of physical and mental practice as one of the best methods of study. This is self-evident in sport. A ski jumper cannot physically carry out 100 jumps a day. The pianist Walter Gieseking studied parts of scores during bus journeys and was able to interpret them from memory upon his arrival. It is to be expected that conductors study a score without the presence of an orchestra and that they thus engrave the music and movements into their head.



Fritz Kreisler, a brilliant violinist, claims that he never practises: *In the formal use of the word, I have never practised in my whole life. I believe that everything is in the brain. You think of a passage and you know exactly how you want it.*



Conclusion

Practice must incorporate a good mixture of training both the mind and the body!



Task

Study the following fragment at a desk without an instrument at your disposal. Imagine the score, the sound and your body movements in your head. Identify the structure: that is always the first step! A fantastic motto is: *You will be able to play accurately whatever you can imagine correctly.* Or to quote Robert Schumann: *Habe ich eine klare und präzise innere Vorstellung von einer Bewegung, so kann ich sie auch ausführen.* (Whenever I have a clear and precise impression of a body movement, I can also carry it out)

Clog dance

Marcel De Backer

Allegro ♩ = 100

The musical score for 'Clog dance' is presented on six staves. It begins with the tempo marking 'Allegro' and a quarter note equal to 100. The key signature is one sharp (F#) and the time signature is 2/4. The melody is composed of eighth and sixteenth notes, creating a rhythmic pattern typical of clog dancing. The piece concludes with a double bar line on the sixth staff.

ABOUT BART SPANHOVE

As a member of Flanders Recorder Quartet, Bart Spanhove played more than 2,500 concerts in 65 countries. He teaches at LUCA School of Arts in Leuven, Belgium. In his lessons and workshops he endeavours daily to inspire others with the desire to make music. His great passion is research into innovative study strategies for musicians.

More information on bartspanhove.com.

