

PORTRAITS OF A WONDERFUL MUSICIAN: EXPLORING THE INTERSECTION OF
GRADUATE MUSIC STUDENT EXPERIENCES AND MENTAL HEALTH THROUGH
POETIC INQUIRY

Sandra Coursey

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Committee:

Dr. Solungga Liu, Committee Chair

Dr. Monica Longmore,

Graduate Faculty Representative

Dr. Ryan Ebright

Dr. Laura Melton

ABSTRACT

Solungga Liu, Committee Chair

This paper explores the intersection of U.S. graduate music student experiences and mental health. A literature review discussing nineteenth-century mechanist piano pedagogy practices, Carl Seashore's *Measures of Musical Talent*, the impact of neoliberal capitalism on students, and an overview of current U.S. studies on university music student mental health underscore the need for further inquiry into the student experience. I held eight semi-structured interviews with current or former U.S. graduate music students focused on their experiences as a music major. Through poetic inquiry and qualitative content-coding, the interview transcripts were analyzed and organized into poetic portraits representing the collective essence of the lived experiences of the interviewees. The set of eight poems, "Portraits of a Wonderful Musician," explores uncovered codes including: identity, self-perception, pressure, expectations, urgency, anxiety, the pursuit of perfection, guilt, depression, criticism, comparison, and burnout. Grounded in phenomenology, this paper foregrounds the subjective lived experiences of those interviewed and demonstrates how these rich understandings can inform current music education trends and practices. Influenced by the historical, social, and cultural constraints of music pedagogies, teachers and students can benefit from student-centered learning approaches, deliberate practice strategies, and modeling growth mindsets.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Walking lonely through the woods one day, a wonderful musician thought, “Time is passing quite slowly alone; I shall find myself a good companion.” He began to fiddle as he walked, his tune rustling the leafy branches surrounding him. Then suddenly, four paws trotted up to him, entranced by his melody. The musician thought, “A wolf? An unsuitable companion.” However, when the wolf came closer and asked, “Fiddler, please teach me how to play music as magically as you,” the musician replied, “Just follow my directions.”

“As a scholar to his master,” obeyed the wolf, and they walked together until coming upon an old, hollow oak tree with a hole in the middle of its ragged trunk. “If you want to learn to play the fiddle,” the musician said, “put your front paws in this hole.” The wolf obeyed, and the musician cunningly wedged a rock into the hole, trapping the wolf and his paws there as prisoners. Promising to return, the musician continued his way through the woods.

Soon again, he began to get lonely and called for a companion by fiddling. Quickly, he encountered and felt dissatisfied by meeting a fox and then, a hare, who both loved his music. But just as he tricked the wolf, the musician hung the fox by a trap tied on a tree bough and tied the hare to the tree trunk. Having met three beasts, unsuitable options for companions in his eyes, the musician once more played as he walked through the woods, and his tune called the attention of a woodcutter, who stopped his work to locate the source of the music. “Finally!” Said the musician, “A human companion, not a wild beast!” As the musician began to play beautifully in celebration, his earlier animal victims freed themselves from their binds and followed the tune through the woods, seeking vengeance. The woodcutter wielded his ax at the three beasts, sending them back into the woods with one glimmering “Whoosh!” of the ax against the air. The

musician continued to play for the woodcutter out of gratitude and then continued alone back along the wooded path, accompanied only by his fiddle.¹

A lesser-known fairy tale from the *Kinder-Und Hausmarchen*, a collection of German folktales compiled and told by the Brothers Grimm, “The Wonderful Musician” is a puzzling story of a lone fiddler on a quest for companionship. A fiddler encounters three animals, who, after he deems them unfit for companionship, uses his music against as a magical means of manipulation, gaining their trust and then entrapping them all. The musician eventually meets a human hunter, who, as the musician sees, is the only worthy listener of his music. This camaraderie works in his favor when the hunter defends the musician against the vengeful animals. Then, the story ends with the musician alone, playing his fiddle just as he began.

There are several ways to interpret this story; for example, one might interpret the three animals as metaphors for negative, animalistic traits the musician wishes to leave behind and the woods as a representation of the musician’s subconscious. One might also see it as a warning against following authority mindlessly if read from the animals’ point of view. Regardless of any reading of the overarching moral, the story plays on familiar tropes of musicians as loners dedicated to their instrument at the cost of companionship. Additionally, the story plays on the master-apprentice dynamic between the musician and animals, a dynamic commonly found in private music lessons. It shows not only the possible detriments of following a teacher mindlessly but also how music is often portrayed as magic to behold, and those who know how to wield it have a great power to inspire and manipulate. Finally, the story describes the difficulty for the musician to connect to the outside world without the support of his instrument, a

¹ Brothers Grimm, “The Wonderful Musician” Grimm, https://www.grimmstories.com/en/grimm_fairy-tales/the_wonderful_musician#google_vignette.

separation between personal and professional identity that is often blurred for musicians who feel a deep connection to their craft.

While this story has become less known with time, the musician stereotype presented in the story is still relevant to today's musicians. As in the above fairytale, musical skill is still commonly misconstrued as magic or an innate talent or gift bestowed on some chosen people, not others. However, access to this magic musical ability may often come at a price in many possible forms, whether it be resolving to journey alone indefinitely, pursue a career in music at the cost of higher paying, more stable jobs, or accepting an abuse of the master-apprentice model of learning for the sake of music. Moreover, if being a “wonderful musician” requires great sacrifice, at what point does that sacrifice become detrimental to the musician’s well-being? And, does the cultural and personal perception of musical talent or lack thereof affect the mental health and well-being of the musicians? Are musicians destined to sacrifice a life of companionship and well-rounded fulfillment for the beauty of their craft? Even more, are music students, like the animals in the story, destined to be led astray by their maestro, equating the pursuit of music study and mastery to falling into a trap?

Problem

Despite a growing body of research on the mental health challenges that all types of musicians and music students face, there remains a lack of understanding of music students’ unique experiences and perspectives on mental health and well-being. Existing research often emphasizes individual responsibility for self-care and personal coping strategies rather than exploring potential systemic difficulties that may contribute to these challenges. While previous studies have identified factors such as high academic expectations and lack of support, how

students experience these factors and their potential impact on mental health and well-being remain unclear. Moreover, pedagogical solutions to improve student experience are not widely known or practiced.

Purpose

The purpose of this study is to explore the experiences of music students as they relate to their mental health and well-being, with a particular focus on identifying any potential systemic issues within music education that may contribute to these experiences. This study will focus on the experiences of graduate music students, as these students have the most years of experience as students in the field. This study uses phenomenology, poetic inquiry, and qualitative content coding (thematic analysis) to create a nuanced understanding of graduate music students' lived experiences and identify patterns or themes that may emerge across their stories. Through this research, I aim to identify any systemic, historical, or sociocultural issues contributing to graduate music students' mental health challenges and propose pedagogical changes that could be made to support their well-being better. This study aims to contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of graduate music students' mental health and well-being challenges and how they intersect with their experiences in school. It also proposes concrete strategies for holistically supporting them throughout their graduate studies.

These are the questions this paper sets out to ask through a crystallization of qualitative research methods: Arts-based research, phenomenology, interpretivism, thematic analysis, and poetic inquiry. By interviewing eight current or former graduate music Students and analyzing the transcripts using the methods mentioned above, I aim to uncover critical insights into the lived experiences of graduate music students regarding their mental health and well-being. Using poetic inquiry, I will represent the collective lived experiences of those interviewed through a

poetic portrait. While a unique method, poetic inquiry is vital to this project and to the integrity of accurately representing those interviewed.

Significance

My research aims to shed light on graduate music students' unique challenges and stressors. These students often experience high levels of pressure to perform at a high level, long hours of practice and rehearsal, and financial insecurity. By exploring these challenges and their potential impacts on mental health and well-being, this study will provide insight into how the music education system may contribute to broader societal issues related to mental health and well-being.

Furthermore, this study will use phenomenology and poetic inquiry as research methods to offer a unique perspective on the lived experiences of graduate music students. These methods will allow for a deep understanding of the participants' experiences, providing a rich and nuanced dataset that can be used to inform policy and practice.

The ultimate aim of this research is to enhance the experiences of graduate music students, both during their studies and beyond, and to advocate for changes in the music education system that prioritize student well-being. This study holds the potential to significantly and positively impact the field of music education and the lives of graduate music students.

Method

I conducted semi-structured interviews with eight former or current graduate music students in the United States, regardless of instrument or musical focus, focusing on experiences related to the student's mental health and well-being in school. The interviews were conducted via Zoom, lasting 60-90 minutes. The semi-structured format allows the participants to have greater control over the direction of the conversation and enables them to discuss topics that are

important to them. Additionally, the interview questions encouraged participants to share their subjective experiences, including any challenges they were facing or experienced during graduate school and how they affected their mental health.

I transcribed and analyzed the interviews using poetic inquiry, including creating a poetic transcription and a final poetic portrait. The poetic transcriptions are meant to capture the essence of the participants' relaying of their experiences, including their tone, rhythm, emotions, and my perception and perspective as the interviewer. I will then create a poetic portrait using themes and insights from the poetic transcriptions to center the interviewees' experiences and consider my interpretations.

To ensure the validity and reliability of the data, I coded the poetic transcriptions using a qualitative content analysis (thematic analysis) approach. Then, I analyzed the codes to identify common themes and patterns, which helped guide pedagogical recommendations for improving students' experiences and supporting their mental health and well-being.

Structure

Chapter II will present a literature review of the conception and construction of talent, the influence of nineteenth-century mechanist piano pedagogies in modern music education, and Carl Seashore's measures of musical talent, an essential milestone in the perception of musical skill. Additionally, this chapter will provide a discussion on the effects of neoliberal capitalism on music students, and an overview of U.S. studies on music student mental health, with an organization of reported symptoms.

Chapter III will present the structure of my research and its methodological foundation. Semi-structured interviews with eight graduate music students centered around their health and well-being while in school, are transcribed and analyzed. Research and analysis are grounded in

the methodologies and philosophies of arts-based research, phenomenology, interpretivism, thematic analysis, and poetic inquiry.

Chapter IV presents a poetic portrait of the collective lived experiences of the graduate music students I interviewed. With this portrait, I discuss key interview themes, such as identity, self-perception, pressure, expectations, urgency, anxiety, pursuit of perfection, guilt, depression, criticism, comparison, talent, etc. Arts-based research methods like Poetic inquiry can lend themselves well to analyzing, interpreting, and receiving emotional themes like these.

Chapter V summarizes key findings from my thematic analysis and poetic inquiry, their implications and applications in areas such as collective conscious resistance, relational connect, student-centered teaching and learning, deliberate practice, Carol Collin's Curious Collaborative Connection concept, and growth mindset.

Chapter VI provides a concluding summary of the previous chapters, acknowledges the limitations of the research design, and provides key areas for further research.

Limitations

While this research cannot establish causality between the music education system and student mental health struggles, it will provide insight into the experiences of graduate music students, as well as historical, social, and cultural context for the current environment, and offer recommendations for improving the learning environment and supporting their mental health and well-being. As a graduate music student, my experiences and perspectives inform my data creation and analysis as an interpretive researcher. Still, I will strive to maintain objectivity and rigor in my methods to ensure the validity and reliability of the findings. I plan to address this limitation by using systematic qualitative data analysis methods to ensure that my conclusions are grounded in the data rather than solely based on my perspectives and experiences. However,

it is also essential to acknowledge that my data analysis as an interpretive researcher is enriched by my lived experience as a graduate music student and my perspective and perception of the interviews I conducted. Furthermore, due to the small sample size and the specific context of this study, the findings are not generalizable to all graduate music programs. Instead, the study is meant to describe the participants' experiences, contribute to the literature on mental health in higher music education, and strengthen an interdisciplinary dialogue in music fields on student-centered education and its benefits.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

College music programs are often known for their focus on training excellent classical music performers and educators. In a competitive sphere, universities continually innovate curricula to keep up with the ever-evolving realities of the music job market that students face upon graduation. However, within the larger framework of U.S. economics and politics, more and more focus is moving toward maximizing the productivity and measurable success of universities and their students, often at the cost of artistic integrity. This environment, widespread and traced back to early conceptions of talent, nineteenth-century mechanist piano pedagogies, and the eugenicist ideals of Carl Seashore, perpetuates a music education culture that silences the voices of students deemed “untalented,” preventing them from reaching their full potential.

Music is often considered an emotional outlet for recharge, communication, or healing. In a music therapy context, practicing and studying music can positively impact the well-being of those participating. However, since antiquity, music has had a social connection between musical talent and “madness” or other mental health concerns.² The “Madness” trope for musicians, and often artists in general, is well represented in popular culture, including the 2020 movie *Nocturne*, in which a young violinist, depicted as having a talent that caused her to perform “as if the devil was in the room with her,” was driven by otherworldly forces to suicide and

² George, Becker, 2014, *A Socio-Historical Overview of the Creativity-Pathology Connection: From Antiquity to Contemporary Times*. In *Creativity and Mental Illness*, (James C. and Kaufman, editor.) Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

subsequently nicknamed “Mad Moira” by her classmates. While a full discussion on the topic of music and madness is beyond the scope of this paper, it is vital to acknowledge the madness trope in discussing esteemed composers as well, such as Beethoven, whose turbulent inner world is often credited with much of his output, as for Robert Schumann, whose mental health is frequently discussed in how it influenced his compositional style. Nevertheless, while rightly acknowledging the influence of the artists’ suffering, these depictions are in danger of inadvertently teaching those with similar aspirations that it is the only way to be a true artist. Within a growing globalization and marketization climate, there is a wealth of global data on professional and student musicians' mental health and well-being status. Although research worldwide indicates that career, experienced, and student musicians are all struggling with mental health, I will primarily focus my research on studies conducted in the United States.

This chapter will provide historical and social context by discussing the conception and construction of “talent,” the mechanist piano pedagogies of the nineteenth century, research on musical talent by Carl Seashore in the early twentieth century, and the influence of neoliberal capitalism in contemporary university music education. By examining the intersection of mental health and music education from both modern and historical perspectives, this chapter aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of the challenges faced by music students.

