

TUTTI

Journal of the Amateur Chamber Music Society Inc.
PO Box 584, Balgowlah NSW 2093

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Web site: <http://www.acms-australia.org/>

President's Report

Welcome to the 27th AGM of the Amateur chamber Music Society.



Playing Day Sunday 25 September 2011 Pymble Ladies College Avon Road, Pymble

The next Playing Day for 2011 and will again be at PLC in Pymble.

The timetable for this Playing Day is:

9:30am	to	9:50am	-	Player registration
9:50am	to	10:00am	-	Briefing session
10:00am	to	noon	-	First playing session
noon	to	1:00pm	-	Lunch
1:00pm	to	2:30pm	-	Second session
2:30pm	to	3:00pm	-	Afternoon tea
3:00pm	to	4:30pm	-	Third session

How to get there:

Enter via the main entrance in Avon Road, Pymble. Proceed along the road around the playing field towards the main group of buildings at the far end of the field. Parking should be available at the far end of the field (or around the field).

The school is located near Pymble Station and the music building is located on the city side of the quad.

Please bring

- instruments you have specified on the enrolment form
- music stand and music, picnic lunch and mug

Tutors

Please tick the appropriate box to indicate if you

1. would like a tutor 2. don't want a tutor 3. don't really mind

Check Group Lists posted at venue for

- any changes in groups
 - who is to provide music. That person may borrow from ACMS library and must return immediately after session.
 - who is to return playing room to original condition after the session.
- This is most important to ensure we don't lose the use of our venues.

Registration forms to be returned by Friday 9 September 2011

Membership Renewal

A final reminder to renew your membership for 2010/11. The Membership Register is being compiled and will be printed and distributed in October, so if you wish to be included in it, renew now. This will also entitle you to attend Playing Days and the Wollongong event.

The mailing label on the envelope in which this issue of *Tutti* came will indicate when your membership expires.

The fee remains at \$20 or \$15 per year for full time student or social security pensioner and there is also the three year option - details on the renewal form.

Blue Mountains Playing Days

There are two more Blue Mountains Playing Days for 2011. They will be as usual at the Uniting Church Hall, Lucasville Road, Glenbrook, NSW and are on these Saturdays:

August 27
October 22

The Practice Formula

Brian Martin

Research on expert performance provides guidance on how to become a much better amateur musician.

Like most others, I grew up with the idea that some individuals are naturally talented at music. Mozart, Beethoven, Schubert and many others had something special. Others surely couldn't expect to accomplish the same feats as musical geniuses.

Then, some years ago, I started reading about some of the research on expert performance. Researchers have investigated chess players, athletes, airline pilots, and many others to determine what it is that enables someone to perform at the highest levels. The findings are astounding.

The research provides little evidence for the existence of natural talent. In every domain, from chess to sports, world-class performers have spent at least ten years dedicated to improving, chalking up 10,000 or more hours of practice.

Some of the best research deals with musicians. In a famous study, researchers went into a violin academy in Germany. Their assumption was that if natural talent exists, they should be able to find top-performing students who didn't or hadn't practised as much as the others. The researchers consulted experts to make judgements about the performance level of the violinists, putting them into three groups: the highest level solo performers, average-level solo performers, and music teachers mostly aspiring to become solo performers. The researchers found that the top group had practised significantly more than the second group, which in turn had practised more than the third group. The key was accumulated lifetime practice. The more practice, the better the performers.

That's right: they didn't find anyone who succeeded without lots of practice. This means it's reasonable to make a seemingly radical hypothesis: there is no such thing as natural talent. Everyone who becomes a talented musician has to spend thousands of hours practising.

When I've mentioned this finding to friends, they often say "But what about Mozart? He wrote such sublime music. Surely he had some special gift." It seems that way on the surface, but those who have studied Mozart's life provide a different explanation. Wolfgang's father Leopold was one of the foremost violin teachers in Europe and began his daughter Nannerl on an intensive programme of practice from the youngest possible age.

Then along came Wolfgang, and Leopold applied the same methods with even greater vigour. Young Wolfgang would sit alongside Nannerl on the piano stool before he could stand. Leopold decided to put his entire energies behind Wolfgang's career.

Wolfgang's first public performance was at age six. Does that show innate talent or simply reflect acquired skills? It's impossible to know for sure because records of Wolfgang's practice schedule do not exist. But if he had spent a few hours per day practising, by age six he could have accumulated several thousand hours of practice, enough to qualify as a good amateur. Few non-musicians can distinguish a good amateur from a professional and in any case this level of performance is exceptional for a six-year old.

