

Seven Ways to Practice Music More Efficiently

Written for King Of The Strings by Thomas Zwijsen



KING OF THE STRINGS

Preface

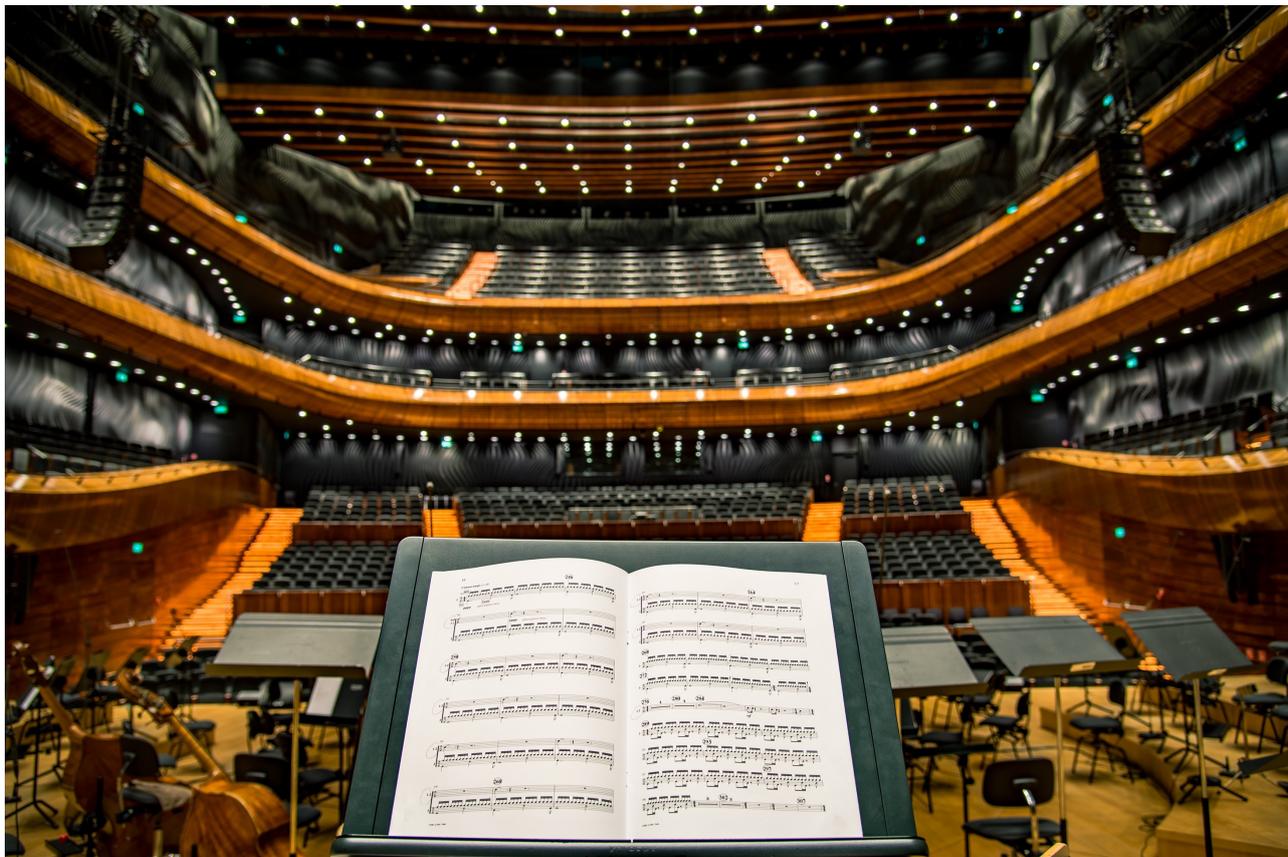
The question I get asked most is “How many hours a day do you practice?!” My short answer is always “a lot”.

In the many years I’ve been studying music, mostly classical guitar, I’ve learned that the amount of time you study doesn’t always directly relate to how much improvement you make.

Everybody knows these stories of classical musicians who practice 9 hours a day and become incredibly good at their instrument. Most people however simply don’t have the time to practice 9 hours a day. Whether it’s because of work, family obligations or other occupations. Even most professional musicians I know don’t practice that many hours. Being a professional musician these days often means you actually spend quite a large amount of time on promoting yourself, doing social media, booking concerts and “being your own manager” in general.

When I’m not doing all of the above, I’m usually touring and playing concerts all over the world. Most of the days on tour are filled with long travels, sound checks, concerts (and some parties). This means the limited time that’s left for practice or rehearsal should be used to the fullest.

The following 7 chapters will help you to get more result from the time you practice your instrument.



1. Choose an achievable song.

Video lesson: https://youtu.be/qwjAc_6L2bl

Being ambitious is incredibly important in music. Being overambitious may cause problems. I've been studying guitar for almost all my life, taught guitar lessons to kids and adults, published books and video lessons of my arrangements and recently started an online guitar school at www.KingOfTheStrings.com.

