

# A hypothetical magical musical power: The one-piece wonder

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For some reason, I've pondered this hypothetical on and off for years: Suppose you were magically granted the ability to perform one piece of music beautifully, but in exchange, you are rendered incapable of playing any other piece at a level higher than beginner.

What instrument and piece should you pick so you can have the longest musical career before you're found out?

For example, the Tchaikovsky Piano Concerto is popular and impressive-sounding, and being one of the best interpreters in the world will get you regular work on the classical music circuit. But people are going to get suspicious if that's the *only* thing you ever play. And when you get called back on stage by an adoring audience for an encore, people are going to be disappointed that you never oblige.

If you pick a solo piece, will people book you for a recital that consists of a single piece?

If you choose Freebird, knowing that it is still frequently played and requested, would people start wondering why you come on stage to play that one song and nothing else?

I eventually concluded that the best answer is the *Turangalîla-Symphonie* on the ondes Martenot. (*Turangalîla-Symphonie* [previously](#).)

You will get regular work because there aren't a lot of ondes Martenot players in the world. Wikipedia claims that "[fewer than 100 people have mastered the ondes Martenot](#)."

You will never get found out because there are no other pieces of any consequence for the ondes Martenot!

When I posed this question to some friends, one of them replied that he would choose Beethoven's Waldstein Sonata. "The orchestra would sit and listen, which means I would get exactly one booking. But, if I was able to play that beautifully just once, I wouldn't need to

play anything else.” I like this answer despite the fact that it rejects the question. (The question isn’t to name the piece that would be most personally satisfying. It’s the one that lets you go the longest without being found out!)

**Bonus chatter:** Businessman Gilbert Kaplan became enamored with the works of Gustav Mahler, particularly the Second Symphony, named *Resurrection*. (Mahler’s Second Symphony previously.) Kaplan conducted over 100 performances of the Second Symphony, and no other work.

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