

# On Practice

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# Some views on practice...

....??

- ▶ Moral position: We must practice - if we don't practice we are lazy, slothful, a bad person.
- ▶ If you don't practice you won't ever be any good
- ▶ Expert view: We must practice to play well in performance
- ▶ Practical Capitalism: The more we practice the better we play
- ▶ If something is not good or not working we need to practice more. Repeat a passage 50 times to make it good. Repeat it 100 times to make it better
- ▶ We must practice to automatize performance and commit playing to muscle memory
- ▶ True Grit: Practice is not fun, but we must do it. Art is all about suffering!
- ▶ “If you practice with your hands only no amount of time will be enough, if you practice with your head, three hours a day should be ample time” (Heifetz/ Auer)



# More views on practice... Carl Flesch (1873-1944)

- ▶ “We regard accordingly the recommendation of cardinal virtues as less important than the realisation and removal of obstacles as the main task which needs to be addressed” (Flesch, II, 3)
- ▶ Practice: “the path which leads from “non-being able to play” a passage to “being able to play it” (Flesch, I, 77)
- ▶ Three stages of practice: (i) not knowing - not being able to play; (ii) to know without knowing by memory (iii) being able to play = memorised
- ▶ Transformation of conscious into unconscious movement (reflection leads to mistakes)
- ▶ “The frequent repetition of a passage has nothing to do with music” (78). Repetition is a “necessary evil” (ie. an evil)
- ▶ Avoiding exaggerations
- ▶ Technical skills are to practiced frequently but in small quantities (non multum, sed multa)
- ▶ One hour general technique, one and a half hours applied technique (technical study of repertoire), one and a half hour of pure music (concert like performance)

# Ivan Galamian (1903-1981)

- ▶ Practice is a process of self-instruction
- ▶ Complete and constant mental alertness during practice
- ▶ Mechanical routine-functioning and endless repetitions...  
...”practice of this kind, lacking both direction and control is a waste of time and effort” (Galamian, 94)

Division of practice time:

Building time: principle of mental preparation is of paramount importance (correlation). Solve one problem and proceed to next (useless to repeat over and over again a problem that is mastered). Mind anticipates the action

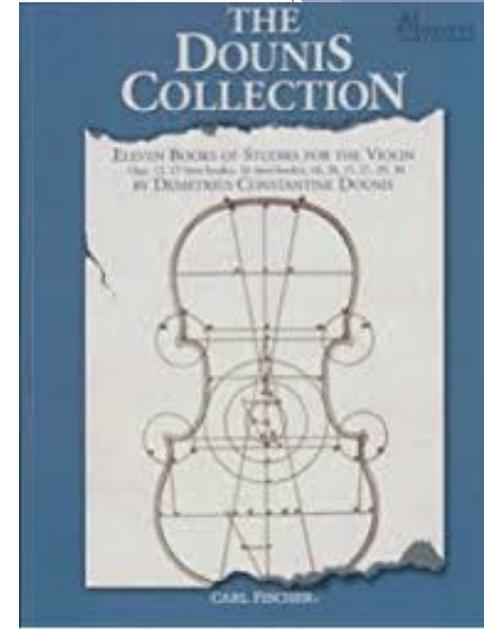
Interpreting time: emphasis on musical expressiveness; no interruption of execution, practice performance attitude and resilience

Performing time: “..entirely different conditions of the mind and muscles in the playing of a passage as an exercise and in playing it as a part of a musical composition (101)



# Demetrius Dounis (1894-1954)

- ▶ “Firstly, Dounis expected memorization of each new piece before it had been played...Most importantly, memorization of all the sensations of motion and relationships of body parts was stressed in order to lessen difficulties and to allow the musician to recreate positive sensations. Dounis believed that before any movement a very specific picture should be reflected in the brain.” (Constantakos, 56,57)
- ▶ “Most violinists believe that the solution of the problem “How to practice” lies in repeating, every day, various finger exercises, scales, arpeggios, bow exercises, etc. But this supposition is a fallacy. No one will ever learn how to practice by repeating day in, day out, finger exercises, scales, or in fact, the whole compendium of daily exercises for the violin. The result of such monotonous and arid study is usually worthless. This procedure explains why after years of intensive study, there are few violinists, very few indeed, who acquire and infallible technique... the true technical training of the violinist is not merely a training of the arm and the fingers but, principally, a training of the brain and the memory (Dounis, 8/10)
- ▶ “Cultivate at all times a feeling of absolute comfort while practicing” (233)





# Tadeusz Wronski (1915-2000)

- ▶ Analysis of practice behaviour of successful violinists
- ▶ “Just as time for technical work is frequently wasted by the knowledge that pieces are waiting and there is less and less time before an upcoming lesson, so too work on repertoire is spoilt through feeling guilty about neglecting proper technical preparation or having spent time where nothing more than a warm up was achieved. My first recommendation is that work with the violin should be thoroughly planned and one must execute practice with full knowledge that it is needed and that it saves time later when working on repertoire. One and a half hours a day is sufficient time for pure technical work. Through planning and uncompromising performance of technical exercises, one introduces a sense of inner calm and a clear conscience into practice.” (Wronski/ Wasiel, 11)
- ▶ Topic based approach (short time frames, in minutes)
- ▶ “the hand likes change” (variation of material)
- ▶ Practise a holistic process and reflects the holistic nature of violin playing. (rotation of material across larger learning cycles)
- ▶ Training plans devised by students for each day

