

**Master of Music Research:**

**Use your personal  
learning style for playing  
by heart**

***Summary***

Written by: Emilie Bastens

School: Royal Conservatoire, The Hague The Netherlands

Major: Harp

Student number: C011075

Major teacher: Ernestine Stoop

Research coach: Enno Voorhorst, Anton Sie

Date: 14 February 2014

# **Index**

Introduction	3
<b>1. It starts in the brain</b>	<b>4</b>
1.1 The brain	4
1.2 The memory	4
<b>2. Playing by heart on a harp</b>	<b>6</b>
2.1 The problems	6
2.2 Train and test your memory	6
2.3 Experiences	6
2.4 Translate the music to the instrument	7
<b>3. The learning</b>	<b>8</b>
<b>4. My personal learning style</b>	<b>9</b>
4.1 The team roles of Belbin	9
4.2 How can I use this for playing by heart?	9
<b>5. The confidence</b>	<b>11</b>
<b>6. The 7 steps</b>	<b>11</b>
Conclusion	11

## **Introduction:**

At the start of this research, I would like to thank a few persons who made it possible for me to write this research.

In the first place I would like to thank Ernestine Stoop for the wide range of learning experiences she has given me.

I also would like to thank Mr. Drs. Johan Boogaars for the guidance he has given me with my self-reflection.

I would like to thank my research coaches Enno Voorhorst and Anton Sie for their help and how they have provided direction in my research.

My inspiration for this research was the solo repertoire of the harp.

In my Master of Music education, I focussed myself more on this repertoire and competed at an international harp competition. In those competitions it is required to play all the music by heart. I did not do this a lot, which made me curious to learn more about it.

The research question is:

“How can you find the most efficient way with fits the best with you for playing by heart?”

I hope this research will inspire other musicians.

# **1. It starts in the brain**

Playing by heart starts in the brain. Because I didn't know a lot about this subject, I started to read and learn more about it.

## **1.1 The brain:**

In the past, they believed that the heart was directing the body. This is where the expression "Playing by heart" comes from. Aristoteles believed that the brain was only used to cool the blood.

The brain is a mechanism what changes all the time. It makes the person who we are. It is not only based on the genes we have gotten by the birth. It changes with the things we do and the area in which we find ourselves.

Our brain is only 2% of the total body volume, but it is the most complex organ of our body.

By knowing more about the brain, we can search for the best way to use it. It helps us to get easier to the results.

## **1.2 The memory:**

Ed Cooke said: "You have to know that just a normal memory can remember a lot of things. You only have to use it in the right way."

There are 3 learning style options for the memory:

- Visual learning style: Learn the best by seeing. For example: Images.
- Kinesthetic learning style: Learn the best by feeling and experiencing.
- Auditory learning style: Learn the best by hearing. For example: Sounds

There will be one dominant. I recognize myself in the auditory learning style the best.

When you train the memory, the brain will use associations. These associations will help to give the memory more ground.

When the brain gets a lot of new information, it is useful to order it. When you do not do this, it is hard to find easy and quickly the right information.

The memory can be compared to a library. The library is all organized into categories. Because of this, you can find everything. So it works with the brain. By putting the new information in the right category, the brain will stay organized and can function optimally.

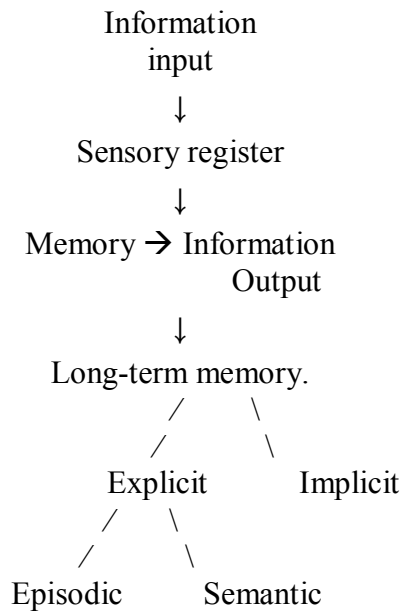
Every human will make a combination of the learning styles for the use of the memory. The brain saves information through repetition. The data will only be stored for a few seconds by the sensory register. This works the same for music. Upon hearing the music, information will quickly be decoded and passed to the memory. The working memory is looking for patterns. The brain looks for recurring themes that characterize the music. Those can be patterns in tones and rhythms.

The founded patterns are saved through repetition in the long-term memory. Music with lyrics has an extra component, the lyrics. This music is decoded to the memory.

Additionally, music with lyrics uses also the semantic memory. This is part of the explicit memory, which gives meaning to the text.

In addition, a lot of factors will play a role in storing musical data. For example: recognition of style conventions and rules in the music. This knowledge is stored in the implicit memory, unconscious memory. The implicit memory is a support for forming patterns in the music. At the same time hearing patterns in music confirms the implicit memory.

