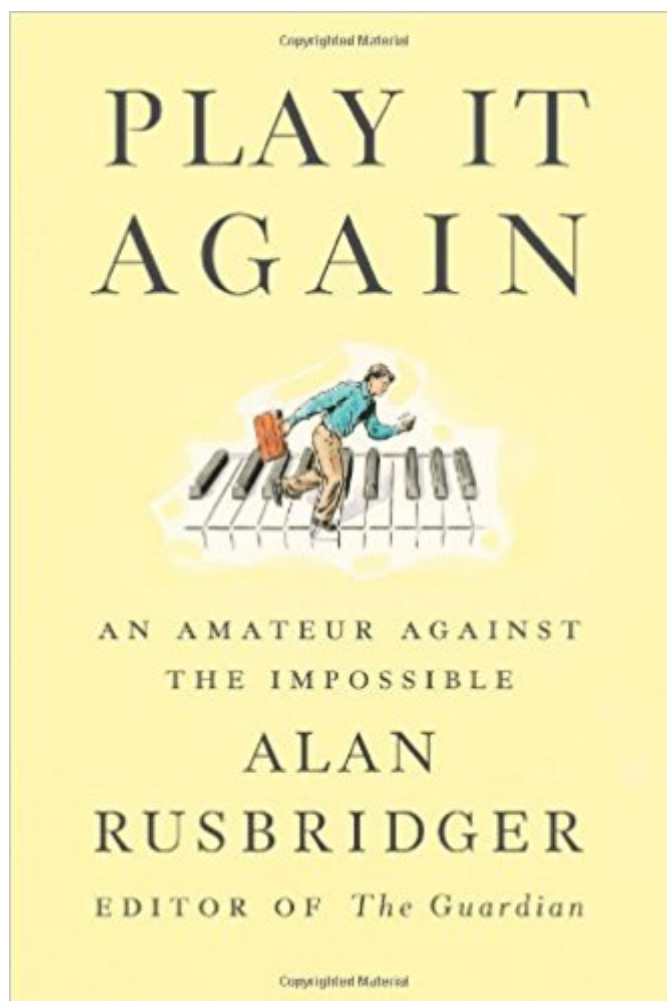


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# Play It Again: An Amateur Against The Impossible



## Synopsis

As editor of the Guardian, one of the world's foremost newspapers, Alan Rusbridger abides by the relentless twenty-four-hour news cycle. But increasingly in midlife, he feels the gravitational pull of music—especially the piano. He sets himself a formidable challenge: to fluently learn Chopin's magnificent Ballade No. 1 in G minor, arguably one of the most difficult Romantic compositions in the repertory. With pyrotechnic passages that require feats of memory, dexterity, and power, the piece is one that causes alarm even in battle-hardened concert pianists. He gives himself a year. Under ideal circumstances, this would have been a daunting task. But the particular year Rusbridger chooses turns out to be one of frenetic intensity. As he writes in his introduction, "Perhaps if I'd known then what else would soon be happening in my day job, I might have had second thoughts. For it would transpire that, at the same time, I would be steering the Guardian through one of the most dramatic years in its history." It was a year that began with WikiLeaks' massive dump of state secrets and ended with the Guardian's revelations about widespread phone hacking at News of the World. "In between, there were the Japanese tsunami, the Arab Spring, the English riots . . . and the death of Osama Bin Laden," writes Rusbridger. The test would be to "nibble out" twenty minutes per day to do something totally unrelated to the above. Rusbridger's description of mastering the Ballade is hugely engaging, yet his subject is clearly larger than any one piece of classical music. *Play It Again* deals with focus, discipline, and desire but is, above all, about the sanctity of one's inner life in a world dominated by deadlines and distractions. What will you do with your twenty minutes?

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

The editor of The Guardian recounts his quest to master a notoriously difficult piano piece in this inspiring book, a tale of perseverance in the face of enormous odds. During a period of more than a year marked by the WikiLeaks and phone-hacking scandal stories, amateur musician Rusbridger carves out the time in his demanding schedule to learn Chopin's "Ballade No. 1 in G minor." With great detail, down to the fingering of the piece, the series of diary entries will interest the musically minded most strongly, although it's possible for nonmusicians to comprehend. Rusbridger speaks to experts and enthusiasts in several different fields to deepen his understanding of the piece and the impact of making music on the brain. Like the Chopin piece, reading this account requires dedication but holds rewards for those who make the effort. As his deadline looms, the drama mounts. Can he master the Ballade and answer his questions about the quest: Is there time for such an endeavor, or is it too late to try? --Bridget Thoreson

"This wonderfully illuminating and entertaining chronicle shows Mr. Rusbridger's incredible dedication and energy in pursuing the mastery of an iconic Chopin piano work. He is an amateur of the piano in the way that we all should be--he truly loves the music and the instrument. I am inspired by his example." --Emanuel Ax

"This is not only the diary of a sixteen-month challenge but also an extended essay on beauty, memory, and performance; on time and how we use it; on work and what we do it for. A wonderful book." --Sarah Bakewell, author of *How to Live: or, A Life of Montaigne in One Question and Twenty Attempts at an Answer*

"Music is not just for professionals. It is a universal art form--to be treasured, shared, and enjoyed by amateurs. *Play It Again* is the inspiring story of how an exceptionally busy editor makes the time in his life for the piano--and one piece in particular, the fearsomely difficult Chopin G minor Ballade No. 1. If it encourages others to find the space for music, I, for one, would be extremely happy." --Daniel Barenboim

