

Learning and Un-learning: how we teach and learn musical performance

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Outline



- What is musical performance?
- What is learning and teaching?
- What is the role of method in performance learning?
- How do we progress and how to do we continue to progress?
- The fundamental importance of musical performance
- Discussion -> implications of theoretical considerations



Understanding musical performance: **Musical performance is a public activity**

-> ability to be comfortable with this. The creative task -> performer cannot be reactive (to circumstances, to distractions, etc). Performance requires concentrated attention in- and of the imagination.

Music a “contemplation of the imagination” (Hanslick)



Musical performance is a temporal activity

-> a. ontological conditions/ circumstances;

b. through the player herself: Performer is in charge of time and temporal unfolding.

Music is not a process which “unpacks”, “executes”- but it is made there and then, on stage -> Thinking in action. This implies a requirement to understand and determine the work with time: NB: the fundamental importance of rhythm.

Further: The nature of mistakes, It is impossible to “correct” performance as performance is not an object. Correction is rather achieved in attentive (“mindful”) repetition. -> The important implications for thinking, practice, teaching methodology

Performance as temporal activity requires us to think in a particular way. When we teach a student to play, we teach this thinking



Musical performance is directed through anticipation

Mastery is achieved through anticipation (not through reaction...)

Anticipation needs to be comprehensive: The importance of deliberate practice.

-> digression: what is practice?

Anticipation involves imagination

Imagination is clarified in a dialogue with perception, equally: perception is possible because we are able to imagine



Musical performance must be artistic

-> means: determined by imagination and intuition,

Artistic performance connects mind/ body -> the importance of feeling. The
Psycho-physical

Imagination of feeling





Musical performance is determined by feeling

-> What is feeling? Psycho-physical: intensity, quality, tactile, kinaesthetic. Feeling is only present when “presenced”- enacted and embodied. Particular – no generic feel.

We play because we feel? We feel because we play?