# Summary (Wronski)

- ▶ Plan daily technical practice and the time allocated for each element as accurately as possible;
- ▶ Practise all elements of technique daily;
- ▶ Practise each technical element differently everyday;
- ▶ Practise with a watch and fulfil all points precisely in your plan;
- ▶ Have all "learning aids", including scale compilations, exercises, caprices and pieces, by your side so that you do not have to take a long time to find them;
- ▶ Plan technical work for the following day every evening on paper;
- ▶ Once a week introduce a "special day" where you spend time working on a certain set of problems;
- ▶ Do not practise technique at all on Sundays;
- ▶ Do not get used to always practising technique before repertoire.



## Karl Leimer (1858-1944)

- ▶ “It is essential, therefore, before beginning with the practice of the piece, to visualize the same, whereupon, if this has been done thoroughly, we shall be able to play it correctly from memory” (Leimer, 11)
- ▶ Conscious and active relaxation: “In order to attain a natural manner of playing... it is of the utmost importance to learn to exert the muscles consciously, and, what is of still greater importance, to relax them consciously. My manner of accomplishing this differs from that of many other pedagogues. I contrive to raise a feeling of relaxation from within, as it were (12)...We must think ceaselessly of relaxation.” (54)
- ▶ “For a pupil, therefore, who wishes to make quick progress, it is of greatest importance to avoid mistakes from the beginning. This can be attained, in the first instance, by playing very slowly, by thorough concentration in regard to rhythm.. and by the use of correct fingering. By means of absolute concentration the pupil is generally able to play small parts absolutely correctly, in the course of a few minutes...The uninterrupted concentration of from twenty to thirty minutes will probably tire the pupil. It is then useless to continue practicing... the pupil should pause for a while, in order to allow the brain to rest, and then commence work again in about an hour’s time, beginning with the phrases he last practiced. It is sufficient even for concert players to practice one-half an hour five or six times a day.” (47/48)

# Fritz Kreisler (1875-1962)



- ▶ “Technical exercises I use very moderately. I wish my imagination to be responsive, my interest fresh, and as a rule I have found that too much work along routine channels does not accord with the best development of my Art. I feel that technic should be in the player’s head, it should be a mental picture, a sort of ‘master record’. It should be a matter of will power to which the manual possibilities should be subjected. Technic to me is a mental and not a manual thing.” (Martens, 105)
- ▶ “The technic thus achieved, a technic whose controlling power is chiefly mental, is not perfect - I say so frankly- because it is more or less dependent on the state of the artist’s nervous system. Yet it is the only kind of technic that can adequately and completely express the musician’s every instinct, wish and emotion. Every other form of technic is stiff, unpliant, since it cannot entirely subordinate itself to the individuality of the artist” (Martens, 106)

# Niccolo Paganini (1782-1840)

- ▶ The “stalkers” who tried to identify the “secret” of Paganini often were unable to do so, because Paganini evidently practiced silently (cf. Kirnaskaya)
- ▶ If you wish to look for my secret..it’s not in the hands but in my head.



# What is practice?

- ▶ Preparation for performance (both in general and in specific terms)
- ▶ Learning of specific works of music
- ▶ Active, purposeful conditioning of
  - ▶ Attention/ intention (attitude)
  - ▶ Thinking
  - ▶ Way of playing
  - ▶ The limits of reaction to playing
- ▶ Individual learning process, involving the instrument - but not only and not always. (“mental practice”)
- ▶ Organised learning process (practice continuum)
- ▶ Reflection of purposeful overall progress (The ambivalence of skill development and specialisation)

# Why practice?

- ▶ Develop skills (instrumental, musical, artistic)
  - ▶ Develop fluency: mental abilities, correlation (mind-body), co-ordination of hands, balance, etc (technical matters)
  - ▶ Imagination (Clarity, vividness, interpretative, metaphorical imagination)
  - ▶ Specific areas: pitch, rhythm, sound, co-ordination
- ▶ Develop ease
- ▶ Develop and refine interpretation (-> building, performing time)
- ▶ Rehearsal of performance

# When is practice successful?

- ▶ The obvious: when performance is improved. Evidence of learning
- ▶ Greater ease (Ease an idea - not an outcome but an intention)
- ▶ Greater clarity, accuracy (Intention is clearer and translates more directly into performance)
- ▶ Mistakes are “removed” (Flesch: *Fehlerbeseitigung*)

# What determines our practice?

- ▶ Time (time available, time spent practicing)
- ▶ Motivation: Extrinsic, intrinsic (-> successful learning builds motivation)
- ▶ Planning -> Purpose & Goals
- ▶ Attention

# Practice to progress

- ▶ Developing a learning continuum
- ▶ Method and approach that reflect:
- ▶ Perspectives: Short term/ medium/ long term
- ▶ Short term: Practice methods
- ▶ Medium: building skills, repertoire
- ▶ Long Term: understanding what constitutes the “art” in its entirety, purpose and position of development

# The role of mistakes in practice & the role and relevance of repetition

- ▶ Mistakes present information
- ▶ Reacting to mistakes may preclude their solution -> keeping learning process open
- ▶ Repeating in response to mistakes is mostly an expression of frustration or confusion (habit)
- ▶ Just because we repeat, does not mean we will improve anything (“Repeating the same thing over and over again
- ▶ Purposeful repetition: recovery and anticipation (thinking).