What about Mozart's phenomenal compositional output? Mozart's earliest symphonies were undistinguished. Indeed, many of them were simply patched together from other composers' works. His first highly accomplished symphonies were only written more than 10 years after he began composing, quite compatible with the observation that no one becomes a world-class performer without at

2011 Playing Days: Sept 25 (PLC): Nov 13 (TBA)
Tutti Deadlines: August 19 October 7

Membership Update (since 1 June 2011) - Welcome to new members

Surname **Given** **Suburb** **Postcode** **Phone-H or mobile** **Ins1** **SG** **Joined**

least a decade of intensive practice.

These observations are not intended to denigrate Mozart. His accomplishments are undeniable. The information available is compatible with the hypothesis that Mozart's brain started out little different from anyone else's, but that it was powerfully shaped from the earliest age towards musical achievement. In other words, Mozart's musical skills were acquired, not innate.

The implication is that your musical skills depend much more on what you do — what you listen to, how much you practise, who teaches you — than on genes or destiny or any other intrinsic factor. Of course, it's much too late to become a modern-day Mozart, shaping your musical brain from birth. But it's possible to take inspiration from the finding that good performance is based on hard work. It means you can get better by doing more practice.

Deliberate practice

What sort of practice? Anders Ericsson, a central researcher in the field, says that to become an expert performer, practice has to take a particular form that he calls "deliberate practice." It involves intense concentration on trying to do better while tackling tasks at the limit of one's skills.

Top performers may spend up to four or five hours per day at deliberate practice. It is exhausting because of the need to maintain concentration. Top-level performers typically practise in several separate sessions, usually when they are most alert, most commonly in the morning, assuming a good night's sleep.

Maintaining this level of practice for many years requires great dedication and often means sacrificing other interests. It's not for everyone.

What does this mean for amateur musicians? Here I try to spell out

the implications for those who want to become better players without aspiring to join the ranks of international soloists. Unlike professionals seeking to spend one, two or four hours per day practising, amateurs may average 5, 15 or 30 minutes per day.

My comments here are for those who would like to spend time becoming better players, and to be more efficient in doing this. If you're perfectly happy playing at your current standard, that's fine.

Rehearsing seldom counts as practice. You might spend an hour every day or an afternoon once a week with your quartet, but little of this is deliberate practice. It may be challenging and fun but it won't do much to raise your standard. Deliberate practice usually needs to be done alone or with someone — a teacher or co-learner — who is helping you to improve.

Let's say you've set aside half an hour to practise. You start with some scales or simple pieces to warm up. This seldom counts as deliberate practice, unless you're concentrating intensely on making those scales better.

Here's the way it works. Your brain has some pathways — actually, sheaths of myelin — for the things you do regularly, and the more you do them, the more developed the pathways. If you've played a scale or passage over and over, without paying much attention, you're using the pathway but not doing much to strengthen it. It's like walking at a casual pace or lifting a light weight just a few times: the activity won't build your stamina or strength. To improve, you need to push your muscles, lungs and — most importantly — your brain past their comfort points.

Let's say you're working on a piece and there are some difficult technical passages in it. In deliberate practice, you focus on those technical passages. One

approach is to play the passage very slowly, slowly enough so you can play every note accurately. Then speed up the tempo. If you make a mistake on a note or two, then that is the area you concentrate on. Ignore the rest of the passage for the moment and focus on the notes you have trouble with. Play them slowly, again so you can play them perfectly. Then more quickly. Over and over, slowly and more quickly. After five minutes of this sort of focus on a few bars, you can move on to another passage.

The next day, when you start practising, you go straight to this difficult passage and repeat the detailed treatment. You might start by trying to play it at tempo. As soon as you make mistakes, again go back to the problem notes and work on them. Your approach to the passage can change from day to day, as you gain facility with some notes but still have problems with others.

It's worth varying your way of practising, because this stimulates the brain more effectively than playing in exactly the same way. To tackle the difficult technical passage, you might vary your approach by doing it all staccato or all slurred, by changing to a dotted rhythm, by using rubato, and so forth.

Consider these two ways of approaching a piece.

1. Play through the whole piece at the same tempo. When you come to a difficult passage, try to get through it as well as you can and keep going.

This approach makes you familiar with the piece. However, you're unlikely to get a lot better on the difficult passages, and you may even reinforce a poor way of playing them.