Concepts and Constructs of Talent

The word talent originally refers to an ancient unit of measurement. This measurement system was also used to measure currency in the weight of gold or silver. As gold and silver were also often used as currency, “talent” was used to describe the value someone might pay for a good or service. For example, in the Bible, talents are referred to as one of the largest

measurements used for currency. In the New Testament's Modern English Version (MEV), Matthew 25:14-30, "The Parable of Talents," a master calls on three servants. While away, he entrusts them with varying talents according to their ability levels. The first servant was given five talents, which he traded with until he had doubled his money. The master provides the second servant with two talents, which the servant takes and trades just as the first until he has doubled his money. Given just one talent, the third servant responded differently than those before him. He remembered the master's character as one who collects upon the labors of others, a selfish man. The third servant was afraid, so he buried that one talent in the ground. When the master returns, he calls upon the three servants again, rewarding the first two servants for being fruitful with the talents he entrusted to them. However, when the master approaches the third servant to find his one talent buried, the servant tries to return it to him. Yet the master responded, "You wicked and slothful servant!" The master demanded that he should receive what is his, *plus* interests upon return. To punish this failure of the third servant, he orders that the one unburied talent shall be gifted to the first servant, "for to everyone who has will more be given, and he will have an abundance. But from him who has nothing, even what he has will be taken away. Furthermore, throw the unprofitable servant into outer darkness."

This parable is one of the first recorded examples of "talent" used as a symbolic reference to a person's abilities and skills as gifted by a higher power. Even more, the parable's moral stands that one should not waste the gifts bestowed upon them and is indebted to be fruitful with those gifted "talents." If not, one is to be punished and shamed. There is much insight to be drawn from this parable in the context of the conceptualization of talent as we know it today. Consider Seashore's measures, for example. These measures seek to quantify a musician's abilities, just as the master quantifies his servants' abilities through the talents he pays them.

Moreover, in both scenarios, these measures seek to identify which workers have the most potential and the best chance for profit. Additionally, the master's compensation toward each servant was comparative, not based on each individual's abilities and successes, but as ranked against each other. This is also true in Seashore's measures, where participants' scores in different areas were compared to judge the best potential music students.

However, the term talent has not had a consistently clear definition, sometimes used interchangeably with 'giftedness' and as a distinction between academic intellect and artistic skill. In the U.S. in 1993, the Department of Education elected to replace the phrase "gifted and talented" with only "talented." Callahan points to a possible reason behind this change: it "may reflect negative social, sculptural, and/or political factors that can be traced to the 1960s and the increased attention to equity issues in education [and] civil rights issues."³ Callahan also speculates that "the term 'gifted' itself implies that the trait has been 'laid upon' the individual at birth, leading many to view the term gifted as implying a trait that is genetically determined."⁴ She also suggests that giftedness is too narrowly focused on intellectual ability and points to researchers who grieve "narrow interpretations of the terms gifted may have contributed to social inequities." The term talented "reflects the position that giftedness should not be separated into distinct constructions of unequal weight."⁵

Although the term 'talent' has evolved in its meaning, its roots in measurement, currency, and bestowed or innate abilities are still influential in today's social and cultural understanding of musical skill. It is important to keep these influences in mind while considering the current atmosphere of higher music education and the wider perceptions of talent and ability.

³ Carolyn M. Callahan, "The Construct of Talent," *Peabody Journal of Education* 72 (3-4), (1997): 24. .

⁴ Callahan, "The Construct of Talent," 24.

⁵ Callahan, "The Construct of Talent," 24.

Laying the Foundation: Nineteenth Century Mechanist Piano Pedagogy

In the first half of the nineteenth century, mechanistic piano pedagogy practices dominated music education with lasting effects. In the *Journal of Historical Research in Music Education*, 2016 article “In Music Nothing is Worse Than Playing Wrong Notes”: Nineteenth-Century Mechanistic Paradigm of Piano Pedagogy, author Lia Laor argues that “neither musicologists nor contemporary music education researchers have acknowledged the depth and intensity of the nineteenth-century open and critical discussions concerning piano pedagogy and their relevance for current music education discourse.”⁶ In light of that, I think it is worthwhile to briefly cover the historical context of mechanist piano pedagogies of the nineteenth century. Laor suggests that this disconnect might be due to the “socio-musical processes [that] emerged in the twentieth century that led to the formation of discrete professional specialization in the field of music, as manifested in the establishment of separate associations, institutions, and journals,” for various fields such as music education, composition, theory, or musicology. There was “little inter-specialization collaboration and dialogue with ranged or pedagogical music and practice from its inception.”⁷ Secondly, Laor suggests this disconnect stems from the “predominance of restrictive or exclusionist rather than inclusive approaches to music research, which by and large, regarded pedagogy as external,” and “thus, ‘mere’ piano pedagogy would not coincide with this exclusionist approach and would not be considered a valid subject of study.”⁸ However, we can only grow by acknowledging the strides and mistakes of other fields. Mechanist piano pedagogy focuses on analyzing, classifying, and mastering the physical mechanics of playing piano.

⁶ Lia Laor, “In Music Nothing Is Worse than Playing Wrong Notes,” *Journal of Historical Research in Music Education* 38 (1) (2016): 7.

⁷ Laor, “In Music Nothing Is Worse than Playing Wrong Notes,” 7.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 7-8.

Through this focus, they believed, effortlessly expressive playing would emerge. Modeled after the scientific method, this pedagogical method aspired to “achieve the status of a science” and placed piano technique as the first to be practiced, with interpretation saved for last.⁹ This outlook caused mechanists to demand “that artistic music be banned from piano lessons until children acquired a sufficient level of technique.”¹⁰

Treating piano technique as “gymnastics,” mechanists focused on “the training of the hands’ musculature and nervous systems,” often encouraging “finger practice to be carried beyond the threshold of pain.”¹¹ After describing a technical exercise, Carl Czerny, one of the most influential nineteenth-century piano pedagogues, advises pianists to repeat his exercises: “This til your fingers ache,” and that “the pupil will persevere after they begin to ache, instead of leaving off at that time.” These mechanistic perspectives of “piano pedagogy were found to damage creativity, artistic problem solving, and individual expression...reduc[ing] music to sheer technicality.”¹² While important, this emphasis on technical mastery often came at the cost of stifling the creative and expressive potential of the students, a concern that still resonates in present music education.

As discussed by Laor, Friedrich Guthman’s pedagogical treatise, *Methodik* (1805), laid the foundation for teacher-directed mechanist pedagogy. The drill-and-practice technique led by Guthman left little room for dialogue with the student, let alone allowing the student to make expressive decisions. Guthman also encouraged corporal punishments, acknowledging that drilling dry passages “may not necessarily be pleasant” but would deal with this unpleasant

⁹ Laor, “In Music Nothing Is Worse than Playing Wrong Notes,” 9.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 11.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 12.

¹² *Ibid.*, 12.

pedagogical experience by suppressing it or blaming it on the student.¹³ In Gunther's philosophy, "students would understand that the method [of corporal punishment] was for their o good and would thus comply gratefully."¹⁴ Importantly, Laor points out that Guthmann's methods were "put into practice by a whole generation of piano pedagogues," who would go on to influence the atmosphere of music education with lasting impacts, including eliciting "extreme pedagogical experiences among teachers and learners, as well as a hostile reaction among musicians, pedagogues, and critics who reject it."¹⁵ It is also important to remember that as the institutionalization and separation of different music sectors formed, the influence and impact of piano pedagogy on the more prominent music education sphere was diminished, if not forgotten. The idea of discipline being of utmost importance to a student's character and demeanor is expressed in Guthmann's *Methodik*, in which he suggests students who "could not maintain strict discipline even if gifted, were expected to become 'corrupt' and to remain 'dilettantes' forever."¹⁶ Although there have been many attempts to rebuke this mechanist school of pedagogy as early as Beethoven and Schumann's more holistic pedagogies, its influence in long-standing traditionalist pedagogies amidst a widespread separation of fields of study continues to quietly perpetuate harmful teaching styles in present music education of all levels.

Later in this chapter, we will see how the "meticulous scientific application of the mechanistic worldview in piano pedagogy" would lead to various innovations, including Carl Seashore's *Measures of Musical Talent*.¹⁷

¹³ Ibid., 11-12.

¹⁴ Ibid., 12.

¹⁵ Ibid., 12.

¹⁶ Ibid., 14.

¹⁷ Ibid., 14.

Musical Paradox: Healing Practice, Harmful Profession

George Musgrave explores the paradox of music-making having a healing potential but music careers being detrimental. He defines these as two separate domains of musicians: music as practice versus music as work, and urges that in “discussions of the benefits of music, we do not forget the voices of working musicians, which are often lost in discussions around the positive impact of music on emotional wellbeing; that is, we must ask the question, beneficial for who and in what way?”¹⁸ This is a particularly insidious societal issue with no quick fix— to pursue a full-time passion for playing music, a person in a capitalist system will need to play music as work. I will delve into this influence more in the section “Neoliberal Capitalism and its Effect on Music Students.”

So, then, “how can we encourage participation in music making, with all of the emotional and psychological benefits,” while “simultaneously preparing those music-makers who develop the desire to build a musical career for the reality that the psychosocial nature of the work has the potential to be emotionally damaging?”¹⁹ As Musgrave describes, “Pursuing a musical career means facing a challenging working environment that can be disabling to those who participate.”²⁰ If musicians resign to this reality of facing complex learning and working environments, “the association of creativity [and in this case, inclination toward music as a career], and madness may be seen as essentially a type of role expectation.”²¹ This role

¹⁸ George Musgrave, (2022) Music and wellbeing vs. musicians’ wellbeing: examining the paradox of music-making positively impacting wellbeing, but musicians suffering from poor mental health, *Cultural Trends*, 9.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 10.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 10.

²¹ Becker, A Socio-Historical Overview, 18.

expectation might be present when considering that “depression rates are almost double in those who view music as their career, and wellbeing is also significantly lower.”²²

It is critical to acknowledge that neoliberal capitalism “encourages competitions as a means for survival” and that in this context, musicians are often led to believe their worth is based on “what, or how much [they] produce.”²³ Therefore, the benefits of music practice, often cited by early life educators and music therapists, are entirely superseded by the capitalist competition imposed on those seeking music as a career that has been instilled deep in the seams of U.S. university music schools thanks to mechanists like Guthmann and eugenicists like Carl Seashore, who believed only the fittest were meant to make it as musicians. Before discussing the details of neoliberalism’s effect on music students, it is essential first to outline Seashore’s specific ideals, as neoliberalism only began emerging in the 1930s, in the last two decades of his life, after establishing his ideals and measurements in music.

Carl Seashore’s Musical Eugenics

Seashore, like many of his psychologist contemporaries, “assumed that intelligence is biologically inheritable, immutable, and variable among individuals.”²⁴ Musical talent, considered a type of intelligence by Seashore, was not immune to this perspective. Seashore believed musical talent was also inheritable, immutable, and variable and sought to find a way to measure the traits within musical abilities. In the early twentieth century, Seashore was the first to develop standardized tests of musical abilities to create a “hierarchical classification of music

²² C. Loveday, G. Musgrave, & S.A. Gross, (2023) Predicting anxiety, depression, and wellbeing in professional and nonprofessional musicians, *Psychology of Music*, 518.

²³ Sins Invalid, 10 Principles of Disability Justice, <https://www.sinsinvalid.org/blog/10-principles-of-disability-justice>.

²⁴ Julia Eklund Koza, *Destined to Fail. Carl Seashore's World of Eugenics, Psychology, Education, and Music*, Jackson: The University of Michigan Press, 2021, 272.

capabilities,” which led to the sorting and ordering of musicians who took these tests.²⁵ The impact of these tests and Seashore’s endorsement of them in music education journals and circles led to one of the top music schools in the United States, the Eastman School of Music, using his tests on students and consequently not accepting or even dismissing students who did not score within a specific range.²⁶

Seashore also ranked the importance of traits that contributed to talent. For example, he “claimed that capacities such as intelligent thought sit higher on the talent hierarchy than the base, elemental sensory capacities.”²⁷ Even more so, he asserted that “the musician who knows his medium and thinks intelligently about it has a vastly greater satisfaction than the one who does not.”²⁸ This is an essential point because Seashore suggests that a quality he defines as inherent can affect how a musician feels about their craft. Therefore, he suggests that any musician who does not derive the same satisfaction must not possess that inherent quality to be successful.

Moreover, Seashore claimed that the “musical mind is a normal mind,” suggesting that any mind deemed “abnormal” is not a musical mind and should be sorted out of the musical population.²⁹ This reasoning persists that not only are some people inherently better at music than others, but that some people are innately worse musicians and that something must be done to identify these differences. These beliefs in “inherited, immutable differences in ability— and consequent differences in quality and value— were, among the stock messages of eugenics, and as was the case with Seashore’s statements about general ability, his beliefs about musical talent

²⁵ Ibid., 269.

²⁶ Hazel Stanton, “Report on Use of Seashore Tests at Eastman School of Music,” *Music Supervisors’ Journal* 12, no. 4 (1926): 20–26.

²⁷ Koza, *Destined to Fail*, 270.

²⁸ Ibid., 270.

²⁹ Ibid., 277.

situated him deeply within the eugenics fold.”³⁰ Seashore defines “normal” in a musical context by how well one scores on his musical measures. Subsequent sections of this chapter will demonstrate that these measures encourage competition within music school environments that negatively impact students’ mental health.

Neoliberal Capitalism and Its Impact on Music Students

Considering that all U.S. university music students exist and operate within a society deeply influenced by neoliberalism, it is essential to understand neoliberalism and its effects on music education and its students. Neoliberalism was established as a school of thought “in the 1950s and 1960s by economists at the University of Chicago, notably Milton Friedman.”³¹ The term continued developing as a “rather broad and general concept referring to an economic model or paradigm,” rising to prominence for the first time in the 1980s.³²

The idea that neoliberalism is hard to define is echoed by scholars who attempt a definition. Although it can generally be considered “a loosely demarcated set of political beliefs,”³³ Steger and Roy delineate the multiple facets of neoliberalism into four clear categories, or “four intertwined manifestations: (1) an ideology; (2) a mode of governance; (3) a policy package; (4) a particular form of capitalism”.³⁴ Ideologies are widely held beliefs that can influence people’s thoughts and actions. Moreover, ideologies establish societal truths that “offer a more or less coherent picture of the world as it is, but also as it ought to be.”³⁵ Neoliberalism as

³⁰ Ibid., 279.