"This captivating book masquerades as the journal of a magnificent obsession, but you soon realize that it's wider-ranging than that, and far more endearing. The story pivots on a feeling that many of us share: a deep and abiding love of music coupled with a daydreamer's challenge to master one truly great work. With an exegetical discussion of Chopin's masterpiece, Alan Rusbridger insists we step inside the music with him and consider the score with the probing mind of a dedicated amateur. A remarkable tour de force." --Thad Carhart, author of *The Piano Shop on the Left Bank*

"In this

dazzling, dizzying memoir, one of the world's leading newspaper editors tells of learning to play Chopin's formidable Ballade No. 1 in G minor against a backdrop of phone hacking and WikiLeaks espionage. The day-to-day counterpoint of piano practice and breaking news is a compositional feat in itself: you have the impression of a wide-awake, fearless mind. — Alex Ross, author of *The Rest Is Noise*

I love music, but I'm not a big classical music fan, and I don't play the piano. But I've really, really enjoyed this book. The gist of the story is that Mr. Rusbridger has a year to learn one of Chopin's most difficult piano pieces, the Ballade No. 1. He only gets to practice for perhaps a half hour a day. How does he do it? He gets a teacher, of course. But he also talks to many, many pianists, including some of the world's top pianists. He also talks to a few neuroscientists to figure out how, for instance, any person can possibly memorize a piece like Chopin's Ballade No. 1. At the same time, I should mention, Rusbridger is editor of the Guardian newspaper--so he's running a newspaper at the same time he's trying to figure out how to play this difficult piece. The lessons that Mr. Rusbridger learns about piano are not limited to the piano, of course, and that's what makes it doubly interesting: any new skill requires similar dedication, and yes, practice does make perfect.

Recommended to me by a teacher at piano camp Sonata when I expressed that my next piece is Chopin Gm Ballade which I gave up completing 15 yrs ago. This book expressed exactly same issues and same feelings. I loved it from the first page . . . Gave me hope to pursue again. Since I started working on the piece, I am able to play whole piece as a rough draft within a month. I didn't think I was capable at late 50s of age to play it again. I look forward to finish the book and finalize the piece so I can perform for my Audience. Wonderful book. Thank you for the inspiration !

Alan Rusbridger's account of his quest to master one of the piano repertoire's most challenging pieces, Chopin's Ballade No. 1 in G minor, is a wonderful lens into the challenges and rewards of pursuing a lofty goal that many would see as belonging in the domain of the young. Two aspects of the narrative were the highlight for me: 1. Alan's interviews with noteworthy pianists, piano teachers, piano makers, and researchers. Alan's deftly draws out opinions and insights on the impact of social media on music, what constitutes musicality, how human memory works in the young and old, and how to practice. 2. Insight into the workings of publishing, the impact of social media on publishing, and the background of the Guardian's breaking of the Wiki Leaks story

is fascinating. The only reason I did not give the book five stars is I found the long, detailed passages on the technical challenges one faces in playing the Ballad overwhelming for this very mediocre pianist. A more accomplished pianist may find Alan's bar by bar descriptions of fingering options and pedaling much more enjoyable than I. In conclusion, Alan's ability to manage his vocation and avocation to squeeze in practice time while working through one of the most demanding periods in his auspicious career is an inspiration for me.

I am a musician/pianist and know the score of the Chopin Ballade in g minor. It was grand entertainment for me to read about all the pitfalls and successes Rusbridger had with learning the Ballade. I kept the score at my side while reading it, therefore I knew the exact measure he was talking about. I sympathized with him all the way. I also liked the various interviews he had with professional pianists, piano makers and scientists. Makes me want to go back to learn it again. It's incredibly beautiful. My only complaint is that he doesn't mention his family very much in relation to their part in his quest to learn the Ballade.

I have just finished reading *Play it Again*, after savoring its pages for more than a year now. I loved it so much, and did not want it to end. Alan Rusbridger has done a great service to the amateur pianist community by writing such a thorough account of his travails with Chopin's ballads. His writing style is sublime, as one would expect of a distinguished newsman. The book is a thoroughly enjoyable read, but more than that, it is a wonderful up-to-date guide on all things that affect and concern the amateur pianist. Most enriching was his plan to meet and interview several accomplished pianists and then to share their candid thoughts with us. As I read, I felt like I too had been granted the priceless opportunity to converse with Barenboim, Ax, Perahia, Berezovsky and many others. I rank this book as one of 2 great reads for piano enthusiasts, the other being the 3 volume Liszt biography by Alan Walker. Bravo Mr Rusbridger! Bravo! Write it Again.

This book is a great narrative of what an amateur pianist can achieve if he or she is decided to. I really enjoyed reading it. What calls my attention is how Mr. Rusbridger got to know all kind of experts about the Ballade. Somehow he was surrounded by pianists, musicians and professionals. Me as an amateur pianist, barely know other pianist or musicians. Sad to say...anyway if you play the piano and you have put yourself different challenges, this book is a good reading. Recommended!

We think it normal for people in high-powered jobs to go to the gym regularly, but a work out on a very difficult piano piece provides a more challenging counterpoint to a very busy job. Two tense tales splendidly interwoven. When did he find time to write a book as well?

Such a fun look in to the life of an editor at the Guardian in one of the craziest years he must have had WHILE he tried to learn a very difficult piano piece. This book purports to be about the journey of the amateur trying to do something on a professional level outside their level of expertise. It is so much more. A swift, engaging, and inspiring read. Though I am not learning Chopin's Ballade Op. 23 because of it, I am learning one of the scherzi!

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