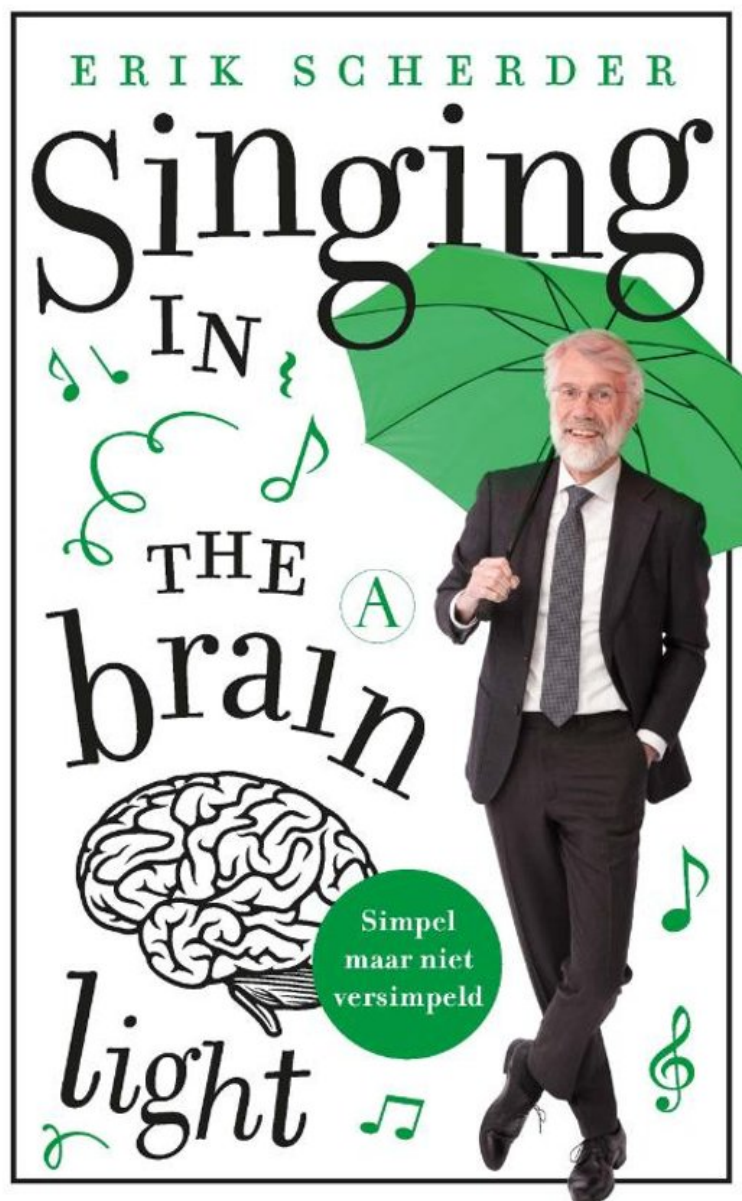


# Playing by Heart

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When I started to play the guitar, I could not read a single note on a score. That's quite annoying if you want to play classical guitar. I started with a chart with all notes on the fingerboard and looked up every note of the score individually. In this way, I automatically studied measure by measure, repeating it numerous times until I had completely finished reading. It's not surprising that I knew the piece by heart afterwards, it was quite worn-in. Knowing by heart was a side-effect, at that time I did not use a structured method for playing by heart.

I must admit: I hated learning by heart. I guess I had to learn by heart a little too many rows for French, German, Greek and Latin on High School. I'd rather derive a formula for Physics from the basics than learning it by heart.

I wanted to learn to read scores, because that got me a lot of music within reach. So, I sat beside my wife Erna when she played the piano, read the score with her and -after some

practice- succeeded to turn the page at the right moment. Specifically, 35 page Beethoven sonatas were perfect exercising material.

That was a good start: I started to relate the score reading to hearing the music and I got the ability to synchronize eyes and ears. Soon score reading turned out to be very practical, it was fun to browse through scores in a short time instead of struggling through note by note in long weeks with in the end the conclusion that the piece was less fun to play than I thought when starting it.

In a few years, I learned to play better and to read better. On the one hand it was convenient, on the other it appeared a limitation. Flipping pages while playing is annoying. One of the solutions was playing pieces of two pages at the most. Consequently, most of my repertoire fits within two pages.

There are longer pieces... No problem as long as the movements of the piece fit on two pages, flipping pages between movements is not so bad. But what about the longer well-known pieces like *Capricho Arabe* by Tarrega, at least five pages including the score saving for the Da Capo?

There is a solution. Learn it by heart. But how?

I have played together for some time with a guitarist with a tremendous tone. She preferred playing by heart. I joined the club, but I still had no other method than wearing-in the part by means of repeated playing. It was a shame that we were not that communicative, that we had been able to talk about the ins and outs of playing by heart. Maybe it had cleared up things.

Unfortunately, my 'method' appeared little stress-proof. I got a black-out during a stressful performance and had to fetch the paperwork *en plein public*, which definitely affected the final result. It yielded me my only and worst review in the local newspaper, an open goal for every reviewer with a little writing experience and sufficient frustration to hate amateur musicians.

Aiaiai, sheer trauma. So much for playing by heart and the duo as well, I was dumped.

Even though... playing by heart has some considerable advantages: you save yourself the effort of reading, you don't have to play shaking your head while switching between paper and fingerboard and you gain a lot of attention for the music itself. In computer terms, you have one program less for execution, leaving more CPU time and resources for the rest if it really counts.

A second advantage: you will not need a music stand. That's positive for the contact with your audience and spreading your sound.

My teacher Ed Westerik used a method for playing by heart which looked quite tedious at first sight. He studied pieces in sessions, partly measure by measure from the beginning and measure by measure from the end, until the ends meet.

So first a quarter of an hour playing measure 1, then measure 1 and 2, etc. Then a quarter of an hour playing the last measure, followed by the two last measures, etc. At a certain moment, the piece is complete and you can play the piece by heart. This method prevents you from spending all concentration to the first part of the piece as a consequence from starting over and over again at the beginning.

A few experiments with a longer piece in this way worked out fine. The freedom to play music without score is addictive!

But... what to do if you are a bit impatient, like me? What if you don't have the time for hours of study a day? What about the effect that pieces start to wear-off if you don't maintain them regularly?

There must be many more feasible methods for playing by heart. On the Internet, however, it was hard to find some information. So, if you have got a nice idea, please contact us. There is a nice contact form in the AllSorts section.