³¹ Marianna Ritchey, *Composing Capital: Classical Music in the Neoliberal Era*, (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2019), 13.

³² Manfred Steger and Ravi K. Roy, 'What's 'neo' about liberalism?', *Neoliberalism: A Very Short Introduction*, 2nd edn, Very Short Introductions (Oxford, 2021), 24.

³³ Dag Einer Thorsen. "The Neoliberal Challenge: What is Neoliberalism?" *Contemporary Readings in Law and Social Justice* 2, no. 2 (Adleton Academic Publishers, 2010): 14.

³⁴ Steger and Roy, 'What's 'neo' about liberalism?', 12.

³⁵ Ibid., 12.

a mode of governance supports entrepreneurship, individualism, and competition within a free-market system. A key component of this governance is encouraging decentralization of power that promotes self-interested business practices.³⁶ Neoliberalism is a public policy that deregulates the economy, liberalizes trade and industry, and privatizes state-owned enterprises. Finally, neoliberalism differs from other forms of liberalism through its free-market trade, as opposed to the controlled capitalism of the past.³⁷ Although difficult to define, neoliberalism profoundly shapes not only economic realms but also cultural and educational ones, laying a foundation for its significant presence in music education.

While not categorized by Steger and Roy, it is also important to note that neoliberalism positions itself within a broader moral and ethical landscape and provides its own “perspective on moral virtue.”³⁸ For example, “the good and virtuous person is one who can access the relevant markets and function as a competent actor in these markets.”³⁹ The “ideal Neoliberal subject is an entrepreneur, and approaches every sphere of life with a competitive, self-serving, entrepreneurial ethos.”⁴⁰ Beyond this virtuous stance, “neoliberal rationality,” a term coined by economist Wendy Brown, outlines the process of assessment and decision-making with concern for potential profits and without regard for moral or ethical concerns.⁴¹

In contrast to the virtuous, ideal neoliberal, “The Chicago school economists asserted that all social problems have their roots in an overregulated market...[because] a truly free market, which individuals entered voluntarily, would be fundamentally rational and thus

³⁶ Ibid., 13.

³⁷ Ibid., 15.

³⁸ Thorsen. "The Neoliberal Challenge: What is Neoliberalism?", 14.

³⁹ Ibid., 14.

⁴⁰ Marianna Ritchey, *Composing Capital*, 106.

⁴¹ Ibid., 14.

incapable of causing injustice”.⁴² Therefore, those who fail in a neoliberal society are considered not just unethical but immoral, defective, disabled, or invaluable, and are “seen as solely responsible for the consequences of the choices...they freely make.”⁴³ Under the umbrella of neoliberal thinking, societal success is intricately tied to market performance, where individual failings are not seen as systemic issues but as personal shortcomings. Emphasizing the personal responsibility for any difficulty faced resembles “a medical model [of] disability as a pathology or defect that resides inside an individual body or mind. This new concept of disability coincides with the emergence of institutions and professions that have as their goal the remediation of disability.”⁴⁴ Neoliberalism goes beyond economic models by assigning monetary, ethical, and moral value to individuals and themselves as a “business.”

Neoliberalism has become a dominant political and economic force in the U.S. that permeates the social order, especially within education. Within this framework, university students double as consumers and institutions as corporations. However, this dual relationship promotes “competition rather than collaboration among practitioners and students, creates a low-trust environment [and the] result is that efficiency and monetized values are prioritized over other pedagogical and social values, such as diversity, equity, well-being, and care.”⁴⁵ Competition becomes a central priority for both the university and the student— to outperform others is not just to win but to survive. To lose, therefore, becomes dangerous. For universities, “losing” might mean significant budget cuts, cutting programs, or dropping student enrollment. For students, this might mean facing rising tuition rates, taking out thousands of dollars in loans,

⁴² Ibid., 14.

⁴³ Thorsen. "The Neoliberal Challenge: What is Neoliberalism?", 14.

⁴⁴ Joseph N. Straus, 2018, *Broken Beauty: Musical Modernism and the Representation of Disability*, New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 7.

⁴⁵ Lyn Tett and Mary Hamilton. “Introduction: Resisting Neoliberalism in Education.” *In Resisting Neoliberalism in Education: Local, National and Transnational Perspectives*, 2.

being unable to pay them back, or having to drop out and pivot to another career, willing or unwilling. While universities may face this issue regardless of student major, US university music institutions are increasingly adopting solutions to the financial precariousness of pursuing a degree in music and hoping to find degree-related employment upon graduation.

Of such solutions, “musical entrepreneurship has become the most widely disseminated and supported [and] has grown especially quickly since the global economic crash of 2008”.⁴⁶ Universities and curricula will present musical entrepreneurship to students, “where it is often couched in a rhetoric of revival, renewal, and freedom, and without a great deal of institutional support for exploring other possibilities” for students to succeed.⁴⁷ The emphasis on the possible positive impacts of musical entrepreneurship on student careers and the longevity of classical music as a whole, as well as the “curricula they have developed, attempt to counter both a narrative of aesthetic, social, or artistic decline—variations on the “death of classical music” theme—and the realities of a shrinking musical job market.”⁴⁸ As music education increasingly promotes neoliberalism and music entrepreneurship, university students are no longer only learners and peers. However, competitors survive in an ever-growing and changing market.

Musical entrepreneurship encourages students to view themselves as 'brands' or 'businesses' to navigate the intersection between artistry and commerce. Replacing an artistic identity with a 'brand' encourages students to “approach their lives competitively and opportunistically and to view the market itself as a site for personal liberation.”⁴⁹ Moreover, adopting music entrepreneurship means a student musician must develop “multiple musical and

⁴⁶ Andrea Moore, "Neoliberalism and the Musical Entrepreneur," *Journal of the Society for American Music*, (Cambridge University Press 2016), 38.

⁴⁷ Moore, "Neoliberalism and the Musical Entrepreneur," 51.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 40.

⁴⁹ Ritchey, *Composing Capital*, 11.

non-musical skills, create and maintain [their] own opportunities, seek funding, manage shifting schedules and priorities among students and parents, and constantly juggle musical and financial priorities.”⁵⁰ This “disparate, varied skill set is the opposite of the specialist’s” fundamentally conflicts with the classical music conservatory ideal of the prodigy or virtuoso specializing in music performance.⁵¹ Additionally, with innovations in the job market moving at an ever faster rate, workers are conditioned “to accept unpaid labor as the cost of gaining experience in a new field.”⁵²

Considering the difficulties mentioned above in securing reliable work and income, it is no surprise that “many musicians are working under conditions that resemble those of economist Guy Standing’s concept of “class-in-the-making,” or “the precariat,” which he argues is “not only defined in part by insecure labor but by ‘precariatization’—habituation to expecting a life of unstable labor and unstable living.”⁵³ While music entrepreneurship offers potential pathways to success, it is also a precarious landscape for artists who often face an overly thin line between opportunities and exploitation. Finally, it comes with a fundamental shift in how students perceive their roles in the music industry, with more emphasis on monetary success rather than artistic freedom and expression.

The pressure to always be productive, present themselves as a brand, take charge of their destiny, and focus on constant output can, and often does, take a mental toll on students. The emphasis on measurable success and productivity harkens to Carl Seashore’s 1919 *Measures of Musical Talent* and can further alienate students who may not fit the mold. Even more, the financial stressors of tuition and the reality of an unstable and competitive job market could be

⁵⁰ Moore, "Neoliberalism and the Musical Entrepreneur," 39.

⁵¹ Ritchey, *Composing Capital*, 111.

⁵² Ritchey, *Composing Capital*, 59.

⁵³ Moore, "Neoliberalism and the Musical Entrepreneur," 48.

enough for some students to quit pursuing music. However, under neoliberalism's ideologies, any student caught in this dilemma has no one to blame but themselves. This echoes the medical model of disability, which emphasizes the abnormalities or defects of the individual while neglecting environmental contributing factors. So, when students in this situation face failure, the impact on self-worth can be detrimental. Student musicians, "like the rest of us, are in an untenable situation, caught between the desire to pursue their craft and the need to survive in the new world that the free market and its attendant ideologies have wrought."⁵⁴ When artists tie their identity and, therefore, their value to their brand, a professional misstep, lousy performance, or critical audience is not just a mistake or career failure but a personal inadequacy, further blurring the lines between brand, business, and identity.

Overview of U.S. Studies and Reported Symptoms by U.S. University Music Students

This section provides an overview of the current symptomatology described in the studies, including US college music student populations. Through my research, I have identified three main groups of symptoms commonly reported among U.S. university music students: personal, contextual, and relational.

Personal Symptoms

In a survey by Christian Bernhard through SUNY Fredonia, 229 undergraduate and graduate majors at a public university school of music responded. This study aimed to compare the burnout levels of diverse types of music majors and to "examine relationships among

⁵⁴ Ritchey, *Composing Capital*, 145.

perceived burnout, academic, and personal variables.”⁵⁵ This study characterized burnout by three main components: emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and reduced personal accomplishment. Bernhard expands upon these categories to describe emotional exhaustion as fatigue and dulled response. He clarifies that depersonalization refers to a “lack of positive feelings toward other humans.”⁵⁶ Additionally, reduced personal accomplishment describes a disappointment in a perceived lack of achievement.⁵⁷ The 229 respondents averaged a “high” score in emotional exhaustion and “moderate” in depersonalization and reduced personal accomplishment.

In a study of 287 undergraduate and graduate music majors and minors from a large midwestern state university music school, Wristen found that self-reported depression and anxiety symptoms were comparable to those reported, irrespective of major. Nevertheless, Wristen claims, “a considerable amount of students reported symptoms indicative of depression and anxiety.”⁵⁸ It is also essential to consider that rates of depression and anxiety in general university students are high.⁵⁹ In this study, nearly a quarter of students they were reported being “negatively affected by their mental health,” with the vast majority reporting not seeking treatment. Wristen compared the numbers of untreated mental health problems in musicians to a similar survey conducted at the same institution the previous fall that included students from the entire university. The rate of untreated mental health problems among musicians is notably higher than in the general student population. It is evident through this study that although music

⁵⁵ C.H. Bernhard, (2010). A Survey of burnout among college music majors. A replication, *Music Performance Research*, 31.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 33.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 33.

⁵⁸ B.G. Wristen, (2013), Depression and Anxiety in University Music Students, Update: *Applications of Research in Music Education*, 21.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 21.

students' mental health problems might be part of a more significant trend in the general population of college students struggling with mental health, music students are far less likely to be treated by a professional.

One thousand one hundred thirty-seven undergraduate music education majors attending public universities and colleges in the United States reported high-stress levels and intense academic and work schedules. Payne et al. assert from the results of this study that “stress, anxiety, and depression seem to be interwoven, or even inseparable, facets of the music education major experience.”⁶⁰

Contextual Symptoms

Reviewing studies on U.S. university music students' mental health reports uncovered a recurring theme of students citing environmental factors that affect well-being. For example, based on an environment that sorts students on ability through auditions, chair placements, and subjective competitions, the “pressure to attain perfection in a competitive field may uniquely intensify student anxiety.”⁶¹ According to Koops and Kubel, who surveyed U.S. university music students, many students cited program requirements and work overload as contributing to difficulties. Students wrote about taking courses for little or no credit and demanding many hours of rehearsal and preparation. Others noted that their workload took precedence over time for sleep, eating, and relaxation.⁶²

⁶⁰ Lewis Payne, & F. McCaskill, (2020), Looking Within: An Investigation of Music Education Majors and Mental Health, *Journal of Music Teacher Education*, 29(3), 50–61.

⁶¹ Marilee L. Teasley, Erin M. Buchanan, "When music goes up in flames: The impact of advising on music major burnout," *NACADA Journal* 36, no. 1 (2016): 41.

⁶²L. H. Koops, C. R & Kuebel, (2021), Self-reported mental health and mental illness among university music students in the United States, *Research Studies in Music Education*, 43(2), 129–143.

It is clear from these reported symptoms that environmental factors can affect how students feel. This is supported through a social model of disability, in which it is essential to acknowledge that students who are struggling with mental health concerns are not inherently and innately misfitted to be musicians but may be experiencing adverse mental health because of the environmental stressors imposed on them as music students.⁶³

Often, the negative assumptions and beliefs at play in university music schools are not identifiable or outwardly advertised. Moreover, it is possible that those in power in university systems still need to be fully aware of the influence archaic modes of thought have on those interacting with the system. Eisner (2001) argued that every school comprises explicit, implicit, and null curricula. The explicit curriculum is the courses and options for study provided and advertised by a school. The implicit curriculum “socializes students to values” that are a part of the university by teaching students socially what behaviors are desirable and what are not.⁶⁴ A null curriculum is any way of learning or thinking the university does not acknowledge or include. In explicit curricula, “conservatories and schools of music explicitly teach technique, artistry, scholarship, and assorted skills related to the craft of music.”⁶⁵

Hanson, with personal experience as well as research experience in a top U.S. music school, asserts this as implicit curricula: “Music is a profession based on scarcity; beating others through mistake reduction leads to success; and demanding, borderline abusive teachers might be terrifying, but they get the most out of their students.”⁶⁶ I argue that many of Carl Seashore’s

⁶³ Rhoda Olkin, “Conceptualizing Disability: Three Models of Disability.” *American Psychological Association*. *American Psychological Association*, March 29, 2022.

⁶⁴ Elliot W. Eisner, “Chapter 4: The Three Curricula That All Schools Teach,” In *The Educational Imagination: On the Design and Evaluation of School Programs*, Upper Saddle River, NJ: Merrill Prentice Hall, 2002, 81.

⁶⁵ Josef Hanson, “Help Wanted? Exploring Altruism in a Music Conservatory through Positive Social Deviance - *College Music Symposium*,” Home - *College Music Symposium*, March 23, 2018.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 5.

ideologies of musical talent as inherent and immutable often exist within this implicit curricula as well. Implied social values in this context foster compliant behavior, damage future interest through extrinsic motivation, and create competitiveness through sorting students, all of which contribute to passing these intellectual and social virtues on to the next generation. Null curricula are more challenging to define, as it is what subjects are missing from the structures above.

