

To Scale, or not to Scale?

Is warming up before your daily practice a waste of time? Here's why it isn't

Most people who pursue a career with an indefinite outcome and no deadline can be found diving in and digging deep as soon as they get started, seeing a warming-up as a trivial obstacle keeping them from doing what they love.

As a student and future professional, you practice your craft (almost) every day. Time-consuming passages that need your attention are on top of your list. When asked about not doing warming-ups, the most common answers are the following: "I just play musical passages slow, that way it benefits my musicality", or "I have no time", or you simply "have to get started on all the new material you have coming in". This, however, causes for two things to happen.

One, your body shoots into the adrenaline-fueled 'work mode', to make ends meet, often losing some mental clarity in the process.

Two, because it is the start of your practice session, your muscles are still relatively cold, which means that playing technically difficult passages right away can strain muscles you didn't even know existed.

In the end, all we want to save is time. But what if we took a chip of this precious time and devoted it to the well-being of our 'machine', our body? The shoulders, to which our arms are attached. The arms that so humbly serve our wrists, which, in turn let our fingers and joints do anything we want them to? How about we turn a warm-up into the essential 'oiling of a motor' (preventive measure and maintenance), instead of fixing a dented bumper later, when the damage has already been done?

For centuries, technical exercises like scales and arpeggios are considered to be part of this 'maintenance package' for a musician's physicality: a training of dexterity and general 'geography' of the instrument. By warming up your body, you're saving yourself time in the end, creating a safety net for injuries and regrets in the long run. After a warm-up, the muscles that are needed to play the instrument, will be warm and (both muscle - and memory wise) ready to face any challenge you put before them.