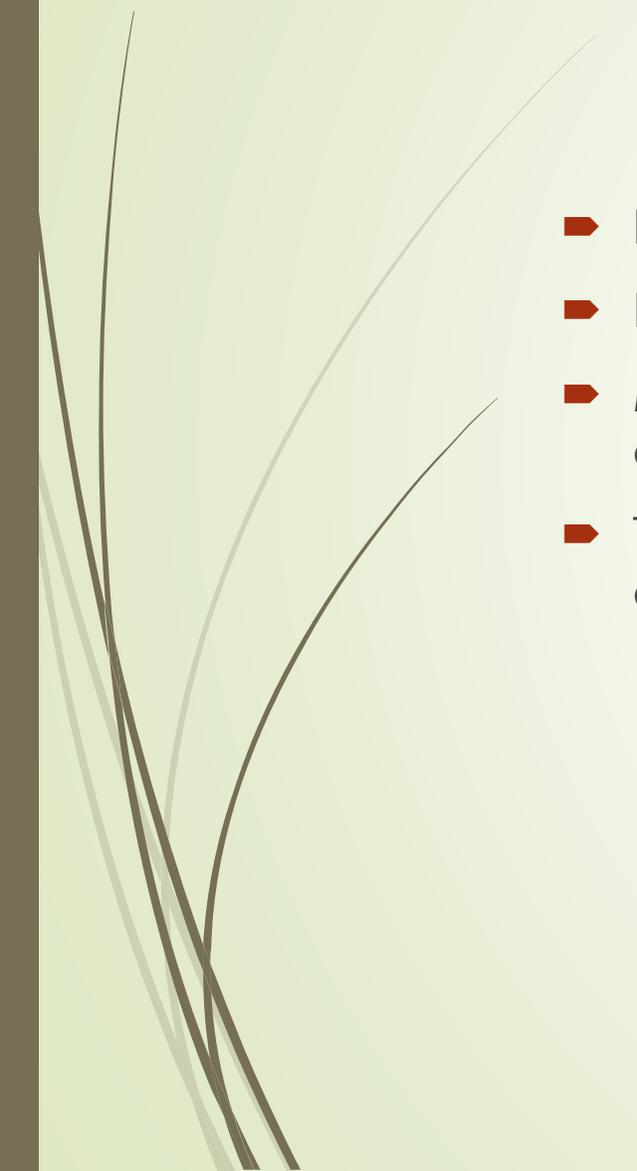


Performance as public activity

- ▶ The Amygdala -> regulating stress response
- ▶ Comfort & Ease -> Somatic preparation: The role of time in performance
- ▶ Ritual in performance preparation. Developing ways to prepare (ritual relaxation exercise -> make it simple). Knowing the right time to play. Working with affirmation.
- ▶ The peculiar nature of the stage: preparing well. The idea of “just having a go” -> the dangers of having a go. Playing when ready and when the idea is clear and distinct. We don't want “problems” on stage
- ▶ The importance of affirmation in debriefing after performance (accept what happens on stage) -> Dealing with ‘disasters’. Practicing resilience



The temporality of music performance

- ▶ Determining pace of action and thoughts
 - ▶ Relaxation and rhythm
 - ▶ Movement/ relaxation achieved by metaphorical imagination (“..playing as if...”)
 - ▶ The importance of rhythmic methods of practice (cyclic patterns including anticipation of action -> psycho-physical unity through feeling)
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Anticipation



- ▶ Practice anticipation (-> mental practice. What is mental practice?)
- ▶ Imagination sound/movement/feel particulars in complete organisation
- ▶ Organisation of thought -> actively reducing reaction and interference
- ▶ Anticipation key to excellence in performance (-> research into high achievement in sport; Galamian: Correlation)
- ▶ The more we think/imagine/feel the better we get at it...
- ▶ Diversify practice methods: building attention



Artistry



- ▶ The importance of beauty (emphasize beauty over correctness)
- ▶ Emphasis on beauty releases inspiration
- ▶ Spontaneity: encourage living thoughts, developing thinking in action.
- ▶ Working with others: listening and thinking together. How we play together and 'communicate'



Feeling



- ▶ Psycho-physical elements of feeling
- ▶ Pre-feel performance – imagining feeling
- ▶ Feeling a dynamic activity, needs to be enacted.
- ▶ Cannot take a feeling and put it onto shelf (Danger of concert business: commodification of feeling. We must teach young musicians the importance of “feel-ing” as an activity of the imagination -> enhancing the autonomy of the individual through the imagination)
- ▶ Feel-ing -> an actuality (an *energeia*). active, needs to be ‘done’ (we don’t ‘have’ feelings, we feel, etc)

Understanding learning and teaching

Learning is autonomous

- > cannot make a student learn. Teachers facilitate and scaffold learning. All teaching accordingly verified by the student's activity.
- Student does not need to be told their mistakes -> they already know. They need to be reminded to act properly in response to their knowledge, though.

Learning is dialogical

- > teacher responds, directs attention – considers the student and her learning and adapts individually. Limits of universal method.
- Amplify aspects of the student's internal dialogue (thinking) and corrects, directs productively.

Learning is organic

- > Evolutionary, organic structure. While there must be purpose and strategy, learning is not “constructed”. Origin of purpose is the “ideal” -> role of the imagination. Thinking back from the ideal. Teaching follows and enhances the momentum of student learning (didactic approach)

Performance learning is psycho-physical

- > at least two dimensions to any skill. Both can shift relevance and are mutually interdependent (body-mind division questionable: embodied mind, minded body?)
- The intellectual/cognitive and physical importance of somatic awareness and training methods (Alexander technique, Feldenkrais)



Learning to perform... performing to learn...

Performers learn creative thinking

- ▶ > Creative thinking is no wishy-washy concept -> referring to forward thinking. Creative thinking implies: good recovery -> reliance on imagination. Major practical implications for pedagogy: dealing with mistakes, when is there - and where is the attention? Integrity to musical-performance idea -> this starts on a technical level (Galamian: Correlation) Recovery – capacity to relax. Stress and tension switch imagination off and close down thinking.