Hanson suggests null curricula for their specific music institution as: “empathy, artistic citizenship, or open-mindedness regarding non-music career paths.”⁶⁷

The presence of an implicit curriculum that harms students’ well-being is apparent when compared to Koops’ findings of extreme language used by students to describe their experiences in university music school. Koops and Kuebel called the language “emotionally charged” and “desperate” and gave examples such as “ ‘insane,’ ‘impossible,’ ‘failure,’ ‘noxious,’ ‘hate,’ and ‘dread.’ ”⁶⁸ Considering the harmless explicit curricula, like described by Hanson, of most music schools, the type of language used to describe student experiences suggests the existence of underlying implications regarding individual ability and talent in this type of environment. In a 2012 study of why students drop out of music schools, many “cited negative experiences in music programs and a perceived lack of fit as a reason for withdrawing from the program.”⁶⁹

Relational Issues

In reviewing studies, I noticed teacher/student relationships cited in various studies on U.S. music university music students and the critical connection between the quality of these relationships and the students’ reported well-being.

⁶⁷ Ibid., 5.

⁶⁸ Koops, Self-reported mental health, 138.

⁶⁹ R. B.Gavin, (2012), An exploration of potential factors affecting student withdrawal from an undergraduate music education program, *Journal of Research in Music Education*, 60(3), 310–323.

U.S. Students who self-reported mental health status and responded to three open-ended questions in a 2021 study noted that “the nature of criticism received, especially from studio professors and ensemble directors, varied in how supportive it was of their mental well-being” And went on to describe that “critique was more difficult when it applied to their music-making than to other forms of academic work, because of the link between emotional expression and their music-making.”⁷⁰ In this same study, the connection of emotion to music was also linked to perfectionism, which many respondents cited as a barrier to mental health.

Many university music schools model the structure and curriculum of the conservatory environment, even if not outwardly labeled as one. In such an environment, “special reverence is reserved for studio faculty in an arrangement that closely resembles the classic master-apprentice model.”⁷¹ This can be dangerous if music schools harbor a “comparative and competitive” environment where “faculty may exert influence within a hidden curriculum by incentivizing or coercing student compliance through overt rewards and punishments tied to student learning and performance opportunities.”⁷² This perspective refers to Seashore’s desire to identify those exceptionally talented and those he deemed “exceptionally or helplessly unmusical.”⁷³ Teachers, like those at the Eastman School of Music, were to use Seashore test scores “in a process that qualified and promoted some students while disqualifying and eliminating others.”⁷⁴ Beyond eliminating the weakest of the pack, Seashore even claimed that “allocations for the gifted student should be more than proportional to innate talent; musically untalented students, by

⁷⁰ Koops, *Self Reported Mental Health*, 137.

⁷¹ Hanson, *Help Wanted?*, 4.

⁷² D. Gilbert, (2021), *A Comparison of Self-Reported Anxiety and Depression Among Undergraduate Music Majors and Nonmusic Majors*, *Journal of Music Teacher Education*, 30(3), 71.

⁷³ Koza, *Destined to Fail*, 331.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 306.

contrast, should rightly receive even less than their proportional share.”⁷⁵ This perspective draws striking similarities to the master’s punishment of the third servant in the Parable of Talents.

Seashore laid out a simple way of tracking and treating students based on their test scores:

Best 10 percent: stimulate enthusiastically.

Next 20 percent: encourage freely

Next 40 percent: encourage

Next 20 percent: question

*Next 10 percent: discourage*⁷⁶

In the same discussion, he stated that those with the lowest scores “should have nothing to do with music.”⁷⁷ Seashore’s suggestions of teacher intervention based on student scores suggest that teachers’ choice to support or not support their students can impact student success. Considering the close relationship between the faculty and students in private lessons, it is understandable that “student well-being hinges on developing strong, nurturing relationships with faculty.”⁷⁸ “It is also important to point out that when Seashore discusses test results from students, he refers not to the scores as good or bad but to the students themselves as good or bad.”⁷⁹ While modern university music teachers are hopefully no longer using the Seashore tests to measure musical talent, it is clear from accounts in recent studies (Gilbert, Koops, and Hanson) that the underlying thought process behind teaching music in this setting is still being affected by Seashore’s influence. For example, one open-ended response in Koops’s study described their experience:

There is an environment of widespread impostor syndrome. The idea that talent is inherent, unchangeable, and the most essential part of being a musician creates a student body plagued by insecurity and low self-esteem.⁸⁰

⁷⁵ Ibid., 307.

⁷⁶ Ibid., 303.

⁷⁷ Ibid., 310.

⁷⁸ Hanson, *Help Wanted?*, 4.

⁷⁹ Koza, *Destined to Fail*, 302.

⁸⁰ Koops, *Self-Reported Mental Health*, 138.

Regarding talent, words like “inherent” and “unchangeable” seem straight from Seashore’s ideologies. Moreover, Seashore’s teachings can influence faculty perspectives, and they are responsible for understanding this influence and supporting current students better. Seashore’s impact on music teaching practices in the U.S. was far-reaching, considering his presentations at music education conferences and publishing in music education journals to share his ideologies. He wanted to “reform music teachers’ ideas and transform their pedagogical practices.” He was published in *Musical Quarterly*, a long-standing, still-running academic journal, and *Etude Magazine* by the Theodore Presser Company from 1883-1957. He also reached members of the Music Supervisors’ National Conference and those who belonged to the much older Music Teachers’ National Association (MTNA).”⁸¹

Music history and educators should acknowledge that Seashore’s measures and ideas about student talent were at one time adopted by one of the top music schools in the country, advertised by popular education journals, and accepted by popular teachers organizations like MTNA, and how that one point in history has lasting impacts on the health and well-being of students in future generations as well. Receiving a degree from Eastman makes it likely that a person will go on to teach other students at a collegiate level, perpetuating this problem and spreading it across the country. Modern-day students are only a few generations removed from Seashore's direct influence on music education, meaning that current teachers, and subsequently, their teachers, are even less removed.

Conclusion

⁸¹ Koza, *Destined to Fail*, 331.

Educators must acknowledge that the last century of music education has a dark history rooted in eugenics, the last two centuries have been plagued with dry, anti-expression mechanist values and teacher-directed pedagogies, and more generally, discussions on artistic skill are tainted by antiquated notions of talent and giftedness. Concurrently, “we need to acknowledge that we are all implicated in many ways in the neoliberal turn and so have to find ways of bringing in new perspectives that challenge the basis of our decisions and actions.”⁸² Koza calls Seashore the “Pied Piper” of standardized musical testing, who amassed a following of music educators across the United States. From the studies outlined earlier in this paper, the attitudes associated with Seashore’s ideologies are often still in play in current music universities, evolving and branching out into marketization and music entrepreneurship. Koza points out that “the followers who continue in the tradition of Seashore today may not realize, however, that the Pied Piper was a eugenicist whose movement was grounded in eugenics.” The Seashore Tests, a significant part of this dark history, have profoundly impacted music education, shaping how music is taught and learned. Furthermore, famous mechanist pedagogues such as Carl Czerny remain standard in piano literature as foundational in technique build. Nevertheless, teachers must critically assess the history of these methods to refrain from repeating them themselves. As beneficial as music study can be for many people, educators and institutions must recognize the naive proposition that music study is always beneficial. Because “in doing so, we semantically privilege the idea of the instrumental benefits of music for some while denying the emotional and psychological challenges rooted in the nature of musicianship, faced by some musicians.”⁸³

⁸² Lyn Tett, and Mary Hamilton, “Introduction: Resisting Neoliberalism in Education,” 4.

⁸³ Musgrave, George. (2022) Music and wellbeing vs. musicians’ wellbeing: examining the paradox of music-making positively impacting wellbeing, but musicians suffering from poor mental health, *Cultural Trends*, 10.

Even more so, institutions and educators need to acknowledge how perspectives on talent, the influence of mechanist pedagogies, and the history of the Seashore Tests may still affect students and teachers today. Also, educators should become more sensitive to the impact their relationship with their students can have on student mental health and well-being while in school and for “faculty to recognize and take care of their own psychological and professional vulnerabilities and strengths so that they do not use students vicariously for their own ego enhancement and professional advancement.”⁸⁴ Although there is no clear answer to what institutions and educators can do to remedy the problems outlined in my paper, Gilbert recommends that “lessening the pressure of perfectionism that may be a byproduct of the conservatory-style approach of many music programs” could be an excellent place to start in strengthening teacher-student relationships and improving student self-confidence.⁸⁵ Chapter V, Discussion and Conclusion, will delve more thoroughly into proactive approaches to tackling the issues outlined in this chapter and Chapter IV.

Considering the historical context and contemporary challenges facing music education, it becomes clear that institutions must critically engage with their legacies. The lasting impact of conceptions of talent, mechanist pedagogies, the Seashore Tests, and the ongoing struggles of students against neoliberal institutional practices highlight an urgent need for reform. Institutions must center student well-being and experiences to ensure pedagogical practices and administrative decisions are not overshadowed by historical biases or market-driven motives. Through reflexivity and proactive measures, university music education can begin to move towards a more inclusive and ethically sound paradigm. Before this new paradigm

⁸⁴ J.J. Nagel, (2009), How to destroy creativity in music students: The need for emotional, psychological support services in music schools, *Medical Problems of Performing Artists*, 24(1), 15–17.

⁸⁵ D. Gilbert, (2021). A Comparison of Self-Reported Anxiety and Depression Among Undergraduate Music Majors and Nonmusic Majors, *Journal of Music Teacher Education*, 30(3), 69–83.

can be reached, educators must acknowledge the current state of student experience because it cannot be fixed until the issue is fully acknowledged. Antiquated perspectives on talent, mechanistic methods of music pedagogy, and Seashore's attempts to quantify musical prowess, still in practice today, prioritize technical facility over student experience and wellbeing, often leading students to sacrifice their mental health for their craft.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

Once upon a time, there were two German brothers, the oldest of a family of brothers and one sister. Orphaned into young adulthood, Jacob, the eldest lad, a “scholarly type, was small and slender with sharply cut features,” and his younger brother Wilhelm was “taller, was sociable, and fond of all the arts.”⁸⁶ Beyond high school, the brothers attended university with civil service ambitions. However, they graduated with an awakened “love of folk poetry” so strong it eventually led the brothers to give up their dreams of a legal career to pursue their literary passions.⁸⁷ To them, “folk poetry was the only true poetry, expressing the eternal joys and sorrows, the hopes and fears of humankind.”⁸⁸ Thus, in their constant search for folk poetry, they began exploring the distant past and “saw in antiquity the foundation of all social institutions of their days.”⁸⁹ They began collecting folk songs and tales from those they encountered, the beautiful, tragic, raw, dark details remaining the backbone of their love for the craft. Their collection grew and grew until one day, a friend said, “Boys, you must publish these tales!” Thus, the *Kinder-Und Hausmarchen* was conceived, with 200 tales that “aimed at conveying the soul, imagination, and beliefs of people through the centuries.” The brothers were dedicated to tellers’ original words, always keeping their folkloric spirit at the heart of the stories. To this day, this collection of tales “remains the earliest ‘scientific’ collection of folktales,” reaching readers worldwide, little did they know for centuries to come.⁹⁰ While the *Kinder-Und Hausmarchen* itself became quintessential, the brothers’ methods of story collection

⁸⁶ L. Denecke, "Brothers Grimm," *Encyclopedia Britannica*, <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Brothers-Grimm>.

⁸⁷ L. Denecke, “Brothers Grimm.”

⁸⁸ Ibid.

⁸⁹ Ibid.

⁹⁰ Ibid.

did as well. Thus, a new folkloric path forward forged by none other than the Brothers Grimm remains the blueprint for authentic story retelling.

Although the fairytales, as told by the Brothers Grimm, are filled with magical and mystical horrors and delights, they reveal raw truths about the realities of those who told them. The stories themselves may be works of fiction. However, the fantastical and often gruesome happenings of some of the most famous of the stories, like *The Little Red Riding Hood*, *The Three Little Pigs*, and *Snow White*, reflect both the sobering realities of life and the tellers' inability to escape them even in fantasy. Combining the brothers' strengths, Jacob's dedication to rigor in his research, and Wilhelm's creativity in crafting that research artistically, their set of tales holds entertainment and cultural, social, historical, and educational value. This is important because the Brothers Grimm set a scientific foundation for the collection of folk songs and tales, where maintaining the integrity of original words and details while, in their case, also collecting, organizing, crafting, and presenting these stories in a way that connects with their audience is vital.

Today, arts-based research echoes the Grimm brothers' creative research endeavors, using the artistic process as a method of qualitative inquiry, most often in the educational and social sciences. If art can create and convey meaning, arts-based research allows for the communication of multiple senses (touch, sight, hear, smell, etc.), leading to a more engaged, empathic understanding from the audience. While arts-based research is a creative modality of understanding and representing experiences, phenomenology provides a framework for rigorous inquiry that centers on the subjective lived experience. A key of phenomenological research is not just profoundly understanding the lived experience of the subject(s) but having *Verstehen* (German: 'to understand'), the ability to empathize and view the world from the perspective of

the story being researched or told. Differing in methodology from the positivist adherence to determinism, the scientific method, and finding objective truths, phenomenology takes an anti-positivist stance on social research, arguing that finding objective truth in research on humans conducted by humans is impossible- there is an inherent and unerasable bias at play in this research dynamic. So, instead of looking to establish objective truth, anti-positivism, sometimes known as interpretivism, acknowledges the subjective nature of human experience, seeking to understand others through empathic immersion. Building on the aesthetic knowledge of arts-based research and the subjectivity of experience in phenomenology, poetic inquiry is a qualitative method that combines the subject's lived experience with the researcher's perception. This creative modality acknowledges the inherent bias present in social research and highlights its value to provide a richer understanding.

Research Design

Recruitment: Participants were recruited through emails, flyers, and social media, targeting current or former graduate music students in the United States who have experienced adverse mental health during their studies. Interested candidates contacted the researcher via email. Potential participants were emailed the consent form, debriefing statement, and list of interview questions for review.

Consent Process: Interested candidates were emailed the consent form to review. If they consented, meetings were scheduled with interested candidates to review the consent form and conduct the interview. Consent was obtained via scanned document or Adobe sign. These meetings and interviews were conducted through Zoom. Participants' questions regarding the

study were addressed. Participants must sign and return the consent form before participating in the interview. No interview occurred if the participant did not sign the consent form.