2. Put most of your time and effort into the most difficult passages.

This approach builds your capacity. After tackling the difficult passages, the other parts of the piece will seem easy.

Exactly the same sort of approach can be applied to every other element of playing, including tuning, articulation, rhythm and interpretation.

A note on interpretation. Many musicians think expression is something you have to feel — and that it can't be practised. You do have to feel it, but you can get better through practice. Just pick a passage, especially one marked *expressivo*, and play it over and over, each time with different tempo, dynamics, attack, *accelerando* or *ritardando*, or other stylistic change. Often it's useful to exaggerate your modifications to strict tempo. Then play your different versions to some non-musicians and see which ones they like the most. As you gain more experience with different ways of playing a phrase or passage, you will start to like some more than others. You're feeling the music!

When you've mastered expression on one passage, then consider following the same process on another, preferably one that is not so easy. Eventually you can work up to *expressivo* on a series of repeated quavers!

Feedback

A crucial part of improvement is obtaining detailed feedback. General comments like "That sounds nice" or "Well done" might improve your self-esteem but don't give much guidance on how to do better. You need comments like "louder in this passage," "your low notes need to be clearer" or "here's a fingering to help with this trill."

Some amateurs get this sort of feedback by taking lessons from professionals. There are other ways. When rehearsing in a small group, you can take time to listen to each player and make suggestions for improvement. Duets with the same instrument are especially good for this. Recording yourself and carefully analysing how you sound can be valuable. So can playing along with recordings. Tuners and metronomes are worthwhile.

The key in all of this is to search for the thing that limits your performance. It might be a matter of technique, rhythm,

tuning or ensemble. Whatever it is, try to get to the bottom of what's holding you back, find a way to improve and then work regularly on it.

Practice schedules

When's the best time of day to undertake deliberate practice, the part of your practice when you concentrate intensely and work on challenging tasks? Generally, it's when you're alert and fresh, which means at or near the beginning of your practice time rather than the end. For most people, energy is greater in the morning than late at night. Getting plenty of rest and sleep is important in having sufficient energy to practise with concentration.

Next: how frequently? The ideal for practising is daily. Ten minutes per day is better than an hour once a week. Why? Because you train your brain more efficiently when you do a bit and

then allow the brain to process what you've done, unconsciously, before the next effort. Daily practice gives more opportunity for this unconscious processing, whereas intermittent lengthy sessions don't.

Imagine preparing for a performance. Is it wise to wait until a few days beforehand and then put in a few marathon practice sessions? Hardly. This would be like a basketball player waiting until a few days before a game and then training for many hours. The result is more likely to be exhaustion than inspiration. It's far better to begin a month beforehand, or longer, and do a small amount every day possible. That way the mental effort has a better opportunity to sink in.

You're not a professional musician, so you don't need or want to practise for hours every day. So how much should you

Kirribilli Sunset Concerts

Sunday 4 September 2011 at 5.00 p.m.

Organizer - Ji-Hyun Kim

Program:

BACH Trio Sonata BWV 1079 (A Musical Offering)

(1) Largo (2) Allegro (3) Andante larghetto (4) Allegro
Vania Chan and Michelle Urquhart (violins), David Oldroyd (cello),
Ji-Hyun Kim (harpsichord)

BRAHMS Sonata for Piano and Cello E minor Op38

(1) Allegro non troppo (2) Allegretto quasi Menuetto – Trio (3) Allegro
Benjamin Avanzi (cello), Ji-Hyun Kim (piano)

FAURE Piano Trio Op120

(1) Allegro ma non troppo (2) Andantino (3) Allegro vivo
Vania Chan (Violin), Caroline Slaytor (cello), Nicholas Stokes (piano)

WEBSTER Carmen Rhapsody (based on themes from Bizet's Carmen)
Richard Tardif (flute), Lindsay Wanstall (clarinet), Ji-Hyun Kim (piano)

Sunday 2 October 2011 at 5.00 p.m.

Organizer - Ian Butler

Draft program could include:

Louise FARRENC (1804 - 1875) Sextet for Piano and Winds in C minor Op40 (25') with piano Lisa Kawai, flute Ian Butler, clarinet Peter Scaysbrook, oboe Yu-Lan Chan, french horn Jillian Carsen-Jackson and bassoon Helen Boyton

Sunday 6 November 2011 at 5.00 p.m.

An organizer is required for this concert - if you would like to volunteer for the role, please contact Tony Tenney or Tomas Drevikovsky.