Learning comes with a history

- ▶ > to understand a learner we seek to understand the history of learning with its habitual behavioural patterns. At the same time, teachers seek to return the learner to “best practice” learning (no baggage > self-description and identity as identified by problems). -> problems as obstacles. (Problema: fortification in war)

Solving problems may not involve learning

- ▶ > What are problems? Performance learning is not problem solving. It is creative doing – eg. Solution based. Thus direction to student: “Don’t come to lessons with problems, come with solutions”! Creativity removes problems. (Flesch: “Fehlerbeseitigung”). The Psycho-physical “encoding” of problems. Teaching creativity means “doing away” with problems.



The role and relevance of method

- ▶ Method as *Methodos*: the path towards
- ▶ Method articulates purpose, captures skills.
- ▶ Advantage of method: standard, proven, accepted and usually effective ways to build stable skill to a point.
- ▶ Limits of method: Student fits to method – when method should fit to student (Nietzsche: “Education is essentially a way to pervert the exception in favour of the rule”); Method limits perspectives and possibilities. What if the development, the solution lies outside the given “path”.
- ▶ Method not “rule” -> Learning a forward directed (creative) activity. Limits to conformity.
- ▶ Method and no-method: Teachers need to balance methodical work with an active capacity to challenge method (their method) -> teachers need to be able to unlearn. Creative element in all teaching. Method is a dynamic concept which continuously evolves. (Methods!)



Achieving progress: .. Day-to-day...

The lesson

- ▶ A safe and successful place of learning. Every minute counts -> progress and motivation.
- ▶ When has a lesson been successful: what has been learnt? The lesson structure: a summary of the discipline, of the development, of the art.... Every moment of the student's/teacher's time is valuable. No waste -> focus directed to learning, to building autonomous ability in the student to think, imagine, play and perform.

Practice

- ▶ The three principles of practice: attention, attention, attention! Attention to what? Rotation of attention -> attending to intent! Neuroscience tells us: We learn through attention. (Plasticity). Frustration, repetition reduce attention. The dangers of adaptation: repetition reduces attention unless attention is intentionally directed (arrested development vs. mindfulness).
- ▶ Practising intent. (silent practice)

Frustration

- ▶ Decision/action pattern: random intent -> random outcome -> frustrated perception -> corruption of future intent and/or skill.
- ▶ Improvement/ learning motivates. (the student who does not practice...)

Imagination

- ▶ clear conception -> intentional, directed decision -> incomplete reality -> recovery -> renewal of intent, purpose, direction ->



Unlearning and technique...

Un-Learning is part of learning

- ▶ > learning specialises (reducing possibilities) (Plato, Thaetetus) -> un-learning discards frustration patterns, refreshes attention -> preserving possibilities (!) -> Purpose and mindful direction in teachers' works direct students towards possibility and intent in a systematic way. NB: Skill follows from the successful translation of intuition into reality.

Technique

- ▶ > a way of doing, playing, performing, etc. Psycho-Physical. Techné: Art. Teaching technique is opening a way towards artfulness. Technique is not functional or instrumental – it is central to art!
- ▶ Good technique remains un-noticed. But equally: a poor performer is without technique. There is no musicality/ artistry without techné. (Art is techné – way of playing)
- ▶ Technique is the way in which we translate intent into actuality



What's in it for me...? Some points about teaching method...

Problems:

Think twice before saying nothing: some mistakes must be ignored. Problems are opportunities (-> if problems persist try "unlearning"). Looking for solutions.

(Problema: Fortification)

Practice:

All student learning flows into and from practice and performance. Students need to be attentive and creative in practice. (deliberate, attentive) repetition: -> imagine/ think -> repeat -> recover -> imagine/ think -> repeat, etc

Practice methods must include recovery and anticipation -> teaching rhythmic methods of practice to embed recovery and strengthen anticipation

Practicing without instrument -> embodied, enacted skill

Performance

All learning culminates in performance. Performance develops "hardware" -> the fundamental importance of musical performance teaching to human development

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