

LISTENING TO TEACHERS' VOICES: CONSTRUCTS ON MUSIC PERFORMANCE ANXIETY IN ARTISTIC EDUCATION

NÁDIA MOURA

Universidade Católica Portuguesa,
School of Arts
Research Center for Science and Technology
of the Arts
nmtmoura@gmail.com

SOFIA SERRA

Universidade Católica Portuguesa,
School of Arts
Research Center for Science and Technology
of the Arts
sserra@ucp.pt

ABSTRACT

Music performance anxiety is an acknowledged condition amongst musicians from early learning stages to professional levels. Anxiety experienced in uncontrolled levels translates into the development of physiological and psychological symptoms that impair performance skills and may, ultimately, lead to post-traumatic stress disorders and drop-out of music-related activities. This paper focuses on teachers' voices to justify the need for inclusion of anxiety management training in music schools' curricula as means of promoting well-being, coping with stress-inducing situations, and boosting growing musicians' performative experiences through positive pedagogies. Semi-structured interviews were conducted to four instrument teachers of a Portuguese institution of specialized artistic education to collect data about previous experiences, conceptions, and ways of teaching MPA managing. The importance of integrating coping strategies in pedagogical practices, its obstacles and benefits, alongside suggestions for conceiving viable intervention projects in schools were discussed by the interviewed and hereby critically presented with respect to existing literature.

Keywords: Music performance anxiety; Music education; Pedagogical practices; Role of teachers; Instrumental learning.

1. INTRODUCTION

Music performance is a high-demanding task, comprising the mastery of complex motor, cognitive and auditory skills, developed over years of intensive practice and further maintenance through regular study (Williamon, 2004). Whilst kinaesthetic senses are refined by systematic repetition of movements, which enhances control of muscles, tendons, and joint positions, and enables autoregulation of precise movements (Watson, 2006), aural ones imply a much broader range of exercises, such as ear training, active listening, sight-reading, or memorizing (Altenmüller & Gruhn, 2002). Countless hours of preparation in multiple levels join in a single moment when the musician publicly presents himself onstage. Still, necessary skills for dealing with intense pressure and audience scrutiny that emerge in these situations are often set apart from the previously mentioned ones, established in most curricula of music schools and conservatoires. In fact, musicians rehearse in practice rooms, significantly different from the concert halls they aspire to attend, and certainly away from the reality of performing to a living audience (Williamon et al., 2014).

According to Lehmann, Sloboda and Woody (2007, p. 10), “instrumental music education has a long and successful tradition of imparting extremely high levels of human performance by refining and handing down skills from generation to generation”. Pedagogical practices conducted in Portuguese specialized artistic schools align with traditional methods of occidental classical music education by combining collective classes of music theory and group music with one-to-one instrumental classes. From early stages, students are encouraged to participate in concerts and auditions, as well as submitted to evaluation processes in form of exam with presence of a specialized jury. Social and assessment dimensions inherent to these contexts (Kenny, 2011), alongside with the low frequency in which they take place (around one examination and one/two auditions per trimester), makes them more propitious to the experience of performance-related anxiety than individual classes.

The lack of opportunities of exposure to realistic performances during school years (Williamon et al., 2014) and insufficient knowledge of music educators regarding MPA management strategies and consequent inability to assist their students (Patston, 2014) are fundamental factors to consider when to conceive pedagogic interventions in this field. This interview dataset was collected during the initial phase of an action research (Moura, 2019), with the aim of responding to scholar community’s opinions and needs in the conception of an MPA management project. The present paper describes the rich, substantial information resulting from content analysis, which we believe to be a useful apparatus for other education institutions, teachers, students, and parents dealing with MPA concerns. With the intention of highlighting the active voice of educators in the field, relevant quotations are constantly transcribed throughout the text.

2. MUSIC PERFORMANCE ANXIETY

Music performance anxiety (MPA) has been a focus of research over the last decades. It is a common condition amongst professional musicians – there are reports of infamous performers such as Maria Callas, Glenn Gould or Pablo Casals (Williamon, 2004) –, students and amateurs of several age groups, including adolescents and children (Matei & Ginsborg, 2017). Although MPA is a considerable factor of influence in the quality of musical performance (Papageorgi et al., 2007), its negative impact extends to personal life and well-being of musicians (Kenny et al., 2014).

A comprehensive definition of MPA is presented by renown author Diana Kenny (Kenny, 2010, p. 433), characterizing it as a music-related experience of marked and persistent anxious apprehension, capable of prejudicing public performance, and “partially independent” from preparation, years of experience and expertise level; it may derive from “underlying biological and/or psychological vulnerabilities and/or specific anxiety-conditioning experiences”. Frequently considered a subtype of social anxiety, similarly to other performance activities involving the presence and/or interaction of an audience (such as sports, theatre, dance or public presentations), MPA may also be conceptualized as occupational stress disorder – when related to stress-inducing working conditions (such as musicians’ injury vulnerability, or conflicts with co-workers) -, focal anxiety disorder – when it occurs exclusively in specific performative situations (for example, an audition, or an extraordinary request to play solo part) -, or even panic disorder – when it assumes tremendously severe levels, including symptoms of paralysis and hyperventilation (Kenny, 2011). Even though the term “stage fright” is commonly used to describe akin symptoms of MPA and both concepts often get blurred, the first refers to the sudden fear or panic experienced in the moment of presentation on stage (Kenny, 2010), whereas the latter is much broader. MPA is not limited to on-stage moments and includes feelings of several previous events; it may act as a defense mechanism against repetition of traumatic situations, and symptoms may start days and weeks in anticipation of forthcoming performances (Kenny, 2011).