Interview Format: Interviews were semi-structured, allowing flexibility in the discussion.

General questions about graduate experiences were asked, such as duration in school, area of study, and current/former student status. Participants were then be asked to choose from a list of submitted interview questions. They may focus on one question, discuss related topics, or choose another question from the list. Each interview is expected to last between 60 and 90 minutes. All interviews will take place via Zoom.

Recording: Only the audio of the interview was recorded for transcription purposes.

Post-Interview: The interview concluded with an opportunity for participants to share any final thoughts. The debriefing statement was reviewed with the participants at the end of the interview. The debriefing statement and the list of interview questions was emailed to each participant, along with the consent form.

Data Handling and Analysis: Audio recordings was transcribed verbatim. The data was analyzed using a qualitative approach to identify themes and patterns in the participants' experiences.

Qualitative Content Coding (Thematic Analysis): Transcriptions were analyzed using qualitative content coding. This process systematically categorizes the transcripts to identify patterns, themes, and nuances in the participants' responses. Codes were generated based on recurring concepts, ideas, and experiences participants share. These codes were then grouped into broader themes that reflect the key aspects of graduate music students' experiences and perspectives on mental health and well-being.

Poetic Inquiry: Alongside content coding, a poetic inquiry approach was employed to delve deeper into the emotional and experiential aspects of the data. This involves selecting segments of the transcriptions that are particularly evocative or representative of the participants' experiences. These segments were then be creatively reworked into poetic forms, retaining the original words and meanings of the participants.

Results: The findings were interpreted in the context of the existing literature on mental health in music education. The analysis yields insights regarding systemic issues, personal experiences, and potential pedagogical changes.

Participant Selection and Data Collection Methods

The selection criteria for this project were that participants must be over 18 years old and be either a current or former graduate student at a US university music school. Two primary recruitment methods were used: emails were sent to colleagues and music educators known to the researcher, and a digital recruitment flyer was posted on social media. From these two methods, interested candidates sent the researcher an email. Interested candidates were then emailed the consent form, debriefing statement, and possible interview questions to review before setting up a meeting time. If, after reviewing the documents, the interested candidates were interested in continuing, a ZOOM meeting was scheduled to review the consent form and possibly conduct an interview. During the ZOOM meeting, the consent form was reviewed with each participant, stressing the confidential nature of the interview and the participant's right to refuse any question or withdraw at any time. Any questions regarding the interview, consent form, or any part of the process were addressed before starting the interview. I looked for 5-8 interested participants who fit my selection criteria. I had 14 interested candidates, so I scheduled the first eight people who contacted me in order of who contacted me first. All eight candidates

signed and reviewed the consent form with me before the interview. Before the interview, the candidate was asked to confirm their consent to record the audio. All candidates checked “yes” on the consent form to record the audio, so I began recording before asking any questions. Interviews lasted between 60-90 minutes and were semi-structured. Participants were informed that the list of interview questions was a starting point for our conversation. They could choose or refuse specific questions or steer the conversation to what felt most relevant and authentic to them. At the end of each interview, participants were asked if they had closing thoughts, clarifications, or questions, and the debriefing statement was reviewed together before stopping the recording and ending the interview.

Poetic Inquiry

The method of poetic inquiry framed this project through a creative lens that allowed both the interviewees’ experiences and the researcher’s insight to be synthesized into one set of poems. These poems capture a nuanced view of the graduate music student experience. In this project, I used poetic inquiry to embody the interview material and present that understanding in a way that highlights the interviewees’ lived experiences. Moreover, “poetry is part of a reflective practice wherein we can acknowledge bias, expectations, and power differences between researcher and participants.”⁹¹ In this project, I used poetry as a representation that supports engagement with data from the researcher and the reader. Additionally, emphasis is placed on the aesthetic presentation of the poems, which allows participation and immersion in the data from anyone who engages with it. Finally, poetic inquiry provides the framework to present the complex and often tricky life situations discussed in the interview.

⁹¹ Sandra L. Faulkner, *Poetic Inquiry: Craft, Method and Practice*, (New York: Routledge 2020): 34.

Phenomenology helped frame my poetic portrait, which focused on the interviewee's experience and perspectives and how they communicated those perspectives and experiences of their time in graduate music school during the interview.⁹² Additionally, the concept of empirical phenomenology gave me a framework for my analysis and how I chose to present it. Aspers asserts that "empirical phenomenology is not just storytelling from the actors' perspective."⁹³ Instead, it grounds the analysis of the interviewee's experience in her perspective and "acknowledges the role of unintended consequences."⁹⁴ Poetic portraiture is well-guided through an empirical phenomenological lens for these reasons—the researcher's experience and understanding of the interview will inherently affect how the interviewee is portrayed in the poetic portrait. Therefore, empirical phenomenology can be used to purposefully center the interviewee and check for personal bias or other unintended consequences.⁹⁵ Hermeneutic phenomenology is also concerned with "meaning-making and uncovering the nature of lived experience."⁹⁶ Poetry, in turn, "provides a powerful way to present deep, nuanced understandings, allowing space for play and ambiguity, revealing fresh and surprising 'ways in' to phenomena."⁹⁷ Combining the philosophies of phenomenology with the method of poetic inquiry allowed the researcher to acknowledge my perspective and experiences concerning the research. Through a phenomenological lens, poetic inquiry allowed me to present an embodied

⁹² Thomas Lindlof and Bryan C. Taylor, *Qualitative Communication Research Methods*. Los Angeles: SAGE, 2019: 51.

⁹³ Aspers, Patrik. "Empirical Phenomenology: A Qualitative Research Approach (the Cologne Seminars)." *Indo-Pacific Journal of Phenomenology* 9, no. 2 (2009): 1.

⁹⁴ Aspers, "Empirical Phenomenology," 1.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 5.

⁹⁶ Emma Green, Margot Solomon, and Deb Spence. "Poem as/and Palimpsest: Hermeneutic Phenomenology and/as Poetic Inquiry." *International Journal of Qualitative Methods* 20, (2021).

⁹⁷ Emma Green, Margot Solomon, and Deb Spence. "Poem as/and Palimpsest."

story of the interviewee and to manifest "the engagement between the [interviewee] and myself as a researcher."⁹⁸

Phenomenology

Phenomenology is a theory that emphasizes perspectives of lived and shared experiences. In other words, it focuses on the structures of consciousness through the first-person point of view.⁹⁹ Moreover, this methodology studies baseline passive perceptions and the active processes contributing to a phenomenon. This theory helps the researcher to understand communication from other perspectives through our ability to reflect on personal experience.¹⁰⁰ Seeing the world from another's point of view requires empathy, or *verstehen*, a concept developed by Wilhelm Dilthey, a German philosopher. Empathy requires the ability to imagine the feelings and experiences of another's life as if they were one's own. Sociologist Max Weber argued that motive was essential to social interactions, choices, and responses. However, an important part of Weber's philosophy is that science should not assign value to human conduct and its explanations.¹⁰¹ Importantly, this philosophy contrasts Seashore's attempts to quantify ability and identify value in music students.

The field of hermeneutics was also influential in phenomenological research. The textual studies in the hermeneutics field were initially dedicated to deciphering ancient scripture but eventually became concerned with broader textual investigation.¹⁰² Hermeneutics is the study of interpretation and often aids research in disciplines that require an interpretive approach. An

⁹⁸Sandra L. Faulkner, Wendy K. Watson, Madison A. Pollino, and Jesse Reese, "Poetic Portraiture as Critical Arts-Based Pedagogy and Methodology: Older Women's Relationships through the Life Course," *Qualitative Inquiry* 28, no. 10 (2022), 991.

⁹⁹ David Woofdruff Smith, "Phenomenology," *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*. Stanford University, December 16, 2013. <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/phenomenology/>.

¹⁰⁰ Thomas Lindlof and Taylor Bryon, "3. Theoretical Traditions and Qualitative Communication Research," Essay, In *Qualitative Communication Research Methods*, 4Th ed., 51.

¹⁰¹ Lindlof, "3. Theoretical Traditions, 52.

¹⁰² Lindlof, "3. Theoretical Traditions," 53.

essential factor of hermeneutics is acknowledging that all communication and knowledge are mediated through dialogue and text. Hermeneutics is concerned with a given subject's nature, scope, and validity and what it implies about life.¹⁰³

Immanuel Kant's work in epistemology and metaphysics also influenced the development of phenomenology. Kant's distinction between the "noumenal" versus "phenomenal" worlds is fundamental to his argument that our unique experiences shape our understanding of the world. The "noumenal" world refers to things as they are within themselves, which we cannot know, while the "phenomenal" world refers to things as they appear to us through our own lived experience. Kant argues that our knowledge is limited to the phenomenal world because our lived experiences and perceptions will inherently mediate our understanding.¹⁰⁴

Philosopher Edmund Husserl was influenced by Kant's ideas on the "phenomenal" world and aimed to understand and define the essence of a given perceived object. This approach views the perception of any object as shaped by our intentions toward that object or its purpose to us. This idea is summed up in his concept, *Zu den Sachen selbst*, meaning "to the things themselves," which favors taking an approach as free from preconceptions as possible.¹⁰⁵ Husserl also argued for a concept called *Lebenswelt*, or life-world, which refers to a sense of inevitability about the world's existence as we know it. This attitude, described by Husserl as "natural," results from social orders and standards evolving from interactions. After a time, these orders no longer feel chosen and instead feel natural. Alfred Schutz built off this idea with the

¹⁰³ Theodore George, "Hermeneutics," *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*. Stanford University, December 9, 2020. <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/hermeneutics/>.

¹⁰⁴ Otto Allen Bird, and Brian Duignan, "Immanuel Kant," *Encyclopedia Britannica*, 25 Apr. 2024, <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Immanuel-Kant>.

¹⁰⁵ Walter Beigel, "Phenomenology," *Encyclopædia Britannica*. Encyclopædia Britannica, inc. Accessed September 1, 2022. <https://www.britannica.com/topic/phenomenology>.

concept of intersubjectivity. Intersubjectivity claims that a shared lifeworld is constructed from faith that others share a similar perspective. Schutz also explores how intersubjectivity can lead to stocks of knowledge developed through personal experiences. Other cultural knowledge might be learned through preexisting typifications that emerge through human-created constructs and classifications.¹⁰⁶

The findings from a phenomenological study should not be presented as fact but as ideas about the essential natures of experiences. One of the ways to achieve this result involves the technique called bracketing. Bracketing involves suspending contingent and accidental considerations to concentrate on the intuitive essence of the object and consciousness in question. This is to help extract what is essential to an object. For example, if it seems inconceivable that an object might lack a specific feature, that feature is part of that object's essence.¹⁰⁷ Studying through a phenomenological lens, a researcher may discover how an object or subject appears through a specific experience, requiring personal reflection and flexibility to find meaning.

Arts-Based Research

Arts-based research is a methodological form of qualitative research that uses artistic processes to inquire, examine, and represent the subjective human experience of a given topic. Researchers can use arts-based research at any phase of the research process, such as generating a research question, collecting data, analyzing data, understanding content, and presenting findings. Moreover, arts-based research can include artistic methods from various disciplines, such as creative writing, music composition or performance, visual arts, and digital media art.¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁶ Lindlof, "3. Theoretical Traditions." 54.

¹⁰⁷ Joel Smith, "Phenomenology ." *Internet encyclopedia of philosophy*, <https://iep.utm.edu/phenom/#SH2c>.

¹⁰⁸ Patricia Leavy, *Oxford Handbook of Qualitative Research*, 2nd ed. (S.L.: Oxford University Press, 2020), 4.

Aesthetic knowing is a principle of arts-based research, assuming the arts can create and convey meaning. The aesthetic of the research product is vital due to its direct relationship to how the audience interacts with and interprets its message.¹⁰⁹ Using an arts-based approach to qualitative research allows the researcher to communicate through multiple senses (touch, feel, sight, sound, taste) and to express difficult-to-describe feelings without relying only on words. The strength of art's ability to communicate through many senses also diversifies the consumer's potential.¹¹⁰

The postmodern movement in the second half of the twentieth century paved the way for the sharp divide between science and art to be broken. Postmodernism is based on the rejection of absolute value and seeks to create new perspectives by juxtaposing unexpected elements. Art educator Elliot Eisner was an early advocate of arts-based education research in the 1970s. Art therapists experimented with ways to use art for self-discovery in the same decade. Shawn McNiff identified both practices as art-based research. McNiff and other pioneers of arts-based research rejected the modernist divide of art versus science, and instead aimed to promote the idea that coming to know through art is valuable.¹¹¹

Much arts-based research is positioned within education and social science domains. This kind of research is unique from other science-based research because it provides multiple ways of interpreting and representing a given experience.¹¹² Arts-based research is discursive, seeking to question and broaden what is considered standard research methodology and the tools that can be used to represent findings.¹¹³ It also blurs expected roles between the researcher and the

¹⁰⁹ Leavy, *Oxford Handbook*, 6.

¹¹⁰ Gloria Chilton and Patricia Leavy, "Arts-Based Research Practice: Merging Social Research and the Creative Arts," in *Handbook of Arts-Based Research*, ed. Patricia Leavy (New York: Guilford Press, 2017), 403-418.

¹¹¹ Chilton and Leavy, "Arts Based Research Practice," (404).

¹¹² Graeme Sullivan, "Research Acts in Art Practice," *Studies in Art Education* 48, no. 1 (2006): 19-35, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/25475803>, 22.