The Manager and volunteer staff of the Kirribilli Neighbourhood Centre provide supper (wine, juice and savouries) and charge \$10 entry donation (\$5 concession/seniors) to raise funds for the Centre which is at the Kirribilli Neighbourhood Centre, 16 Fitzroy St, Kirribilli.

do? It really depends on what standard you want to reach and maintain. It's often better to start with a modest target, for example 10 minutes per day of deliberate practice. If you can maintain that for months and you're itching to do even better, then you might increase it to 15 minutes. On the other hand, if 10 minutes of concentrated effort on difficult passages seems too agonising, then cut it back to 5 minutes.

Motivation

The hard part in this is getting started. Prominent soloists are in a different situation. They didn't get to their standard by coasting along, just practising now and then, but through regular, dedicated effort. They learned how to maintain a habit long ago and they know they need to maintain it because they have performances regularly.

Amateur musicians are in a different situation. There's no obligation to maintain a standard, and often it's good enough just to drift along, practising whenever you feel in the mood. If, though, you want to add more deliberate practice to your regime, how can you become motivated?

Imagine there are two competing impulses in your mind. One, the planner, says "I'd like to improve because I know I'll get greater satisfaction, and therefore I want to practise regularly." The other, the postponer, says "I don't really feel like it today, so I'll do it tomorrow." The challenge for your planner is to set up a system to overcome the postponer.

You can set up a personal routine, for example to practise immediately after breakfast. Another option is to ask someone you live with to give a reminder: "Tell me to practise if I haven't done it by 5pm." Or you could ask a friend to text you at a particular time or, even better, have a reciprocal arrangement.

Changing your habits can be extremely difficult, so you may want to consider contingency management, which means you give yourself a reward for practising or a penalty for not. Suppose you want to spend the first five minutes working on a tough passage. You could reward yourself by then playing something you enjoy. For getting started practising, you could reward yourself afterwards with a coffee or chocolate.

As for penalties, you could say "I won't have lunch until I practise" or "I won't take a shower until I practise." If you find yourself skipping lunch or not showering for days, you'll know you have some deep resistance to practising!

Why should you go through such contortions? You're an amateur, after all, and skipping a day or a week or a month should be no big deal. Quite so. Only use these sorts of techniques if you — the planner side of you — really want the satisfaction you know you obtain from practising and improving and playing ever tougher pieces, and are being thwarted by your postponer side.

The postponer can be insidious, putting all sorts of negative thoughts in your mind, such as "This is a waste of time," "I'll never get better," and "I'll be in a better mood tomorrow," or just "I don't have to do this." Be prepared for this negative self-talk, and counter it by responding "I enjoy practising once I get started," "If I keep practising, I'll get better" or "Shut up little voice!"

Children may not have such self-doubts because they do what their parents say, or maybe they are thrilled to be able to learn music. Few adults have a parent figure to give us authoritative advice — we are not like the young Wolfgang. Even if you have a teacher, you still need to put in effort practising. That's why

establishing a habit is so important. There's no obligation, but there's also nothing stopping you.

Acknowledgements

I thank Susan Butler and Anders Ericsson for valuable comments on a draft.

Further reading

On the violin academy study, see K. Anders Ericsson, Ralf Th. Krampe and Clemens Tesch-Römer, "The role of deliberate practice in the acquisition of expert performance," *Psychological Review*, Volume 100, Number 3, 1993, pages 363–406.

For the relevance of this research for non-professionals, see Andreas C. Lehmann and K. Anders Ericsson, "Research on expert performance and deliberate practice: implications for the education of amateur musicians and music students," *Psychomusicology*, Volume 16, 1997, pages 40–58.

For research covering a range of areas, see K. Anders Ericsson, Neil Charness, Paul J. Feltovich and Robert R. Hoffman (eds.), *Cambridge Handbook of Expertise and Expert Performance* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006).

Accessible treatments of research on expert performance include Geoff Colvin, *Talent is Overrated: What Really Separates World-class Performers from Everybody Else* (New York: Penguin, 2010); Daniel Coyle, *The Talent Code. Greatness Isn't Born. It's Grown. Here's How* (New York: Bantam, 2009); David Shenk, *The Genius in All of Us: Why Everything You've Been Told about Genetics, Talent, and IQ Is Wrong* (New York: Doubleday, 2010).

The new committee for 2011/2012 is:

President
Secretary
Treasurer
Committee
Committee and M'ship Sec'y
Playing Days (co-opted)
Administrator (co-opted)
Tutti Editor (co-opted)