Symptoms of MPA are usually divided in three groups: physiological, cognitive, and behavioral. Physiological symptoms include somatic responses such as heart rate increase, difficulty in breathing, nausea, dry mouth, excessive sweating, amongst others. Mental symptoms may be cognitive – decrease of concentration, memory failure, high distraction levels – or emotional – feelings of stress, insecurity, panic. Behavioral symptoms are defined as visible aspects to the audience which translate into clear signs of anxiety, therefore leading to its increase and compromising the quality of performance - examples include tremors, muscle stiffness, agitation and others which propitiate occurrence of errors related to the instrument’s playing technique (Burin & Osório, 2017).

The experience of anxiety is a natural process. When reduced to recommended levels, MPA may impact performance positively and facilitate it by enhancing concentration and preparing the body for the task

to deliver (Spahn et al., 2016; Wilson & Rowland, 2002). In opposition, it becomes clinically significant, or maladaptive, when reaches high levels and impairs usual activities (Last, 2006), blocking the execution of performance-related tasks and, in extreme scenarios, leading to its collapse (Matei & Ginsborg, 2017; Papageorgi et al., 2007). Thus, to reduce anxiety levels to a degree where they potentiate performance is a priority in the development of growing musicians (Spahn et al., 2016).

In line with Valentine (2002), who states MPA causes are triparted in elements of person, task and situation, Wilson (2001) presents a categorical model in which stress is generated by analogous sources: trait anxiety, defined by personal characteristics that make an individual susceptible to stress; situational stress, caused by environmental factors arising from performative context, like the presence of an audience or the evaluative dimension; and finally, task mastery, related to preparation and difficulty levels of the task. Sources are independent from each other and their interplay is crucial to determine their beneficial or detrimental role in performance: whereas some individuals can reduce their anxiety levels in more relaxed concert settings, others might feel more engaged and perform better when playing to a more demanding public (Wilson & Rowland, 2002).

A wide range of strategies have been developed with the aim of MPA control, including cognitive, behavioural, and cognitive-behavioural therapy; physical exercise; bio and neurofeedback; Alexander technique; pharmacological intervention; amongst others (Williamon, 2004). Cognitive-behavioural therapy (CBT) combines cognitive therapy (aimed at restructuring maladaptive conditions and altering negative thinking patterns) with a behavioural one (aimed at altering behaviour through systematic desensitization techniques). Examples of implemented exercises comprise relaxation, simulation, mental study, concentration, exposure, amongst others (Altenmüller et al., 2015; Kenny, 2011; McGrath, 2012). Although studies indicate exposure and cognitive restructuring practices to be more successful than no treatment (Kendrick et al., 1982) or medication and placebo (Clark & Agras, 1991), as well as when inserted in combined treatments with other techniques such as biofeedback (Nagel et al., 1989), the relatively small amount of research conducted on MPA (when compared to public speaking or test anxiety) does not provide enough evidence to clearly recommend one therapeutical approach over another (McGinnis & Milling, 2005).

Some music educators develop their own strategies from numerous sources to help students cope with MPA, often resulting in individual-directed plans according to each student's needs (Lazarus & Abramovitz, 2004; Spahn, 2015), while others do not have the necessary previous knowledge or tools to succeed in this matter (Patston, 2014). In fact, the majority of interventions cited in the literature ought to be administered by psychologists and other healthcare professionals, increasing the difficulty of practical, in-class application by music teachers (Shaw et al., 2020). A described solution consists in lecturing teachers accessible and cost-effective techniques comprising attentional training, yoga, meditation

or breathing relaxation, which could easily improve pedagogical practices (Sieger, 2017). Shaw and colleagues (2020) developed an ACT (Acceptance and Commitment Training) model of interventions for MPA, since it had efficacious results in other clinical disorders. ACT is centred in the development of psychological flexibility, so individuals get less stuck in behavioural processes expressed internally and externally, which constitute the cause for several psychological problems. Although only applied to one student, the model showed promising results as effective MPA intervention to be conducted by teachers in realistic scholar conditions (Shaw et al., 2020).

Teachers perform a key role in assisting students overcome MPA by means of moulding harmful mindsets by: replacing counterproductive negative thoughts with positive, more realistic ones (Kenny & Osborne, 2006); presenting anxiety as a natural, evolutionary part of music performance that may even facilitate it, when properly controlled (Hoffman & Hanrahan, 2012); and managing proposed tasks to be defying but yet achievable for the student, achieving balance between positive and negative feedback (Patston, 2014). By assessing MPA experiences in 53 choir students (age range from 10 to 12 years old), Miles (2020) underpinned the role of conductors in music school settings as mediators of students' anxiety and enjoyment levels, evoking the value of selecting adequate language during classes, creating safe and non-threatening inter-relational environments, and choosing suitable repertoire to the group's performative skills in order to reduce anxiety experience in children and achieve better musical results.