# The objective ear

- ▶ Galamian: “To train the ear for objective listening is of the greatest importance in order to be able to hear the sound as the audience would hear it and to free oneself from the flattering fallacies of the subjective ear” (Galamian, 102)
- ▶ Leimer: “Most pianists have not the faculty of hearing themselves correctly...the noticing of the exact tone pitch is, so to say, only secondary when compared with the noticing of the exact tone quality, tone duration and tone strength.. The thorough training of the ear is a prerequisite for rapid progress” (Leimer, 10)
- ▶ Is there an objective ear? Is it desirable?
- ▶ The relevant perspectives:
  - ▶ Internal: performer’s perspective.
  - ▶ External: audience perspective
  - ▶ Different temporal relationships, but performer must “match” these, yet in the process of matching must not lose “internal ear”

# The importance of organisation for practice

- ▶ If practice is preparation for performance, it has to develop “one-chance” thinking which sustains performance. This means:
- ▶ Organisation of attention and intention (temporal, succession), recovery/ rest
- ▶ Setting timeframes for completion (expectations) -> starting and finishing times of practice, with increasingly clearer expectations of outcomes
- ▶ Autonomous organisation, ie. student determines pace, sets agenda, debriefs. -> development of practice ability over time.

# Effective organisation of practice

- ▶ Balancing work & Developing attention (units of practice that sustain attention, refreshing attention)
- ▶ Keeping track of progress
- ▶ Abandoning unproductive approaches and changing agendas (limits of planning and method)
- ▶ Noting progress - increasing expectations (high expectations sustain effective learning)

# Practicing for string players (particulars)

- ▶ Organisation of time to reflect areas of work (General Technique 20-30%, Applied Technique 20-30%, Repertoire 50%)
- ▶ Organisation in practice units (“boxes” of 20 minutes- can be modified). Work with clock

Daily

|                  |                     |                           |
|------------------|---------------------|---------------------------|
| GT (Scales, Arp) | AT (Kreutzer 10)    | GT (Double Stops, Bow Ex) |
| Kreutzer 10      | Repertoire (Bach E) | Bach E                    |
|                  |                     |                           |
|                  |                     |                           |

Week commencing \_\_\_\_\_

| Monday | Tuesday | Wednesday | Thursday | Friday | Saturday | Sunday |
|--------|---------|-----------|----------|--------|----------|--------|
| At     |         |           |          |        |          |        |
| Gt     |         |           |          |        |          |        |
| AT     |         |           |          |        |          |        |
| GT     |         |           |          |        |          |        |
| Rep    |         |           |          |        |          |        |
| Rep    |         |           |          |        |          |        |
|        |         |           |          |        |          |        |
|        |         |           |          |        |          |        |
|        |         |           |          |        |          |        |
|        |         |           |          |        |          |        |

# Establishing larger practice cycles

- ▶ Student works on their own practice development (organisation of time, content, balance of work). Discussions in lesson on quantity, content/ quality
- ▶ Possibility to rotate topics and include silent / mental practice in planning
- ▶ While there are guidelines on practice times for students (set for the various levels) the student is in charge and determines their time and rate of progress. Practice is entirely student centric.
- ▶ Central concern of practice is effective learning

# String Issues

- ▶ Overall Primary Direction from the internal ear (singing)
- ▶ Movement based performance. Playing is determined by anticipation, relaxation, co-ordination, rhythm
- ▶ Principle of attention to movement: arm/ fingers move while balance of movement is free. Attention on non-moving parts. (Leimer's "relaxation") (effective/ efficiency)
- ▶ Working on co-ordination and balance: technical practice establishes (ideal) models of co-ordination (left, right, left-right).
- ▶ Practice which separates feel -> pre-feel, pre-hear. (Yankelevich) Practice without bow, without violin & bow (miming)
- ▶ Applied Technical work and Repertoire studies must follow through on models established in technical work
- ▶ Models of playing guide imagination (and are in turn guided by imagination) - Metaphorical approach

# Specific Practice

- ▶ Son-file: practicing rest balance, tone production
- ▶ Rhythmic practice (cf. Galamian) to improve co-ordination in
  - ▶ I.e. Left hand dexterity (mordents, trills)
  - ▶ Bowing technique
  - ▶ Specific passage work
- ▶ Rhythm: impulse & recovery (energetic attention)
- ▶ Anticipation (anticipate complete playing - connection of internal ear & feeling)

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