¹¹³ Barone, Tom, and Elliot W Eisner. 2012. *Arts-Based Research*. Los Angeles: Sage. 2.

audience by allowing the audience to experience the author's perspective or situation.¹¹⁴ This blending of perspectives provides a more complex understanding of the world and how it is experienced. Therefore, arts-based research can potentially communicate ideas and facilitate social change based on those ideas. Even more, arts-based research is a political statement about social justice, creating and disseminating knowledge by challenging the status quo of academia and its restrictive means of knowing.¹¹⁵

Qualitative Content Coding (Thematic Analysis)

Before drafting the poems from the poetic transcript, I did a thematic analysis of the original interview transcripts from each of the eight interviews. I coded each interview by reading through the transcript multiple times, marking words and phrases, and labeling them with thoughts, questions, and descriptors. In my analysis, "these codes function as a way of patterning, classifying, and later reorganizing them into emergent categories."¹¹⁶ Through these codes, I could draw out the more significant themes that I used to create my poems: Identity self-perception, pressure, expectations, urgency, anxiety, the pursuit of perfection, guilt, depression, criticism, comparison, talent, practice, teaching, legacy, resilience, and reflection. These themes are my categorizations for my codes, which provide "meaning-rich units that we can better grasp the particular features of each one and the categories' possible interrelationships with one another."¹¹⁷ These themes helped guide what data I wanted to use for the poems and how I wanted them structured. These themes helped me categorize outlying data that would be unhelpful or irrelevant to creating poems and analyzing the chosen themes. For example, a few

¹¹⁴ Miroslav Pavle Manovski, *Arts-Based Research, Autoethnography, and Music Education* (Leiden, The Netherlands: Brill, 2014). (xvi)

¹¹⁵ J. Gary Knowles, and Ardra L Cole. 2007. *Handbook of the Arts in Qualitative Research*. SAGE Publications. 30.

¹¹⁶ Johnny Saldana, "Coding and Analysis Strategies," Essay, In *The Oxford Handbook of Qualitative Research*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 584.

¹¹⁷ Johnny Saldana, "Coding and Analysis Strategies," 587.

interviewees discussed positive teacher and mentor relationships and their impact on their lives. While this information provided a more precise context to the interviewee's experiences and perceptions, it was obvious that underlying those positive experiences were lasting impacts from themes I picked out, such as pressure, expectations, urgency, criticism, comparison, and guilt.

Poetic transcription allowed me to center creativity, intuitive knowing, non-verbal communication, and experience through text. It also provided a framework for acknowledging my influence as a researcher based on how I perceived what the interviewee said. Moreover, it allowed me to embody the data from the original transcript, which led to a better understanding of the material. Presenting what I came to understand about the interviewees through poetry provided an embodied experience for me and hopefully for any reader. "Embodied experience recognizes the need for poetry to make audiences feel with, rather than about a poem," I felt that poetic portraiture allowed me to provide an aesthetic representation to allow for understanding.¹¹⁸ The aesthetic of the research product is vital because it is directly related to how the audience interacts with and interprets its message.¹¹⁹ Using an arts-based approach to qualitative research allows the researcher to communicate through multiple senses (touch, feel, sight, sound, taste) and express difficult-to-describe feelings without relying only on words. Art's strength in communicating through many senses also diversifies the consumer's potential.¹²⁰

Through combining multiple forms of inquiry, analysis, and representation, this project's methodology is based on **Crystallization** - "a pluralistic, constitutive approach that combines multiple forms of analysis and representation, demonstrates reflexivity and vulnerability, and

¹¹⁸ Sandra L. Faulkner, "Concern with Craft: Using Ars Poetica as Criteria for Reading Research Poetry." *Qualitative Inquiry* 13, no. 2 (2019): 230.

¹¹⁹ Patricia Leavy. "Introduction to Arts Based Research." Essay. In *Handbook of Arts-Based Research*, 3–21. NY, NY: The Guilford Press, 2019:6.

¹²⁰ Chilton and Leavy, "Arts-based research practice," 403.

acknowledges the indeterminacy and partiality of knowledge claims.”¹²¹ Laura Richardson argues in *Writing: A Method of Inquiry* that “crystallization provides us with a deep end, complex, thoroughly partial, understanding of the topic. Paradoxically, we know more and doubt what we know. Ingeniously, we know there is always more to know.”¹²² Laura Ellingson, a Student of Richardson, expands that “crystallization necessitates seeing the fields of methodology not as an art-science dichotomy but as existing along a continuum from positivism through radical interpretivism.”¹²³ Using a crystallization of arts-based research, phenomenology, thematic analysis, and poetic inquiry, this project demonstrates reflexivity, acknowledges inherent researcher bias, provides a rich understanding of lived experience, and uncovers more questions for further research on students’ experiences.

¹²¹ Sandra L. Faulkner and Joshua D. Atkinson, "Evaluating Qualitative Research," in *Qualitative Methods in Communication and Media* (New York: Oxford Academic, 2023; online edn, 19 Oct. 2023), <https://doi.org/10.1093/oso/9780190944056.003.0007>.

¹²² L. Richardson, "Writing: A Method of Inquiry," in *Handbook of Qualitative Research*, 2nd ed., ed. N. K. Denzin and Y. S. Lincoln (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2000), 923-948, 934.

¹²³ L. L. Ellingson, *Engaging Crystallization in Qualitative Research: An Introduction* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2009).

CHAPTER FOUR: POETIC PORTRAIT AND DISCUSSION

Late to the Downbeat

I should have known
When I was nine,
All I was doing
Was wasting my time.

If I wanted to
Make it big,
There was no time
To be a kid.

Although it's harsh
I'd rather know
That I've missed
The narrow window.

Clearly, it's easy
For everyone else.
That's why I'm so
Hard on myself.

But I know someday,
I can succeed.
If I just accept
What's wrong with me.

Acting as a prelude to the rest of the set, “Late to the Downbeat” introduces some of the main themes the rest of the set explores, beginning with a theme of lost childhood, explored in multiple layers in the first two stanzas. Interviewee 1 expressed that while she started taking piano lessons at 9, she always felt like that was too late: “I think that starting lessons young and with a rigorous teacher is so important to having finely developed skills as a professional pianist. I was nine years old when I started lessons, and I really feel like that was too late.” Due to this perceived deficiency, she felt as though she was always behind her peers, saying, “I constantly felt stressed, and like it was already too late for me, but I tried anyway.” 5 or 6 years old would have been best to start, she suggested. Other interviewees shared similar sentiments. For

example, Interviewee 7 discussed this “window of neuroplasticity” available at an early age to acquire great skill at an instrument: “There is this critical period in your life in which you have more opportunity to develop skills than later in life, I like to call it some sort of window of opportunity or window of neuroplasticity.” The other side of emphasizing this window of opportunity is that it can lead to feelings of inadequacy in those who feel they missed it in order to hone their musical skills. The theme of lost childhood is relevant in both outcomes, in that the interviewee feels as though they have lost their chance at gaining skills in their childhood but recognize that the dedication required to gain exceptional skills so young can lead to losing the chance to be a child.

The second stanza also introduces the themes of pressure and expectations, whether social or internal, to succeed from a very young age. From the inception of musical study, the stakes have been high, and there is an underlying sense of urgency in feeling behind it. Fueled by the regret of missing this once-in-a-lifetime opportunity, a sense of resignation toward the harsh realities of it all washes over the third stanza. I felt that the way the interviewees expressed this idea of knowing they had missed the narrow window was very matter-of-fact, almost too quick to accept it, as if they might be afraid to admit they were still trying to develop their skill. This is an example of students demonstrating fixed mindset, which Chapter V will discuss in more depth. Stanza 4 introduces the themes of comparison and self-criticism. Interviewees expressed that they measured their struggles against others’ perceived successes, although they knew they did not see the complete picture. However, interviewees often cited outside comparison as an excellent motivator for personal criticism. Finally, the last stanza foreshadows the ongoing journey for self-acceptance and the struggle of facing one’s flaws without being overly critical.

Because this poem acts as an introduction to themes that will be explored more in the subsequent poems, and because it deals with a sense of guilt for having spent time being a child instead of honing their craft from as young as possible, I wanted to structure this poem in a simplistic, traditional form, almost akin to a nursery rhyme, helping portray the early age these feelings can arise. Moreover, it shows that the feeling of self-criticism and comparison can often be so harsh as to criticize a child for acting as such. The title, “Late to the Downbeat,” conveys the idea of feeling behind, even from the very beginning, and how these early career pressures can shape self-perception.

The Unbroken Tie

The notes whisper
 Their names to me,
 Calling me to
 Don my mask which
 Brings immense comfort.

We are tied together.

It consumes me entirely,
 My essence, my *enamora*,
 My skill fueled by intense love,
It's what I do,
 What I'm known to be-

The only thing I'm good at, *period*.

Deeply intertwined with me,
 It's also a performance.
 Performing as myself, the musician,
 Not myself, the person.
 My calling, my livelihood.

This is not a hobby.

With unwavering commitment,
 I seized the opportunity,
 Navigating a graduate program
 Would have been
 Unthinkable, otherwise.

There was nothing else.

Those two pieces, my favorite,
The inspirations, inceptions, of my journey-
Now lay untouched,
Unheard since that day.
A necessary hiatus ensued.

My comfort became my misery.

The first piece unfolded promisingly.
But the second?
Crumbled beneath my fingers.
I felt and played like garbage.
Not just a blow to my confidence,

But an injury to my soul.

Imagine... if it had gone worse,
I could have completely
Given up this career.
I need to find a way to
Divide myself from my work.

I felt like I was dying.

it's difficult for me to
Separate myself
From my musical and work goals,
We never learned
How to do that in school.

The Unbroken Tie introduces the theme of identity in the first stanza, describing how presenting as a musician or performer can be used as a mask that functions as a shield or barrier between them and the outside world. For example, Interviewee 5 said their instrument and identity as a performer are “like a mask; it’s something I put on to distance myself from other people. I’m performing.”

However, in the second stanza, the lines between the mask and the person behind it become blurred. The Unbroken Tie expands on several themes from Late to the Downbeat, such as pressures, expectations, and self-perception. Stanza three deepens the stakes of this intertwined relationship, with a reminder that although it may be an arts performance, each performance feels as though their livelihood is on the line. It was this profound emotional connection that many interviewees described as the reason for pursuing graduate music degrees—they felt as though music was an integral part of themselves, and they were not complete without it. For example, Interviewee 5 said: “My identity has always been tied to, I’m a musician. It’s what I do. It’s the only thing I’m good at, period. The only thing people know me for...[music] became just deeply intertwined into me as a person.” Moreover, Interviewee 6 said: “like an essential deed, like eating or drinking water, I need [practicing music] in my life.” Therefore, they wanted to find a way to make it a career. Many interviewees cited the prospects of jobs in academia for musicians as requiring graduate degrees, so many of them felt that attending a graduate program in music was a prerequisite to having a career as a musician in the way they dreamed. Interviewee 6 said this about their decision to pursue grad school.

I intensely love music...I remain tremendously excited by music...it’s everything that I do and think about half the time...if I didn’t like music as much as I had, then I don’t know that I would have made it through a graduate school program in music, but I was completely committed to music and this opportunity, and there was nothing else.

Stanzas five and six describe an incident that Interviewee 5 recalled, in which, for a final degree recital, they wanted to play repertoire that had initially inspired them to want to pursue their instrument in the first place. However, when their performance did not go as well as hoped, they shared that they never played those pieces again. For a few months after the performance,

they refrained from practicing their instrument, feeling as if they were recovering from an injury or had been sidelined:

When I had my recital that did not go so well, it was a huge blow to me... it was an awful semester. It was just another thing that was miserable about that time...my favorite piece, at least it was, did not go very well. And I have not played it since, and I don't think I've even really listened to it since. Which is kind of sad, but I'm also okay with that. It was like I was injured, like I was sick or something.

Furthermore, the themes of pressure and expectations are shown in this perceived "failed performance," displaying the intense emotional and psychological impact that high expectations can impose when mixed with a fear of inadequacy. How a performance is perceived can significantly affect the performers' self-perception. For example, Interviewee 5 said, "I'm garbage because I just played like garbage."

Stanza seven shows how high the stakes might feel with each performance or school requirement, with the idea that if a performance does not go well enough, one should give up one's career entirely because it is a sign that it is not meant to be. This is black-and-white thinking, even more, exemplified by the idea that the prospect of making a mistake and giving up a career in music feels akin to dying. Although it is not inherently a life-or-death situation, it may feel like one to the performer whose entire life feels at stake for the level of performance. Much of this fear of inadequacy seems to stem from mistakes, which draws similarities to Czerny's view that, "in music, the worst thing is to play notes."

Finally, the last stanza points to a level of self-awareness to the difficulty of separating oneself from one's craft, especially when that craft is a passion and a livelihood. For example, Interviewee 5 said: "I feel like I've tied myself to being a musician so much that my value as a musician is directly correlated to my value as a person or vice versa...which is something I've been trying to disconnect myself from." Additionally, Interviewee 6 said:

I need to find a way to divide myself from my work, because I feel like that is the main part of who I am...because of how much work we're expected to do to get our degrees, it's not like I can really develop a totally separate identity from that.

Even more, it shows the level of dedication the interviewees expressed to their schooling, expressing their willingness to do what was asked of them. This last time, "we never learned how to do that in school," suggests that not only did graduate music schooling neglect to teach a sensible work-life balance, but it may have contributed to modeling the opposite.

The form of "The Unbroken Tie" is meant to reflect this inseparable bond between a musician and their craft through five-line stanzas connected by one-line phrases that encapsulate the feelings of the previous stanzas. The singular lines function as the ties between each stanza, representing the interconnectedness of self and music, and the resulting feelings of passion, dedication, and failure.

Measured Gifts

Talent is

A piece of gold in the dross.

Talent is

A mysterious puzzle,

As the stars were to ancient man.

Talent is

The starlight heavens on a moonlight stroll,

A mad spell of those to be

Under their fateful influences.

Talent is

Great; an innate skill, a window of nurturing,

Some secret ingredient that makes

Some people learn faster,

However, it only gets you so far.

Talent is

Very hard to believe in,

Some sort of confirmation bias.

I'm still not sure that talent exists.

If it does, I don't have any.

I've never been the most talented person.

Talent is *not*
 Work, passion, labor,
 Effort, ardor, challenge,
 Many, many, many, many,
 Hours of practicing,
 3000 hours locked inside a little box,
 Sweating, crying, trying to get it all worked out.

Oh gosh, you're so talented
 I avoid that word.
 I hate it. Actually, I despise it.

Going into the interviews, I knew I wanted to ask all interviewees about their thoughts and personal relationships with the word talent. After researching Carl Seashore, it was essential to include this question in each interview, if possible. Considering the interesting responses from all eight interviewees, I decided to do subsequent research on the historical conceptualization of talent as we understand it in the United States today. I understood that the interaction between the perception of talent and graduate music students is complex, multi-faceted, nonlinear, and contextualized within certain societal expectations.