Perfectionism has been identified as a high impact factor in the development of MPA (Valentine, 2002). In their search for unattainable perfection, musicians tend to experience frustration and anxiety when fail to achieve unrealistic expectations imposed by themselves or by their tutors. Citing Patston (2014, p. 92): "the very best teachers understand that encouraging students to be self-aware and develop the ability to problem solve in the moment is the key to increased skills paralleling an increased confidence in performance". The author also reinforces the idea that educators of one-to-one instrumental classes should promote time for healthy dialogues and reflexions about broader aspects of music, rather than simply focusing on the study of the instrument. From another perspective, McPherson and McCormick (2006) underline self-efficacy – individual's belief in his/her capabilities to execute actions necessary to accomplish determined performance results – is particularly relevant in activities which imply high levels of concentration and self-discipline (such as music), having proved it performs a key role in foreseeing results of young musicians' examinations. Recent studies have defined self-efficacy as a predictor factor of performance boost (González et al., 2018) – a state of positive alertness during performance, also described as controlled-level anxiety -, and decisive in keeping MPA symptoms low, or even reducing them during performance (Spahn et al., 2021).

3. METHODOLOGY

Interviews were conducted to four instrument teachers (one from keyboards department, one from winds department and two from strings department) at a Portuguese school of specialized artistic education, with the objectives of: acknowledging the role of one-to-one instrument class teachers in students' MPA management, including known and implemented strategies by them; collecting opinions and beliefs about integration of MPA management in daily teaching and in development of pedagogic intervention projects; and understanding how teachers' background and previous experiences affects their position towards MPA. Based on the analysis of the collected data, a pedagogical intervention project was conceptualized according to the scholar community's needs concerning MPA management, and further implemented and evaluated (Moura, 2019).

The selected type of interview was a semi structured one, as it allows for greater freedom of answer and does not impose a strict question order. It also qualifies the interviewed to flexibly express himself, using his own vocabulary and sharing personal opinions, attitudes, representations, ideas, values, amongst others, resulting in more authentic outcomes (Amado, 2016). A script of questions was designed corresponding to the intended objectives and information to collect, according to the following group organization (for synthesis, we excluded Group 1, centred in interview opening and legitimization, and Group 6, consisting in closing and post-participation information):

Group 2: Professional and academic characterization

Objective: collect data about the academic and professional profile of the interviewee. Guideline questions: *What is your academic background? How long have you been teaching music? What subjects do you teach? What is the age range of your students?*

Group 3: Strategies and practices regarding MPA (known, used individually, used with students)

Objectives: understand which MPA strategies are a) identified and previously tried by the interviewee, b) used currently in the interviewee's performative activity, c) used by the interviewee in managing students' MPA; assess the interviewee's opinion regarding the results of mentioned strategies. Guideline questions: *Which MPA strategies do you know? Which of those have you tried, and how was that experience? Do you usually experience MPA in your daily life? If so, what strategies do you use? How do you work MPA issues in instrumental class? Do you find any strategies to be more effective with students?*

Group 4: Background in MPA (personal experiences, influences)

Objectives: understand the interviewee's relationship with MPA during their life, identify previous influences in MPA management (teachers, peers, etc.). Guideline questions: *Did your instrument*

teachers approach MPA throughout your academic journey? How did you learn how to cope with MPA?

Group 5: Importance of working MPA management in music teaching
Objective: evaluate the importance and relevance given to MPA work in music teaching. Guideline questions: *Do you consider important for instrument teachers to work MPA-related issues in their class? Is this a need you identify in your pupils? Would it be useful to develop workshops/sessions about MPA in your school? How could they be organized for students to benefit from them?*

After transcription, the collected data was treated through application of Amado's technique for content analysis (2016). A first set of successive readings was conducted to identify overall relevant themes, ideologies and most utilized concepts in discourses. Simultaneously, annotations were produced to mark where question objectives considered in interview design popped, which were then considered in the succeeding categorization process. Categorization aims at systematically organizing content in a categorical (and sub categorical) system which translates key ideas of documentation in analysis, so later it is possible to interpret and theorize about the resulting information. For that, several phases were implemented. Initially we opted to pursue a mixed procedure type of categorization – combining the previously designed categorical system (according to the interview's objectives) with the flexibility of inductively creating other categories from the data. Second phase consisted in vertical cutting and grouping registration units – sections of text with inherent meaning – in corresponding category, subcategory and indicator; to each registration unit a code was associated, so sources could be later differentiated. Throughout this process, new subcategories and indicators emerged and revisions to the text were conducted. We identified several topics being brought up by the interviewed in multiple moments of the talk, even when they were not asked about, whilst others did not have the expected expansion. This led to the third phase of analysis, comprising regrouping and horizontal comparison of indicators, resulting in the following conceptual map which served as basis to the development of the final matrix grid used for analytical interpretation of the resulting data.

4. LISTENING TO TEACHERS' VOICES: RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

In this section the content analysis of the interviews is presented, in respect to the scheme in Figure 1. From the professional and academic characterization of the sample, we concluded all participants were professionally qualified in teaching the respective musical instrument (two completed masters' degree and two completed official qualification courses for teachers with many years of teaching practice). Years of teaching experience ranged from ten to fifteen for three participants, and twenty-five for the fourth. All participants had experience teaching students from initial levels (five to ten years old), elementary (eleven to fifteen years old) and

secondary (sixteen to eighteen years old), which constitute the principal cycles of studies offered by specialized artistic schools. Regarding performative profile, three teachers confirmed they keep an active performer career in parallel to scholar activity.