For storing musical data different memory systems has to work together to be able to store the data and make it available for the memory. It is a complicated process.



## **2. Playing by heart on a harp**

A lot of factors come with the playing by heart on a harp. I analyzed the difficulties, which I based on my experiences. I used also the knowledge I got from different (harp) teachers.

### **2.1 The problems:**

I played the harp for 19 years. Everything what comes with the instrument feels normal to me. I realised that this is very dangerous to think. There is a chance you forget the basic of the instrument. When you play by heart, you can not forget anything. You have to make sure you are aware of every detail, and this starts with the basic of the instrument.

The modern double action pedal harp had 47 strings. This harp has 7 pedals, which are connected to one tone in the scale. Each tone can be increased two times, because of the pedal. There are 3 options, for example: C $\flat$ , C and C $\sharp$ .

For the harpist there is the problem, that there is no difference in playing between a C $\sharp$  and a C. Only the pedal has a different position, but the string is the same. Because there is no difference between the diatonic and chromatic notes, it is difficult to play a melody on the harp, which you just heard, without the sheet music.

The same problem comes with the harmonies.

On a harp you often use enharmonisations. Because of this, sometimes you play something else as you heard. For example: I play C, E, G, B $\sharp$  and I hear C, E, G, C. As a harpist you have to know the position of your pedals. If something went wrong, it is easier to fix it.

### **2.2 Train and test your memory:**

A few examples based on my experiences:

- Sing the melody on the names of the notes
- Practise hands separate
- Practise Détaché
- Remember de distances
- Say the names of the pedals out loud
- Think the music, put only the pedals in the right position in time
- Play very slow
- Mental practising
- Create a route

### **2.3 Experiences:**

G. Rossini – Rondo on Zitti, ziti: This piece was quite easy to learn by heart because of the style of music. There were not a lot of enharmonisations and it was possible to

play it by ear. I realised I had to check everything I did, so I would not make any mistakes.

A. Casella – Sonata per arp: It was not easy for me to remember the notes. For 3 weeks I practised the piece, and I could not remember the notes I practised. I realised I should learn it immediately by heart. It worked. In one week I could play it (slowly) by heart. I analyzed the piece and made connections so I could remember it.

M. Glinka – The Lark: It was not easy for me to remember the left hand of the beginning, so I tried to remember it by the harmonies. It worked. I did also a lot of mental practising, what helped me also. The hardest thing for me was to remember the easiest page of the piece. It took me a long time before I could play it by heart.

## 2.4 Translate the music to the instrument:

For professional musicians there are three important subjects for remembering the music: solfège, harmony and structure.

Solfège: For remembering the melody

Harmony: Single notes are now a whole

Structure: Remember the big lines, so the brain knows what comes.

It is important that the two hemispheres well co-operate with each other.

When everything is well ordered in the library of the brain, it is easier to play the music in a flow.

### **3. The learning**

Studying for playing by heart comes close to learning. Because of that, I searched for more information about this subject.

Between humans there are differences in learning styles.

I think it is important to know your personal learning style and therefore is the research tool Belbin.

Belbin and other researchers used the archetypes written by Carl Gustav Jung.

Archetypes are innate capabilities why images tend to develop in a similar manner.

Archetypes are unconscious and universal ideas patterns.

In his developmental psychology, Jung describes that the psyche of the human is not a blank slate. The psyche is, the same as with the human body, structured in a certain way.

According to Jung, people have preferences in four areas:

- **Extraversion-Introversion**: Are you inwards or outwards?
- **Sensing-intuition**: If you prefer to realistic factual information or intuitive global information?
- **Thinking-Feeling**: Do you take decisions on objective and rational grounds or on the basis of subjective and personal reasons?
- **Judging-Perceiving**: Do you live an organized a structured life or a spontaneous and flexible life?

Later on, several researchers have made research tools for personal learning styles, based on these archetypes.

One of these researchers is Belbin. He elaborated on the basis of the above four areas, the following personalities.

- **Think power**: Plant, Monitor Evaluator
- **Will power**: Shaper, Co-ordinator
- **Deed power**: Implementer, Resource investigator
- **Feeling**: Complete finisher, Teamworker

J. Vermunt summarizes the learning style of students wider.

Vermunt provides three control processes:

- Self
- Extern
- Disorientation

From everything I have read about learning styles, I discovered that there is relatively little written about the learning associated with playing by heart on a harp.

That is why I ask myself the following questions:

- What is my personal learning style?
- What can I do to study more efficient and yield-oriented?
- How can I remove blockages in learning?
- How can I use ratio by learning when emotions are overwhelming?

## 4. My personal learning style

Using Belbin, I searched for my personal learning style.

