

# FormingPerforming

- *first-person methods as a strategy for improving quality of music practice*

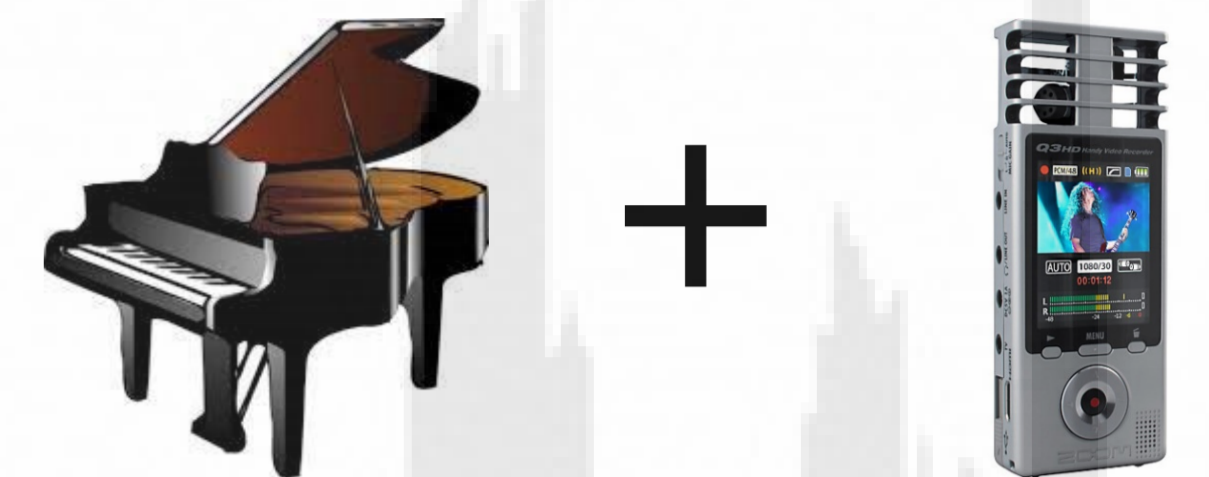
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## Background

The cognitive processes involved in mastering a classical musical piece at a professional level is difficult to assess via traditional research methods, as they entail a complex blend of analytical strategies, automated motor learning expertise and emotional and imaginative involvement. In this project, Rastogi has systematically used first-person methods such as self-observation and reflection to search for categorization and conceptualization of important aspects of the learning process.

## Methods

The method involved in his investigation was primarily observation of video recordings of his own piano practice. Around 70 hours were recorded and subsequently reviewed and analyzed applying critical reflection, leading to a set of derived conceptualizations. Some of the videos, including synchronized on-screen analyses, were published on YouTube. Furthermore, the results were published in an e-book.



## Findings

Unconscious strategy changes appear rapidly, resistance in the learning process is often resolved covertly and several techniques were developed which increased the speed of learning, such as conscious attention shifts between perception and action as well as self-awareness strategies (see below for concrete advice).

The project demonstrates the validity of using a first-person perspective to gain new insights directly relevant for professional musicians and as a way of gaining a better understanding of the cognitive processes involved in advanced level musical practice.



*Model showing the lightning-fast attention changes, expert classical music performers need to master.*

## Strategies for optimizing practice

Generally: The key is to balance conscious and sub-conscious aspects as well as competently alternating attention between “inside” and “outside” phenomena (see above).

- “Tickling yourself”. Learning how to focus on the emotional/perceptive result of the different actions done at the instrument
- Actively using “action representation” (Jeannerod 2006) as a processual element, by imagining, executing, and perceiving as an integrated phenomenon
- Using muscular freedom as a means to musical freedom, and vice versa
- Using self-monitoring technology as a tool for both increasing the quality of the practice process as well as a shortcut to achieving an external focus, which is integral to a convincing performance
- Consciously oscillating between focusing on details and overall phenomena - “Being in several places at the same time”.
- Accepting intuitive leaps in the process, but managing the practice process analytically and consciously on larger time-scales
- Be open for “bottom-up” processes, so the body schemas (Gallagher 2005) gained by achieving expertise can become a fully and completely part of the process

## References

Marc Jeannerod: Motor Cognition: What actions tell the self. Oxford University Press 2006

Shaun Gallagher: How the Body Shapes the Mind. Oxford University Press 2005

## BIO

Søren Rastogi is an internationally renowned and sought-after professional concert pianist as well as an associate professor at RAMA. In this artistic research project, supported by The Danish Ministry of Culture and The Royal Danish Academy of Music (Copenhagen), he explored the process of learning the hitherto not performed piano concerto by Paul von Klenau (1944).