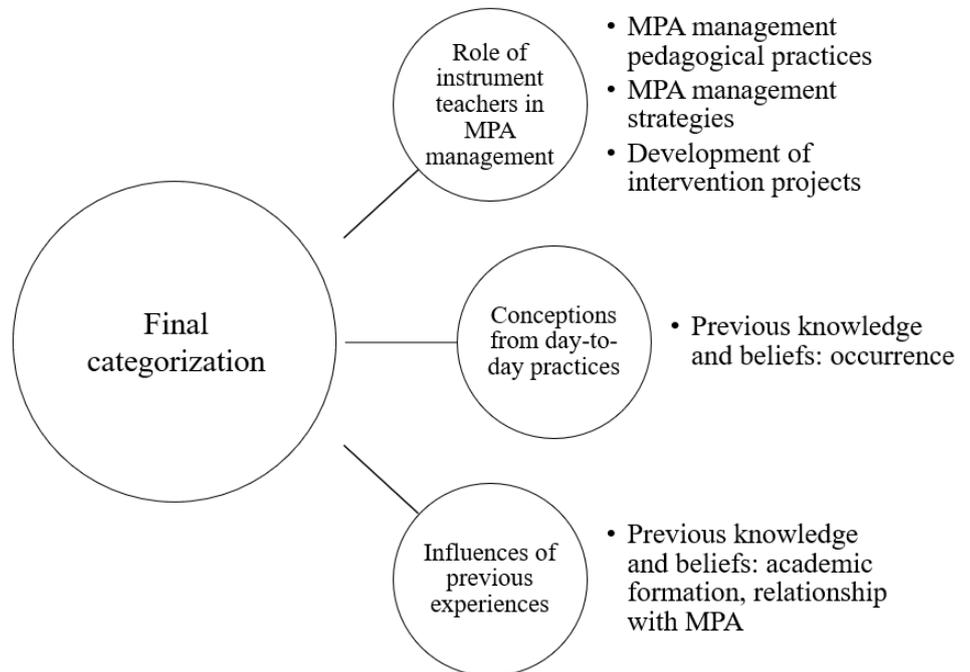


Figure 1: Final categorization for regrouping and interpretation of data. Source: self-elaborated.

4.1. THE ROLE OF INSTRUMENT TEACHERS IN MPA MANAGEMENT

The first goal of this study was to assess teachers' perceptions regarding their role in the management of students MPA levels, as well as to what extent they were familiar with the issue, the importance given to it, and how MPA is integrated in their class.

From the teachers' perspective, MPA was considered as a normal part of any musicians' life, which may occur in more or less accentuated ways, being the most important point to learn how to control it. In fact, teachers showed to be in line with MPA framework (Last, 2006; Matei & Ginsborg, 2017; Spahn et al., 2016), recognizing the facilitating role anxiety may perform when reduced to desirable levels, in terms of concentration and predisposition to the task:

I usually consider a bit of anxiety is necessary because I think it raises, helps keeping concentration levels, helps keeping a kind of self-demand, isn't it? (Teacher 3)

Contrarily, when high-levelled, MPA is debilitating and may even lead to panic experiences when one cannot even step on the stage:

Several times they work very well, but then there it is, they are not ready to deal with anxiety and... break down in examinations... (Teacher 1)

One of the participants referred we are constantly under pressure in various aspects of life (work, studies) and as such, MPA should be faced as one more barrier to cross, which advocates the idea that through MPA training, students intensify valuable mechanisms for dealing with pressure in other domains of their lives.

Teachers considered as part of their job as educators to mentor students in coping with MPA, by integrating strategic activities in lessons and promoting pedagogical experiences such as public presentations, group sessions, masterclasses, amongst others which may constitute exposure learning opportunities. In clinical contexts, exposure is commonly employed in anxiety treatments for children and adolescents, since it promotes development of self-control, self-determination and self-confidence through authentic confrontation of aversive stimulus (Friedberg & McClure, 2001). In vivo exposures, comprising real situations, are reported as more effective (McGinnis & Milling, 2005); nonetheless, virtual reality simulators have indicated approximate levels of anxiety to real audition environments (in measurements of reported state anxiety and heart rate variability) (Williamon et al., 2014).

Although all teachers confirmed to have experienced anxiety through various moments of their musical lives, they considered specialized education in MPA would be a plus in combination to their empirical knowledge. Half of the participants stated they had never approached the theme in academic context, whilst the other half said to have approached the topic in some university theoretical classes, such as Psychology of Music. For the latter, it would have been more beneficial to participate in practical MPA management projects during their studies, targeted at applying several techniques to real contexts of performance preparation and presentation. They declared this way they would have had the specialized instruction they lack nowadays in their practice. Finally, the four teachers stated it is common to hear other peers emphasizing the need for further education whenever the topic MPA is brought to conversation.

It was also highlighted that, in extreme situations, MPA may lead to the development of post-traumatic stress disorders and the abandonment of musical studies (as well as a factor for students to choose not to follow music courses on superior levels), which underpins the importance of being guided by teachers into coping with stress.

A set of management strategies used in instrumental teaching was described, which can be organized in two groups, considering Valentine's previously presented model (2002): task-directed – exercises of simulation, preparation, concentration, and breath control – and person-directed – to “read” the student, dialogue, self-confidence boost, normalizing errors, strategic repertoire selection and clear definition of objectives.