This poem contains several nods to Seashore and his misguided attempts to quantify talent, from the title "Measured Gifts" to the purposeful addition of a line at the end of each stanza. Finally, the first three stanzas are taken from an excerpt of Seashore's concluding discussion on talent. His first observation that finding talent in a student is akin to "a piece of gold in the dross" is especially troubling when considering the process of refined metal extraction. "Dross" refers to the impurities left over when purifying gold or silver- an excellent term to describe the elements, but not our students. Students are not "gold" or "dross," and neither are their strengths and weaknesses. Furthermore, his statement that talent is often seen as

a “mysterious puzzle, as the stars were to ancient man” touches on a critical contextual sentiment considering the conceptualization of talent as we know it today.

The first three stanzas of *Measured Gifts*, as quotes from Seashore, point out this common notion that talent is a mysterious and bestowed gift of a magical or spiritual nature. Seashore interjects that talent as the mystery is not just observable but quantifiable, just as the stars are to astronomers, which is where his measures come into play. While I disagree with Seashore in significant areas of musical ability, I do agree that he was onto something in terms of studying ability— what we commonly regard as “talent” is not a magical ability gifted from the heavens but a combination of factors that are unique to everyone, within a context of a historical and cultural framework that regards spiritually bestowed abilities as a dogmatic explanation for exceptional skill.

The final three stanzas represent the collective thoughts on talent from the interviewees, showing a gamut of opinions and relationships with the concept and word itself. Multiple interviewees expressed the idea of talent as a type of innate skill acquired and mastered at an early age. For example, Interviewee 1 said, “I do think that innate skill can certainly play into how talented you are as an adult.” Additionally, Interviewee 2 said:

Every musician has a talent or particular affinity or skill for something. There is something that they do really well, and maybe there’s other things that they don’t do as well. But, sometimes, there are these people who just seem to do everything amazing.

Interviewee 8 said: “The talented kids got an early exposure to it in some way that jives with their personal cognitive abilities or something.” Moreover, as discussed in the first poem, *Late to the Downbeat*, Interviewee 7 described a “window of opportunity” or “neuroplasticity” in skill acquisition. Regarding this “window of opportunity,” several interviewees expressed a theme of having missed that early window to develop great “talent,” as observed by examples of

the perceptions of others' ease or quick progress. In other words, participants described themselves as not talented while observing others as proof of talent. This idea is shown in the fifth stanza, "I'm still not sure talent exists/ if it does, I don't have any." This line was taken from a discussion with Interviewee 8 on talent:

I still don't believe in talent in some way. It's weird to perform something really arduous and challenging, and then at the end of it to have someone say like, 'oh my gosh you're so talented,' as if I could have just like, done that without spending 3000 hours locked in a little box, sweating and crying, trying to get it all worked out. So there's a part of me that is like, there's no way talent could be real. Or if it is, I sure don't have any. Anything I've done is through labor, or effort.

Interviewees who did not see themselves as talented cited the amount of time and effort they have dedicated to their craft instead of the idea of talent as an innate skill for themselves.

In interview 8, we discussed this relationship between the perception of talent within ourselves versus others. We concluded that the less closely you know a person's craft, the more likely you perceive them as talented. The last stanza is given extra context- when a listener means to compliment the performer as "talented," it sometimes elicits visceral responses such as hate and disgust from the performer, as it not only seems to dismiss the level of commitment and work put into their craft but also shows a genuine lack of understanding and appreciation for the process of skill acquisition.

It is essential to consider that the concept of talent cannot inherently exist without comparing the abilities of others. Originating as a unit of measurement, the term "talent" is rooted in comparing values of fine metals and morphed into a signifier of spiritually gifted abilities from which one must prosper. Within this framework, there will always be "cans" and "can-nots." As shown in the rest of this paper, comparing others' skills can become highly detrimental to mental health, especially when paired with a neoliberal capitalist society that encourages artists to "brand" and monetize their identity and history of measuring talent as

innate and unchangeable by researchers like Seashore and perpetuated by institutions like Eastman. For those who claimed not to “believe” in talent, it was clear that the question came from a sense of not possessing talent oneself. For example, Interviewee 8: “A big part of me says talent isn’t real...I don’t know. I think it’s kind of a mystery in some ways.” Afterall, if one believes themselves to be talented, they must believe talent to exist, yes? Moreover, if one is unsure that talent exists, one must believe they do not possess it themselves but may be unsure of others.

However, the interviewees sensed that “talent” was an adversary to their craft. For example, Interviewee 6:

I hate the word talent. Actually, I despise it because it denies all of the work that goes into these things... Until recently, I had decided that talent didn’t exist... that it was really just hard work and maybe some secret ingredient that helps people learn faster.

Moreover, Interviewee 5 said:

People think that the ability to play an instrument is something you’re born with. No, this is a very finely honed craft that has taken decades for me to still need decades more. Anytime someone tells me, ‘Oh, I wish I had your talent,’ I’m like, well, it’s not talent...I spent many, many, many, many hours playing my instrument, figuring out how to make myself sound pretty.

Inertia Etude

Everybody seems like they’re doing so much,
And reaching the bare minimum is
Taking all of my time and energy.

It’s too late, it’s too late for me, I’m behind,
And there’s no way to catch up.
But I can try.

How many hours a day are you practicing? And you?
The most important thing is that I practice;
I have to practice all the time.

An essential deed,

Like eating or drinking water,
When I don't have the time, it feels awful.

Compulsory practicing 40 hours per week-
I've lost the joy with everything
Being so rigid and structured.

Do your drills over and over and over,
And punish yourself for not practicing.
I feel a bit (supremely) guilty sometimes.

*Of course, you're not the best or most talented,
You don't work or push yourself as hard.
As who?*

Balance? I don't know if I ever found balance.
I should be pushing myself to the point of
Burnout at all times to consider myself successful.

There's currently no rest-
I'm currently not resting,
And there's currently no rest of my life.

This tunnel vision, running myself ragged,
The mentality of hustling,
It's very lonely.

*Oh, make sure that you exercise,
And take time out of your day
For this and that and stuff,*

They don't really mean it.
It's obligatory so they
Don't come off as harsh.

*But also, practice for 8 hours.
Make sure you do all your homework.
Make it to these rehearsals,*

Oh, and? ...photocopy this for me.

*Do as much as you can,
Push as hard as you can,
And don't forget to take care of yourself.*

The professors will joke,

*When I was in grad school
I didn't sleep and I had no money.*

*Well, you're in grad school,
Of course you're not sleeping,
Of course you're not taking care,*

That's the standard.
Everyone's hopped up on
Caffeine and no sleep.

*Why do you need external validation?
Don't compare yourself to others.
You are unique, blah, blah, blah...*

*Okay, she's fine,
She's not going to
kill herself or anything...*

Why is the expectation that
we're going to be unwell and poor?
That we're going to be miserable?

We are all losing our minds.

One of the biggest red flags
Is reaching this moment of
I don't really care anymore, whatever.

I'm jaded enough that I don't care.
I want to be happy.
I want to feel good about myself.

This title, "Inertia Etude," was born from a conversation I had with Interviewee 7, who shared a transformative experience from a lecture they attended. The lecture was designed to help musicians shift their mindset from 'surviving' to 'thriving.' Despite feeling time-poor, the interviewee discovered that the more they did, the more efficient they became and the more they could achieve. This revelation sparked a new sense of empowerment and motivation to change their situation:

I feel that reaching the bare minimum is taking all my time and energy. I'm a smart person. I am a DMA student. My bare minimum is very high...bust (but) still, I felt I didn't have time for what it seemed that everyone else was doing. When anxiety hits, it seems I am the only black sheep in this environment. There's this imposter syndrome kicking in.

So, inspired by this lecture, they signed up for even more than they already felt overwhelmed doing. This is a common trope that a body in rest stays in rest, and a body in motion stays in motion. Of course, this is the power of inertia and momentum; it is a simple law of physics. There is something to be said about learning to be efficient and its benefits, but momentum can be challenging to stop once started. For example, Interviewee 7 said that after attending the lecture, they learned that: "not having the time is so often an illusion...when we do not have a lot going on, we waste more time. But, when we have more things to do, it forces us to stay more organized."

Many musicians, unbeknownst to them, fall into what Oliver Burkeman, author of *Four Thousand Weeks*, aptly terms the 'efficiency trap.' This trap suggests that as one becomes more efficient at a task, more work is assigned to fill the newfound extra time, creating a cycle of perpetual momentum. It is essentially a punishment for improving. Burkeman's perspective on the efficiency trap is a thought-provoking one:

I soon discovered that when you get tremendously efficient at answering email, all that happens is that you get much more email...Productivity is a trap. Becoming more efficient just makes you more rushed, and trying to clear the decks simply makes them fill up again faster.¹²⁴

This phenomenon was observed and recorded in a 1942 essay in *The Economist* by C. Northcote Parkinson, who later wrote and published an entire book on Parkinson's Law in 1957. In both the essay and the later book, Parkinson establishes that "work expands so as to fill the

¹²⁴ Oliver Burkeman, *Four Thousand Weeks: Time Management for Mortals* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2021).

time available for its completion.”¹²⁵ Another critical factor of the efficiency trap is that the more efficient one becomes at one's job, the less respect and appreciation is often given for that effort, as more will always be required to satisfy.

Especially when one is plagued with a sense of not possessing an innate skill that their peers seem to have but still has a great love and desire to pursue their passion, an overwhelming sense of urgency and personal practice responsibility may feel like the only option to “fit in” or make it as a musician. For example, Interviewee 2 said: “Am I doing enough? Because all these other people seem to have the energy and discipline to practice all these hours.”

Another common trope in skill acquisition is the idea that 10,000 hours of practice will make a person an expert at their chosen craft. While there may be a correlation between dedicating thousands of hours to a skill and one's subsequent mastery, this oversimplification can lead students to prioritize the hours spent in the practice room over anything else. For example, Interview 4 said: “I was compulsory practicing 40 hours a week...running myself ragged, and it was harming to my health, mental and physical.” Additionally, Interviewee 2 said, “I had the mindset when I first started school that the most important thing is that I practice. I have to practice all the time. That's the only thing that matters.” Interviewee 6 said, “I think it is always do as much as you can and push as much as you can.” Finally, Interview 4 said: “Music means I have to be miserable. I have to be punishing myself for practicing, or if I'm not practicing.”

Malcolm Gladwell's 10,000-hour rule for skill acquisition, as discussed in his book *Outliers: The Story of Success*, popularized along with K. Anders Ericsson's research on deliberate practice, emphasizes methods and nature of practice for skill acquisition over-reliance

¹²⁵ Cyril Northcote Parkinson, “Parkinson's Law,” *The Economist*, November 19, 1955, ISSN 0013-0613.

on innate ability. While there may be an argument that 10,000 hours is an “average” amount of hours needed or specifically refers to the amount of deliberate practice hours spent, the sentiment can be easily misconstrued as a need to prioritize time spent practicing. Popular YouTube channel TwoSet Violin, a pair of classically trained violinists who post various comedic content online, plays on this trope in their videos, often referring to a fictional character, “Ling Ling,” who regularly practices 40 hours daily.¹²⁶ Although sarcastic, this joke represents a broader prioritization of time spent practicing and a culture of comparing time spent practicing with peers. An emphasis on the time spent practicing, mixed with comparing the perceived level of commitment based on hours in the practice room and comparing the skill and progress between others, does not acknowledge each student's unique circumstances and abilities. Instead, it seeks to uniformly measure and order aspiring musicians by grasping an easy numerical placeholder. It is important to note that research shows no clear correlation between time spent practicing and skill level. Instead, deliberate practice strategies are more likely indicators of skill level. Deliberate practice is discussed in more depth in Chapter V. Finally, students excited about or enthusiastic about the piece they are practicing are much more likely to use deliberate practice strategies than those practicing music they do not feel connected with.

This poem is meant to portray the momentum that can be difficult to stop when a student gets caught in the cycle of expectation and comparison. It begins with practicing from passion and care to losing that passion from the amount of practice. For example, Interviewee 5 said: “Once I got to college and started taking lessons, I lost a little bit of the joy of practicing because now everything was super rigid and structured.” While the interviewees expressed varied experiences throughout their graduate careers, a clear theme arose during our conversations: it

¹²⁶ TwoSet Violin, “How to Practice 40 Hours a Day,” Youtube Video, 2:01, 2018.

felt impossible to find a balance between their lives in school, as musicians, and the rest of their lives. One interviewee said, “There is no rest,” implying there is no time to rest and no rest of their life. The complete statement from Interview 7: “There is currently no rest...I’m currently not resting, [and] there’s currently no rest of my life.” Moreover, Interviewee 3 said: “I don’t know if I ever found balance. I didn’t do anything else than school...like putting myself into a bubble.”

Several interviewees felt burnt out but had to hunker down and push through to finish their degree. For example, Interviewee 2 said:

One of these red flags of burnout I experienced is that I really don’t care anymore. Like, it’s impossible. I really love this, and I really care about that. But when you reach the moment of ‘I don’t care’ I think that’s just like the big red flag.

The stakes are often high, and turning back or dropping out is a high price, so one interviewee described feeling like there was no other choice but just to put her head down and push through to the end. Beyond the evolution of compulsory practice to burnout is the perspective that the expectations placed on graduate music students are beyond achievable within a day, leading to exhaustion and distrust of those in charge. For example, Interviewee 1 said:

I don’t see how I could have done it differently to not get burnt out and I don’t know how you can learn and do everything you need... the chance of pushing yourself over the edge seems unavoidable.

Multiple interviewees cited the feeling of unspoken expectations looming beyond the verbal messages in graduate music school. For example, Interviewee 5 said:

I feel like there is an unspoken expectation. The teachers will preach, ‘Oh, we need to make sure you exercise and take time out of your day for this and that and stuff, but also, practice for eight hours, make sure you do all of your homework, make sure that you make it to these rehearsals and photocopy this for me... They speak about these things we should be doing for self-care, but they don’t really mean it. It’s just obligatory, so they don’t come off as super harsh.

Although multiple interviewees were clear that no teacher or administrator ever outright encouraged them to lose sleep to practice or study, encouraging self-care and modeling poor work-life boundaries send a mixed signal to impressionable students looking to impress their professors. Interviewees described getting emails late at night, being required to attend rehearsals, concerts, or classes at odd hours and on weekends and routinely staying at the school until midnight to wake up and teach an 8:00 am theory class the next day. Moreover, many of those professors perpetuate the cycle of poor boundaries by placing the same expectations they went through on their students. For example, Interviewee 1 mentioned that she would get “emails about office work at 11:30 pm ... and I think of my teachers as very high capacity people...but I feel my capacity is not there. Maybe they don’t realize they are modeling what pushes me personally over the edge?”