During all these activities I noticed a similar trend; many students seem to overestimate themselves a bit.

You can't blame people for dreaming out loud... But when you ask them in one of their first guitar lessons "What song would you like to learn?", and they answer something like "Fear Of The Dark by Iron Maiden", you might need to advise them to choose a more achievable song. I definitely don't want to demotivate anyone, and I absolutely believe all of my students can achieve amazing results, but starting with songs that are "above your league" usually works demotivating. After a couple of lessons you might start to think "wow, I still suck, maybe guitar is not for me...". If you start with a more achievable song you just need a few lessons to say "awesome, I can already play this song pretty well and I can entertain people with it".

In my opinion it's important to see and enjoy the results of your practicing as soon as possible. As a young kid I started learning music in Belgium. The Belgian music schools are amazing, but they have one HUGE disadvantage. The first year the kids in Belgium only get theory and solfège classes (sight reading, singing intervals, studying harmony, etc). Of course all these skills are incredibly important for a musician, but when you're a kid and your parents tell you "we'll take you to guitar classes", you want to play an actual guitar immediately, not study theory for a year prior to finally being allowed to touch a guitar. Due to these theory classes I started disliking music school at a very young age. Luckily my father taught me some easy (but still useful) songs before I totally lost motivation to study music.

Some of these very first songs were *House Of The Rising Sun* by *The Animals* and *Streets Of London* by *Ralph McTell*. These songs aren't difficult at all, but they're still challenging for a total beginner, and most importantly... They sound nice! Playing achievable songs well is much nicer than playing extremely challenging songs badly. We all know getting compliments is motivating. When someone hears you playing a song well, and it sounds pleasant and beautiful, you may get positive feedback and you'll be motivated to practice more. Nobody likes to hear someone struggling playing a piece that's way to difficult.

The *King Of The Strings* online guitar course I created consists of two levels; the beginners course and the advanced course. I notice many people join the advanced course, without mastering all the basic techniques from the beginners course. Without being in control of these basic techniques, it may be impossible to play some of the really advanced songs.

Some of the masterclasses and guitar clinics I've taught were followed by performances of the students. Sometimes some of the most talented students would choose to perform extremely challenging songs. If for some reason the performance didn't go well, for instance because the song is technically too difficult (and even more difficult due to the pressure of playing for an audience), the student would have a bad feeling about the performance, even though he or she might be the most talented one of all. This obviously works demotivating.



Choose an achievable song; learn how to walk before you think of flying!

2. Focus on Beauty, not Speed.

Video lesson: <https://youtu.be/11hsWibCch8>

It's important to start slowly. Focus on playing every bar correctly, and playing every bar as beautiful as possible, not as fast as possible (for now). Of course it's tempting to play the easier parts faster than the difficult parts, but this leads to sloppy performances of the fast parts, and to a bad sense of rhythm in general.

When you start practicing a song, choose an achievable starting tempo for the song, and **play the whole song** in that tempo! Don't increase the tempo until you can play every bar in your starting tempo.

The most important question to ask yourself is; can you **CONNECT** all the bars without leaving a gap?!

Most students have the tendency to play the parts they can play well faster and faster every time, but when the difficult parts come up what do they do...? Usually they slow down, leave a gap, or play a mistake.

Obviously the best way to keep your tempo consistent throughout the song, is using a metronome. You don't even need to go to a store anymore to buy a metronome.. there are many of them online, you can install a metronome app on your smartphone, and every free recording software (such as Garageband) has a built in metronome.

Set your metronome to a calm, achievable speed when you get started. Try to play the whole song at this speed. Obviously some parts will be too difficult, so these are the parts you need to isolate and work on more. Once you can play through the song without slowing down on the difficult parts, you're ready in increase the tempo on your metronome. Repeat the same procedure till you've achieved the speed you aimed for.

I've had students in the past who wanted to play my Nylon Maiden arrangements, and who could technically play all the techniques in both hands correctly. They could also play each bar correctly. Despite their talent and effort, I could hear immediately that they never used a metronome. They'd literally leave a gap between every bar. They'd play a bar correctly, then leave a gap to prepare the next bar... etc. This is not nice to listen to!

Apart from using a metronome, there's another very easy solution for this; play along to a recording of the song!!



Playing a note correctly is one thing... playing it at the right time is just as important!

“This course gives answers to all questions about practicing...

*How to practice efficiently? How to memorize songs? How to avoid injuries?
How much do I need to practice? How to achieve more result in less time?
How to prepare for a performance? How to avoid playing mistakes? How to
overcome stage fright? How to entertain an audience? How to improve sense
of rhythm? How to prepare mentally? Etc... “*

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Click this link to get the Complete Course!



<http://kingofthestrings.com/seven-ways-to-practice-more-efficiently/>