To begin with an explanation on task-directed MPA strategies, simulation exercises are usually implemented one or two weeks before auditions and examinations and replicate all steps integrating those situations (e.g. local of presentation, entrance and leaving protocol, social environment):

this week I am doing exam simulation with all students, so they perform the sequence of the exam and I only take notes... For them to get used to it, when in exam the teacher is in silence, because in other classes I am always intervening! (Teacher 1)

Preparation is approached by sensibilising students about the importance of maintaining regular and effective study outside class to master the task, improve confidence and minimize anxiety levels derived from feeling unprepared in the moment of performing. Despite talking in terms of preparation, teachers seemed to have an inherent sense of developing self-efficacy in students, as a positive influence factor of anxiety, which associates with previous research (Kenny & Osborne, 2006; Spahn et al., 2021). Concentration is trained by asking students to fully focus on the music while playing, abstracting themselves from outside distractions. Teachers also considered if the student could do so in class or study schedule, he would also be able to do it in real performance:

Because really, when we're fully focused in... on certain objectives and... solving problems of the repertoire... our attention stops being turned to other things which... which leave us full on anxieties and fears... (Teacher 2)

Finally, breath control is implemented in two ways: by slowly inhaling and exhaling in conscience of one's body and by training breaths in relation to the music's breath itself, therefore adjusting one's pace to it.

On the side of person-directed strategies, teachers mentioned several educational approaches: to "read" students by stepping into their shoes and trying to understand what is making them anxious; to promote thoughtful dialogue about anxiety-provoking moments and experiences; to boost confidence by letting students know they are well prepared, which will translate into a more confident performative posture; to normalize errors as part of work in progress and opportunities for learning; as well as to clearly define objectives through explaining in detail every step of the learning process in ways to make student feel accompanied and safe. One last pointed strategy - more specific to music teaching - was the tactical repertoire selection according to student's needs: for example, to choose a study that will improve a technical ability is lacking to the student, or in other hand, to give a piece that may seem difficult for a student but will motivate him to study more and evolve.

Although not directly evoking their names, the concepts of differentiated pedagogy and coping were inherent to most of the suggested practices. One-to-one instrument classes provide the ideal context for applying differentiated pedagogy, which defends productive learning situations should be planned for each individual student in ways difficulties are attenuated and objectives are conquered – the same goal may be achieved through different learning paths, adequate to each person's characteristics and needs (Perrenoud, 2005). Bearing in mind this individualized approach, coping mechanisms are introduced in more

effective ways, according to students' anxiety profiles. When regularly implemented in learning processes, psychological exercises comprising mindfulness, positive feedback and scaffolding (as the ones mentioned by the teachers) may reduce MPA over time (Sieger, 2017). In Hoffman & Hanrahan's study (2012), MPA targeted workshops inciting short mental-skills development such as self-awareness, control of dysfunctional thought patterns and effective self-talk showed to be more effective in assisting individuals cope with anxiety, rather significantly reducing it.

Regarding frequency of these practices, one teacher affirmed to implement them from the moment students can play a piece entirely, and/or in the class before an examination or concert. Only one teacher brought up the view about results, affirming practices were showing positive results and most students successfully coped with MPA.

Taking into account the intention of developing a consistent pedagogical intervention project in this domain (Moura, 2019), teachers were asked about obstacles and facilities they found when working MPA with students. On the bright side, two favourable contexts for developing MPA management pedagogy were brought up: students who have supportive families, and students who have had anxiety experiences early in their musical lives, allowing more balanced work over the years when compared to those who start experiencing MPA in more advanced levels:

When that first time [experiencing MPA] comes later I even think it's worse than being anxious from the beginning, because, yes ma'am, demonstrates high levels of anxiety when has to present himself in public, but can be immediately, from the beginning, motivated to correct it. (Teacher 3)

According to González and colleagues (2018), adequate parental support is crucial in preventing MPA, particularly in early stages of development, when children need a secure attachment and emotional support to evolve their musical aspirations. Concerning the evolution of MPA over the years, a recent study by Urruzola and Bernaras (2020) demonstrated that the experience of state-anxiety at early age (8-12 years) negatively affects self-confidence, and ultimately propitiates trait-anxiety, which indicates that the accumulation of negative performative experiences may be a core issue in preventing uncontrolled MPA levels amongst young musicians.

In opposition, several obstacles emerge in this kind of work. Firstly, the complexity of the theme and the difficulty to treat it in integrated ways – MPA strategies should not be taught independently but rather as part of performative learning, or else anxiety would be overvalued, and maybe even enhanced. Secondly, the interviewed also underlined the reduced class schedule, barely sufficient to work music contents and leaving minor space to treat other contents; the lack of control teachers have on the carrying of work at home; and the high amount of time students take to prepare repertoire and be able to play entire pieces, which translates into spending most classes focusing on mastering technical skills rather than

performative ones. When absent, family support was also mentioned as an obstacle.

Suggestions regarding pertinent ways to involve scholar community in projects-to-be were collected: they should offer exercises with practical applications of MPA management techniques instead of purely theoretical sessions, and include modalities for both students and teachers:

It is extremely important not only for students but also to educate teachers, because, like I said, in my education, I approached that theme like many others, but never in a way like maybe... the way it should be. (Teacher 3)

4.2. CONCEPTIONS FROM DAY-TO-DAY PRACTICES

During the talks, teachers revealed to have learned about anxiety by means of their own experiences and by shared knowledge from other musicians. In this section, conceptions about MPA generated from teacher's empirical experience and work in the field are presented.

