



A Devil to Play: One Man's Year-Long Quest to Master the Orchestra's Most Difficult Instrument

By Jasper Rees

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A charming and deeply funny memoir of musical obsession, *A Devil to Play* is the story of Jasper Rees, a man who unearths his childhood French horn, and begins a quixotic but obsessively serious challenge: to play a Mozart concerto—alone—for a paying audience within one year's time. It's an endearing, inspiring tale of perseverance and achievement, relayed masterfully, one side-splittingly off-key note at a time.

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Editorial Review

From Publishers Weekly

Rees, a London journalist, decided to face his midlife crisis by picking up the French horn—an instrument he hadn't played since he was a teenager—and whip himself back into shape so he could play a Mozart concerto in front of an audience in just one year. Luckily, he had one of England's best horn players to give him lessons, but it was still an uphill battle—for starters, the concerto was composed in the key of E flat, but the horn was tuned to F, so Rees (like every performer before him) had to transpose the notes down a tone as he played along. Along the way, he recounts the instrument's colorful history, including a playful recreation of the first performance of Handel's *Water Music* (when the hunting horn first appeared alongside more widely acknowledged serious instruments), and chats with many of the world's leading performers, as well as Holly Hunter and Ewan McGregor who, like Rees, played the instrument in their youth. Rees's self-assigned quest turns into an amiable romp with quiet bits of inspiration. (*Dec.*)

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From the Back Cover

In the days before his fortieth birthday, London-based journalist Jasper Rees traded his pen for a French horn that had been gathering dust in the attic for more than twenty-two years and, on a lark, played it at the annual festival of the British Horn Society. Despite an embarrassingly poor performance, the experience inspired Rees to embark on a daunting, bizarre, and ultimately winning journey: to return to the festival in one year's time and play a Mozart concerto—solo—to a large paying audience.

A Devil to Play is the true story of an unlikely midlife crisis spent conquering eighteen feet of wrapped brass tubing widely regarded as the most difficult instrument in the world to master—an endearing, inspiring tale of perseverance and achievement, relayed masterfully, one side-splittingly off-key note at a time.

About the Author

A journalist with two decades of experience, Jasper Rees has written for *The Daily Telegraph*, *The Independent*, the *Evening Standard*, and *The Times*. He lives in London.

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James Shaw:

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