Belbin works in the following way:

1. Completing list about yourself
2. Completing list by others about you
3. Process scores by Mr. Drs. J. Boogaars
4. Explanation about the scores by Mr. Drs. J. Boogaars
5. Self-evaluation

### 4.1 The team roles of Belbin:

**Plant:** The role was so-called because one such individual was “planted” in each team. They tended to be highly creative and good at solving problems in unconventional ways.

**Monitor Evaluator:** Needed to provide a logical eye, make impartial judgments where required and to weigh up the team’s options in a dispassionate way.

**Co-ordinators:** Needed to focus on the team’s objectives, draw out team members and delegate work appropriately.

**Resource Investigators:** When the team was at risk of becoming isolated and inwardly-focused, this person provided inside knowledge on the opposition and made sure that the team’s idea would carry to the world outside the team.

**Implementers:** Needed to plan a practical, workable strategy and carry it out as efficiently as possible.

**Completer Finishers:** Most effectively used at the end of a task, to “polish” and scrutinize the work for errors, subjecting it to the highest standards of quality control.

**Teamworkers:** helped the team to gel, using their versatility to identify the work required and complete it on behalf of the team.

**Shapers:** Challenging individuals provided the necessary drive to ensure that the team kept moving and did not lose focus or momentum.

**Specialist:** In the real world, the value of an individual with in-depth knowledge of a key area came to be recognized as yet another essential team contribution.

The expressions above are based on team working. It is also possible to bring them in relation to individual persons. This is how I used the Belbin.

According to the list I filled in myself and the list other persons filled in about me, this is the result:

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
Teamworker	Complete finisher	Implementer	Plant	Monitor Evaluator	resource investigator	Specialist	Shaper	Co-ordinator

### 4.2 How can I use this for playing by heart?

The strong side of the Plant is creative and searching for new stuff. The shade is that they find it hard to directing “normal” people. Here I see a connecting to the harp and

myself. As I wrote earlier I find it hard to learn “easy music”, like I wrote by the experiences about The Lark by M. Glinka.

My concentration will be weak at those points, so I need to put more energy in those parts, so I can make sure I play them right.

I am also a Teamworker and a Complete finisher. The negative side of both of them, are very close to each other for me. As a Teamworker I think it is important to work in good harmony. When it does not, the Complete finisher comes above in me. I am putting myself to the sideline and then I won't function optimally. In those cases I need to be more true to myself so I can play at my best.

As a shaper I am focused on results. Sometimes it becomes that I forget all the things what can help you to reach your goal. I need to go back to the basics.

From my personal learning I will always respond as above described first. But now I know these things, I can work on it, so I can play better.

You can practise very well on the technical stuff, but there is always a change that you will react on stuff from your first archetype. Due to gain more insight into how to use your strengths and weaknesses in the right way, you will be more confident. This is how you can get easier into the musical flow.

To summarize, the archetypes of Jung:

**Introversion:** I am more introvert. When I play in a musical flow, I get more energy.

**Intuition:** I prefer global and intuitive information. For studying I can think better in rational steps.

**Feeling:** I make easier decisions on personal and subjective grounds.

**Perceiving:** My life is going in a flow, and I follow it spontaneous and flexible.

For all those learning styles I made a Do's & Don'ts list.

I searched for helpful though who can help during the studying process of playing by heart. I used the triangle off Lencioni, the triangle of drama and the 5 phases of loss.

For me it was very recognizable. Those helpful thoughts (Psycho Educations) can help, so you reach earlier and better your goal.

## **5. The confidence**

Practised the piece in the technical way, use you qualities of your personal learning style and use the helpful thoughts. When you have done all those things, you may have the confidence that you know the piece.

Trust on the fact if something went wrong, you know enough to fix it.

## **6. The 7 steps**

Now I know how to use my personal learning style for playing by heart, I would like to pass it to other harpists.

Because of that I made a 7 steps:

1. The foundation: Do I know the basic of the instrument?
2. The threshold: Do I understand what the difficulty is about the translation of the music to the instrument?
3. The repetition: Did I do all the technical practising?
4. The spiral: Can I use helpful thoughts?
5. The awareness: Do I know my personal learning style?
6. De application: Do I use the right Do's & Don'ts?
7. Let go: Do I really have confidence in myself?

## **Conclusion**

My answer on the question: "How can you find the most efficient way with fits the best with you for playing by heart?" is:

As indicated by the 7-steps, there are many things important and influences the studying. But when you have insight and knowledge about your personal learning style, you are able to study and memorize optimally. This makes that you can study more efficient. By knowing your strong sides and weaknesses, you can customize your learning to this. You can change the negative emotions, which comes with it, to positive thinking. Use helpful thoughts for this.

Daily I experience the positive effects on my studying.

I would like to pass this trough to other harpists.