Identified factors of influence in MPA were: responsibility and difficulty of the task – the higher, the more anxiety experienced; consciousness and self-awareness, at times associated with age, since from adolescence students tend to develop accentuated MPA levels and worry more about other's judgements (friends, teachers, family); audience type and size; preparation – more prepared students are able to reduce anxiety levels and increase self-confidence; and error occurrence – when students fail a passage, immediately tend to feel more anxious. External factors, such as having a bad day in school, were also pointed out, although they are hard to predict.

The profile of students was briefly approached. Two main types were presented: over-relaxed students who manage not to experience anxiety throughout the learning process; and committed students who, although prepared, fail to cope and end up impaired by MPA. In fact, trait anxiety is the term used when referring to the natural tendency an individual has to develop anxious patterns, driven from genetic contributions like personality traits of low self-confidence, perfectionism and catastrophising (Altenmüller & Ioannou, 2016; Stoeber & Eismann, 2007).

On the other hand, the profile of teachers themselves was brought to conversation, as their approach towards the error may influence students' MPA:

If the student fails but the teacher also... takes advantage of the error so he can... in a pedagogical way... correct it and continue evolving, or else the teacher may, happens regularly, have an attitude which blocks the student there. (Teacher 3)

Conceptions about how MPA changes according to context were added. Classroom environments, read as learning and constructive places where errors may be corrected, promote none or low levels of anxiety.

MPA levels rise when students are confronted with forthcoming concerts, persisting through weeks or days depending on the student; and particularly moments before entering the stage and five to ten minutes after starting performance.

4.3. INFLUENCES OF PREVIOUS EXPERIENCES

This section presents MPA-related experiences previously lived by teachers during their lives as students and performers as means to relate their backgrounds with their positions regarding anxiety. When asked about their relationship with MPA, all teachers generally classified it as positive; experience and preparation were underlined as foundations of mechanisms developed for anxiety control over the years.

Three of the interviewed referred to have experienced greater MPA levels during their academic lives, derived from wanting to deliver great results, to correspond to high expectations established by both themselves and teachers, the evaluative nature of performances and the fear of failure. Experience as an instrument teacher was pointed out as a factor in reducing anxiety:

I think I am responsible for conveying tranquillity to a child, and if the child sees I am afraid of stepping into a stage, the child also has legitimacy to be afraid, and so I stopped being afraid because of that... (Teacher 1)

Contrary positions about anxiety felt in group and solo performances were presented: one teacher mentioned to feel less anxious when performing in groups because responsibility was shared, whilst another said the opposite – to feel more anxious in collective playing and less anxious when performing solo, because that way there is no dependency of others.

Teachers were asked about MPA strategies they used in their performative practice. Common strategies to the ones implemented with students were concentration, preparation, and breath control. One of the teachers emphasized the importance of rest before a concert and how it translated into a more relaxed state of mind. Another teacher talked about the use of medically prescribed pharmacological treatment (betablockers); the teacher had taken it exclusively while preparing mandatory music prerequisites for university appliance in a younger age, and stated it helped controlling physiological symptoms. Experience gained through regular performance and interaction with audiences was also pointed out as a desensitizing strategy. The lack of performative experiences may lead to developing new and higher MPA patterns:

I believe that, in that sense, if you are not in contact with the public, maybe, anxiety levels come back... (Teacher 4)

A reinforcement to the value of balancing the performing and pedagogical activities should therefore be made, at the risk of building a reality of artis-

tic education where pedagogues asked to teach performance are far from regularly performing themselves.

Considerable differences between these teachers' practices in comparison to their past instrument teachers were portrayed, which may indicate changes in instrumental didactics concerning MPA might occur throughout generations of pedagogues. Two of the interviewed referred their conservatoire instrument teachers approach MPA in superficial manners, essentially by letting students know the more prepared the repertoire was, the less nervous they would feel, because where there was study there was "no need" to be frightened of playing. The same teachers referred to have had no approach to MPA in superior level instrument classes, as their tutors focused mainly on technique and interpretation skills' improvement:

My university teacher never gave much value to that, because really, you have to find the best moment and the best way, and it is you who has to search. (Teacher 4)

Two teachers referred not to have talked about it in instrument class, at all:

Oh well, in my academic journey I had four instrument teachers. And I can say none of them ever talked about this aspect of anxiety. (Teacher 3)

Comparing these approaches with the ones conducted by the participants nowadays, one may identify promising changes in instrumental pedagogy and an increase of teachers' sensitivity towards the problematic of MPA and well-being in young and adolescent music students. Contrary to the belief that few music teachers (from primary to secondary levels) determine written annual individualized goals and structured lesson plans for students engaging them in broader aspects of music such as MPA (Patston, 2014), the interviewed showed evidence of conducting thoughtful, individual-directed didactic approaches in which several coping strategies are integrated for better student's anxiety experiences.

5. CONCLUSIONS

Throughout this study, we focused on instrument teachers' voices – interview speech – to provide a representation of MPA management practices and conceptions in specialized artistic institutions of the Portuguese educational system. Literature in the field was introduced as familiar topics emerged from the discourses to create a "statement-versus-fact" critical discussion. In line with previous research (MacAfee & Comeau, 2020; Patston, 2014; Shaw et al., 2020), we reinforced the key role educators perform in teaching students how to cope with anxiety, having the power to pass on knowledge derived from both theoretical grounds and personal experiences, and motivating the implementation of management strategies in day-to-day practice routines and weekly lessons.

