



# Play It Again: An Amateur Against the Impossible

*Alan Rusbridger*

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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?*

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