

Coming back to your instrument after years away

Four weeks, ten to thirty minutes a day. More of it is still there than you think.

Before you start: have the instrument looked at. Old strings, a perished reed, a stuck valve or a dry bow will make you think the problem is you. It is not. Fresh strings or reeds, a service, and a mouthpiece or bow you can trust cost less than a month of doubt.

1

Wake the sound

Ten minutes a day. Wind and brass: long notes at an easy volume, listening as the sound settles. Strings: long, slow bows on open strings, letting the arm find its weight again. Then two scales you know well. Stop before anything aches; this week is the body remembering, not repertoire. And send one message now, to a community orchestra or an old musical friend, so that week 4 has a date in the diary.

2

Keep it, add a piece

The week-1 warm-up stays as your opening five minutes. After them, ten more on one piece you played years ago: half speed, easy sections only. Record thirty seconds on your phone and listen the next day; it is better than it felt.

3

Same warm-up, more music

Still open with the warm-up. Then push the week-2 piece into its harder pages and nearer its tempo, or add a second piece you love, playing along with a recording where it helps. Twenty minutes of music, not exercises. The same piece going better is progress, not repetition; this is the week you remember why you did this.

4

Go and play

Keep the daily shape, warm-up then music, and go to the date you set in week 1: a community orchestra rehearsal, an ensemble at a music centre or one that exists specifically for returning players, or two friends and a trio. Sit at the back, play what you can, count what you cannot. Everyone there once had a first night back.

If no orchestra is within reach yet: keep going anyway; the habit is the point: the part in front of you, and the passage repeated until you can play it. And if the idea of practising with a whole orchestra around you at home appeals, the address below is worth a visit.