Regarding MPA management practices, teachers correctly identified negative/positive effects of anxiety and consequent urge to include it in their teaching; described how they implement several coping strategies cited in the literature with students, including task-directed and person-directed exercises with emphasis on mindset building and negative thoughts regulation; and provided important advice about inherent difficulties and facilities of this type of work. From day-to-day teaching experience, participants mentioned extrinsic and intrinsic factors and contexts of influence in students' MPA experiences. Finally, the impact of teachers' previous experiences revealed to be positive: to have experienced anxiety in their academic paths and have had little instruction about MPA seems to have promoted higher levels of preoccupation about the matter and a shift of didactic practices in relation to the previous generation of instrument teachers. Still, educators highlighted that, although they practice MPA management with their students, there is a need for specialized instruction in the area, so these practices become more solid, methodical, and attain better results. This aligns with the identified need for development of efficacious treatments, applicable to real world scholarly contexts, and possible of being implemented by teachers, in opposition to the high number of existing therapies which imply the administration by mental health clinicians and psychologists (Shaw et al., 2020).

It is acknowledged that the data presented symbolizes a residual sum of four teachers of the same institution in a universe of more than a hundred public schools of specialized music education¹ and certainly hundreds more of private nature all over the country. A larger exploratory study involving more teachers of contrasting contexts is suggested to form a more realistic representation and extrapolate conclusions. However, we believe the hereby presented insights and applications regarding MPA will constitute a basis for sensibilization of teachers, students, and other scholar community members, as well as inspire the development of instructional programs and pedagogical intervention projects.

REFERENCES

- Altenmüller, E. O., Finger, S., & Boller, F. (2015). *Music, neurology, and neuroscience: historical connections and perspectives*. Elsevier.
- Altenmüller, E. O., & Gruhn, W. (2002). Brain Mechanisms. In R. Parncutt & G. E. Mcpherson (Eds.), *The Science and Psychology of Music Performance: Creative Strategies for Teaching and Learning*. Oxford University Press.
- Altenmüller, E. O., & Ioannou, C. (2016). Music Performance: Expectations, Failures, and Prevention. In *Performance Psychology* (pp. 103–119). Elsevier.

¹ A hundred and eighteen public music schools were financed by the Portuguese government during the period of 2018-2024 according to DGEstE (Direção-Geral dos Estabelecimentos Escolares, 2018).

Amado, J. (2016). *Manual de investigação qualitativa em educação*. Coimbra University Press.

<http://doi.org/10.14195/978-989-26-0879-2>

Burin, A. B., & Osório, F. L. (2017). Music performance anxiety: A critical review of etiological aspects, perceived causes, coping strategies and treatment. *Revista de Psiquiatria Clínica*, 44(5), 127–133.

<https://doi.org/10.1590/0101-60830000000136>

Clark, D. B., & Agras, W. S. (1991). The assessment and treatment of performance anxiety in musicians. *The American Journal of Psychiatry*, 148(5), 598–605.

<https://doi.org/10.1176/ajp.148.5.598>

Direção-Geral dos Estabelecimentos Escolares (2018). *Lista definitiva Música Concurso Contrato Patrocínio 2018/2024*. Retrieved from

https://www.dgeste.mec.pt/wp-content/uploads/2018/09/ListaDefinitivaMusicaCorrecaoE-AE-18_24.pdf

Friedberg, R., & McClure, J. (2001). *A prática clínica de terapia cognitiva em crianças e adolescentes*. Artmed Editora.

González, A., Blanco-Piñeiro, P., & Díaz-Pereira, M. P. (2018). Music performance anxiety: Exploring structural relations with self-efficacy, boost, and self-rated performance. *Psychology of Music*, 46(6), 831–847.

<https://doi.org/10.1177/0305735617727822>

Hoffman, S. L., & Hanrahan, S. J. (2012). Mental skills for musicians: Managing music performance anxiety and enhancing performance. *Sport, Exercise, and Performance Psychology*, 1(1), 17–28.

<https://doi.org/10.1037/a0025409>

Kendrick, M. J., Craig, K. D., Lawson, D. M., & Davidson, P. O. (1982). Cognitive and behavioral therapy for musical-performance anxiety. *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology*, 50(3), 353–362.

<https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-006X.50.3.353>

Kenny, D. T. (2010). The role of negative emotions in performance anxiety. In P. N. Juslin & J. A. Sloboda (Eds.), *Handbook of Music and Emotion: Theory, Research, Applications* (pp. 425–452). Oxford University Press.

<https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780199230143.001.0001>

Kenny, D. T. (2011). *The Psychology of Music Performance Anxiety*. Oxford University Press.

Kenny, D. T., Driscoll, T., & Ackermann, B. (2014). Psychological well-being in professional orchestral musicians in Australia: A descriptive population study. *Psychology of Music, 42*(2), 210–232.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/0305735612463950>

Kenny, D. T., & Osborne, M. S. (2006). Music performance anxiety: New insights from young musicians. *Advances in Cognitive Psychology, 2*(2), 103–112.
<https://doi.org/10.2478/v10053-008-0049-5>

Last, C. (2006). *SOS Crianças*. Casa das Letras.

Lazarus, A. A., & Abramovitz, A. (2004). A multimodal behavioral approach to performance anxiety. *Journal of Clinical Psychology, 60*(8), 831–840.
<https://doi.org/10.1002/jclp.20041>

Lehmann, A. C., Sloboda, J. A., & Woody, R. H. (2007). *Psychology for Musicians Understanding and Acquiring the Skills*. Oxford University Press.

MacAfee, E., & Comeau, G. (2020). Exploring music performance anxiety, self-efficacy, performance quality, and behavioural anxiety within a self-modelling intervention for young musicians. *Music Education Research, 22*(4), 457–477.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/14613808.2020.1781074>

Matei, R., & Ginsborg, J. (2017). Music performance anxiety in classical musicians – what we know about what works. *BJPsych. International, 14*(2), 33–35.
<https://doi.org/10.1192/s2056474000001744>

McGinnis, A. M., & Milling, L. S. (2005). Psychological treatment of musical performance anxiety: Current status and future directions. *Psychotherapy, 42*(3), 357–373.
<https://doi.org/10.1037/0033-3204.42.3.357>

McGrath, C. (2012). *Music Performance Anxiety Therapies: A review of the literature*. University of Illinois.

McPherson, G. E., & McCormick, J. (2006). Self-efficacy and music performance. *Psychology of Music, 34*(3), 322–336.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/0305735606064841>

Miles, M. (2020). Knowing the Audience: Music Performance Anxiety and Other Performance Experiences of a Primary School Choir. *Australian Journal of Music Education, 53*(2), 44–49.

Moura, N. (2019). *A exposição gradual como estratégia de gestão da ansiedade na performance musical em crianças e adolescentes* [Portuguese Catholic University].

<https://repositorio.ucp.pt/handle/10400.14/28906>

Nagel, J. J., Himle, D. P., & Papsdorf, J. D. (1989). Cognitive-Behavioural Treatment of Musical Performance Anxiety. *Psychology of Music, 17*(1), 12–21.

<https://doi.org/10.1177/0305735689171002>

Papageorgi, I., Hallam, S., & Welch, G. F. (2007). A conceptual framework for understanding musical performance anxiety. *Research Studies in Music Education, 28*(1), 83–107.

<https://doi.org/10.1177/1321103X070280010207>

Patston, T. (2014). Teaching stage fright? - Implications for music educators. *British Journal of Music Education, 31*(1), 85–98.

<https://doi.org/10.1017/S0265051713000144>

Perrenoud, P. (2005). *Pedagogia diferenciada: das intenções à ação*. Artmed Editora.

Shaw, T. A., Juncos, D. G., & Winter, D. (2020). Piloting a New Model for Treating Music Performance Anxiety: Training a Singing Teacher to Use Acceptance and Commitment Coaching With a Student. *Frontiers in Psychology, 11*(May), 1–14.

<https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2020.00882>

Sieger, C. (2017). Music Performance Anxiety in Instrumental Music Students: A Multiple Case Study of Teacher Perspectives. *Contributions to Music Education, 42*, 35–52.

Spahn, C. (2015). Treatment and prevention of music performance anxiety. *Progress in Brain Research, 217*, 129–140.

<https://doi.org/10.1016/bs.pbr.2014.11.024>

Spahn, C., Krampe, F., & Nusseck, M. (2021). Classifying Different Types of Music Performance Anxiety. *Frontiers in Psychology, 12*(April), 1–11.

<https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2021.538535>

Spahn, C., Walther, J. C., & Nusseck, M. (2016). The effectiveness of a multimodal concept of audition training for music students in coping with music performance anxiety. *Psychology of Music, 44*(4), 893–909.

<https://doi.org/10.1177/0305735615597484>

Stoeber, J., & Eismann, U. (2007). Perfectionism in young musicians: Relations with motivation, effort, achievement, and distress. *Personality and Individual Differences*, *43*(8), 2182–2192.
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.paid.2007.06.036>

Urruzola, M. V., & Bernaras, E. (2020). Music performance anxiety in 8- to 12-Year-Old children. *Revista de Psicodidáctica* (English Ed.), *25*(1), 76–83.
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.psicoe.2019.10.003>

Valentine, E. (2002). The fear of performance. In J. Rink (Ed.), *Musical Performance: a guide to understanding* (pp. 168–182). Cambridge University Press.

Watson, A. H. D. (2006). What can studying musicians tell us about motor control of the hand? *Journal of Anatomy*, *208*(4), 527–542.
<https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1469-7580.2006.00545.x>

Williamon, A. (2004). *Musical Excellence: Strategies and Techniques to Enhance Performance*. Oxford University Press.

Williamon, A., Aufegger, L., & Eiholzer, H. (2014). Simulating and stimulating performance: Introducing distributed simulation to enhance musical learning and performance. *Frontiers in Psychology*, *5*(FEB), 1–9.
<https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2014.00025>

Wilson, G. (2001). *Psychology for performing artists*. John Wiley & Sons.

Wilson, G., & Rowland, D. (2002). Performance anxiety. In *The Science and Psychology of Music Performance. Creative Strategies for Teaching and Learning*. (pp. 47–61). Oxford University Press.

Article received on 31/03/2021 and accepted on 01/07/2021.

[Creative Commons Attribution License](#) | This is an open-access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution License (CC BY). The use, distribution or reproduction in other forums is permitted, provided the original author(s) and the copyright owner(s) are credited and that the original publication in this journal is cited, in accordance with accepted academic practice. No use, distribution or reproduction is permitted which does not comply with these terms.