Moreover, Interviewee 2 said, " There’s this culture in grad school of, well, you’re in grad school, of course, you’re not sleeping, of course, you’re not taking care of yourself. That’s the standard. Everyone’s hopped up on caffeine and not sleeping." Consider Chapter II’s discussion on explicit and implicit curriculum. Although the interviewed students describe an explicit curriculum of support, they are perceiving the implicit curricula that student musicians must sacrifice their well-being for their craft. This is why these band-aid attempts to encourage self-care come across as disingenuous. For example, the line, “Okay, she’s not going to kill herself or anything,” was stated initially by Interviewee 3, who described what it was like to be in graduate school after a close family member’s death. She could not attend any memorial ceremony and poured herself into her work. She felt solidarity with her professors, who watched her from afar while she spent hours in a practice room or buried in books without much rest. “Okay, it’s fine, she’s not going to kill herself or anything,” she impersonated her professors soberly. The fact

that the issue of suicide is a topic in this situation at all is the problem, not the *if* or *when* of it. I understand that this is the student's perception and not the professors', but this is important: music school is not a life-or-death situation, and it is up to the teachers to model that and help prevent that mentality. However, it can also often be a shared experience of adverse mental health amongst peers, with Interviewee 6 saying: "I've watched people and studied with people whom I could tell how much they were struggling... We were all losing our minds at that time."

Many interviewees described extremely positive teacher-student relationships with professors, but, as Interviewee 8 described, "one bad apple spoils the bunch." They initially used this phrase regarding practicing music they do not like and how doing that makes practicing unpleasant, spoiling practicing music they would otherwise enjoy. However, I think it also applies to the professors and mentors students encounter throughout their studies. As I will discuss in more depth in "Sympathetic Vibrations," the effects of having poor or even abusive guidance from a teacher can resonate far into the future, regardless of the positive encounters the students have before or after. Sympathetic Vibrations are foreshadowed more in the last stanza, referencing this statement maby Interviewee 5:

I think I'm jaded enough that I don't care. I want to be happy. I want to feel good about myself. I want to do the things that I enjoy. And if I have to sacrifice some of these things people expect me to do, then you know, too bad for them. I've been trying to shirk off that guilt.

I do not point this out to discount those teachers who have impacted their students positively but to warn of the detriments of even one negative encounter with a mentor. It reminds us of the great responsibility and power we hold as educators when we take a student's musical trajectory into our hands.

Critic's Cadence

That was terrible,
Do it again.

We play it this way,
Do it again.

To call yourself a musician,
You must learn this piece.
Do it again.

I'm surprised
You haven't mastered this.
Do it again.

I'll put in effort
When you've earned it.
Do it again.

You don't work hard,
You waste my time,
Do it again.

It's sad, your outside work is
Debilitating your skill.
Do it again.

If you audition here,
You won't be accepted.
Do it again.

I'm honest
Because I care.
Do it again.

Critic's Counterpoint

Dread.

Always prepared to fight, to be
Chewed out for hitting wrong notes,
Ranked against my peers, my friends,
To be told:

*You suck,
Get the eff out of my studio.*

Or, in (not so) veiled terms:

You're not a great player.

Well, no one likes that.

Deflated.
 It wasn't terrible,
 It just wasn't together.
 I don't even like the piece-
 I've suffered long enough,
 Why suffer more?

But I could be polishing

My Opus 10 No. 1...

Regardless of how much I'm doing,
 I should be doing more.

Miserable.
 Not necessarily, but honestly.
 To be a musician is to be miserable.
 Do as much, and
 Push as hard as possible.

Take the path

Of least resistance

Or be prepared to fight.

Interviewee 8: "The first thing he said is, 'That was terrible, do it again.'" And it was so deflating to me because I thought it wasn't terrible, though. It just wasn't together."

Critic's Cadence exemplifies the attitude of those "spoiled apples" of professors and how they can leave a negative impression on students and their outlooks on music performance and education. Throughout the interviews, the theme of callous criticism from a professor disregarding student circumstances arose multiple times. Interviewee 8 described the feedback from stanzas 1-3 as "prescriptive feedback," which does not allow room for students to develop their musical ideas and opinions when learning a piece. This prescriptive feedback heavily mirrors the teacher-focused pedagogy of the mechanisms discussed in Chapter 2. The interviewee said this about prescriptive feedback:

I think the prescriptive model doesn't really acknowledge our students as different people or as being different in any way; it doesn't celebrate or enable that. That is a big fault of it, and that's why a lot of students now are going into it with dread and fear. Because they are very different, and the model doesn't acknowledge that.

Thanks to the lasting influence of mechanistic pedagogy, it is often thought that the first point of mastery of a piece of repertoire is an accurate realization of all notes, rhythms, articulations, and extra-musical indications. However, in pedagogical practice, if a teacher relies too much on this point of importance, lessons can become nothing more than pointing out discrepancies between a student's performance and the score. While there is undoubtedly some value in this, it also means that the teacher is constantly acting as a bearer of unwelcome news to the students, constantly delivering their mistakes on a silver platter for them to tally. Moreover, it often does not consider comprehension, yet imperfection from the student, and sets an expectation of perfection from a student to avoid criticism. For example, Interviewee 8 said:

Why am I still here? Really, I have to take more lessons? Oh my god...there's a little bit of dread going into each of my lessons. Like, okay, I'm gonna walk into this lesson, and he's going to tell me how he wants me to play it instead of asking me questions or using a line of inquiry to build an interpretation. He's just going to tell me what he wants me to do...I'm starting to feel like maybe I could use lessons less often...So he's a little old school, we do it this way, and this is the best way to do it.

Another theme that arose from multiple interviews in the context of teacher-student relationships is the idea of old-school, traditional mentalities from the professors being imposed on their students. This seems like an extension of this mechanist ideal of playing with flawless technique and precision, as well as an extension of Seashore's measures, in which a professor attempts to quantify their pedagogy and its reception through comparison, often in the form of comparing student performance to others past, present, or imagined. For example, Interviewee 8 said:

I did not want to play it. I did not like this piece of music. And he was like, ‘you have to play this piece of music. You can’t call yourself a [musician] if you haven’t played it’...and I’m like, who could possibly care about this piece? I was miserable...it’s a totally miserable experience playing a piece of music you don’t want to play. I can’t, won’t do it anymore...the first time it happened to me, I was like, wow, this is so much worse than anything I’ve ever done. And I would never impose this on my students.

Each phrase in this poem was said by a professor to their graduate music student, as reported by the eight interviewees. Stanzas 4-7 all deal with this recurring theme of a sense of urgency or lost time (with an insinuation that it is the fault of the student), this time being further instilled by the professor onto their students. The final two stanzas represent how impactful a professor’s words can be on a student’s future, with criticisms often framed as earnest attempts at honest guidance. For example, Interviewee 7, an international student, shared that their professor encouraged them to apply for graduate school abroad only after indicating their slim chances of being accepted into a difficult-to-get-in domestic university. Additionally, Interviewee 1 shared that their graduate mentor advised her to pursue pedagogy over performance only after indicating that their performance and technical skills were lacking and that they should have been “further along” in their skill development than where they were. Finally, Interviewee 6 shared that their professor and mentor encouraged them to apply for their doctorate immediately without taking any breaks, only after indicating they were already too old to be in school and needed to finish the degree before they were “too old and tired.” This student-teacher interaction harkens back to the idea of gaining momentum and riding that inertia without ever being able to stop or question things.

Critic’s Counterpoint is a counter perspective of Critic’s Cadence, or how the students received the critiques, as recounted by the interviewees. While the first of the set is a strict format of directives, the latter is more narrative-driven, reflecting the internal thoughts and

reactions of the student on the receiving end of the Critic's Cadence, including the recollections of the teacher comments, personal guilt, and peer advice, respectively. It is important to note again that not all graduate students have had negative experiences with their teachers or have had positive experiences with other teachers later. Critic's Cadence and Counterpoint could not only represent the outward relationship of a student and teacher but also an inward conflict in the self. However, this pair of poems represents specifically the experiences of the eight interviewees, who described their experience of anticipation for and during lessons with their professors, whom they described as "old-school." I used three exemplary descriptors to mark the beginnings of a new stanza in Critic's Counterpoint, followed by student reflections on their reactions to the environment of their lessons. Stanza one sets an atmosphere of tenseness, hostility, fear of failure, anxiety, and peer comparison. Direct insults and blunt dismissals add to the setting, creating a sense of inadequacy, rejection, and discouragement. This poem further explores these feelings of dread, defeat, and deflation experienced by a student subject to constant and enduring criticism, which can make it a battle to maintain self-worth in the face of identifying strongly as a musician. However, from the line, "always be prepared to fight," there is anticipation but also a weary resilience against the criticism, showing that the student might not always agree with the cutting remarks. The full quote from Interviewee 8: "I know going in that we're just gonna fight for 30 minutes, so I just go in prepared for that...I'm prepared to fight; that's what it will be. I gotta fight, I guess."

The "feedback" in the lines, "You suck/ Get the eff out of my studio," are not constructive and come across as personal attacks, which can signal a defensive response from a student, not just with whatever skill is being criticized, but with maintaining their dignity while under such harsh verbal scrutiny. The line, "Or, in (not so) veiled terms," suggests the criticism

often comes cloaked as professional feedback but is received by the student as a personal and harsh judgment. The line, “You’re not a great player,” is not just a skill assessment but a comparative observation, isolating and categorizing a student as inferior to others. The final line of this first stanza, “Well, no one likes that,” is a humbly grounded response to the fiery angst before it, rejecting the approach not just in acknowledging the universal dislike of being subjected to such treatment but in the quiet delivery of the remark. Concerning practicing repertoire that they did not enjoy, Interviewee 8 said: “I suffered enough today, why suffer more? One bad apple spoils the bunch.” In other words, they felt an obligation to practice music they did not like, which made them dislike practicing music they usually enjoyed.

The pair of poems, *Critic’s Cadence* and *Critic’s Counterpoint*, can be seen as a dialogue between teacher and student or between one’s inner critic and self. The first poem highlights the demands placed on students, and the second reveals their psychological impact. This format explores the power dynamics of educational settings in music lessons, where subjective judgments can profoundly affect a student’s self-esteem and artistic identity. Overall, this set of poems is meant to highlight the themes of implicit comparison and critique in classical music lessons and that although criticism is necessary for growth, repeated, unhelpful, and harsh feedback can push students to question their skills, feel like they are not doing enough, such “but I could be polishing my Op. 10 No 1.” The complete statement from Interviewee 7 was: “Whenever I think of experimenting with something new, I have something pop up in my head saying, ‘Well, you could be using this time to polish your Op. 10 No. 1...’”

Forgetful Fugue

It was a year
Of horrible performances.
I forgot my bottle (of meds),

Traveling back to school.
 But remembered—
 I've grown so much
 As a musician.
 I thought maybe—
I don't need that anymore.

And so I stopped.

I couldn't even
 reach a cadence.
 Memory slips—
 Shaking,
 Back and forth
 And
 Back and forth.
 Shaking.

I forgot my bottle.
 A mere slip, now seared
 In my memory.
 Its absence at once
 An ominous presence
 Of silence,
 The weight of which
 Drags my fingers
 To a grinding halt.

I'm so sorry
 My voice breaks.
 Hammered strings,
 Interrupted by
 My footsteps
 Off the stage.
 Two retired couples sat,
 Quietly perplexed;
 An orphaned audience,
 Unsure if meant to clap.

I can't continue
 Like this.
 It was a year
 Of horrible performances.

I forgot my bottle
 But remembered—

Oh, you only worry too much;
 A cold, yet accurate assessment.
 I thought maybe—
 I should still make an appointment.
 And so I called.

Two weeks later,
 I've got a new bottle.
 I forget the details
 Of that next performance.
 But, I remember—
 Afterwards backstage,
 I looked to my teacher
 And smiled:
I'm back.

The forgetful fugue is the only poem of the set of 8 based on a singular story from an interviewee. However, it still encapsulates a theme shared by many interviewees: a perceived inferior performance can feel highly detrimental to a musician's self-worth. The way this interviewee described the story was captivating, so I wanted to capture that narrative essence in this free-meter poem. The story begins by repeating, "It was a year of horrible performances." Subsequently, the narrator explains that they have forgotten their medication (my bottle) back home upon returning to school for the year. Throughout the rest of the poem, this medication is referred to as "my bottle," as this is the interviewee's original word choice. For many reasons, it was appropriate to retain that word choice; for one, highlighting the purposefully obscure nature of "my bottle" shows this is deeply personal. Even more, this word choice can also be a metaphor for any source of essential support that could be detrimental if lost. However, remembering their growth as musicians, they decide to take this setback in stride and push through school without it. Despite their better efforts, the narrator starts experiencing uncontrollable bouts of performance anxiety, manifesting both mentally and physically, even in low-pressure performance environments. The interviewee vividly explained to me a recollection

of an afternoon performance with an intimate audience of just a few older yet eager and forgiving listeners. However, the interviewee could not recover from a memory slip, going back to try and restart the section a few times until deciding to stop playing, apologize, and immediately walk away.

Although this performance was particularly harmful to the interviewee, they also described it as a “last straw” type that caused them to realize they needed to change, “I can’t continue like this.” However, they also recalled feeling dismissed by their previous prescriber, which contributed to their hesitancy in seeking support, as shown by the line “Oh, you only worry too much.” Despite the dismissive nature of such a statement, the narrator agrees to a degree, with an underlying sense of empowerment upon the realization that they may worry too much. Moreover, with this new footing, the interviewee shared that they made an appointment with a new prescriber and, soon after renewing their forgotten medication (the bottle), they felt their confidence reappear. They described this sense of renewal in their first performance after restarting their prescription: they felt grounded, present, and connected in that performance, although unable to recall the exact piece of repertoire they performed. This shows that the underlying feeling about a performance is often even more memorable than the performance itself, which is why it is so important for musicians to learn coping skills for performances gone wrong. Even more importantly, it calls for a culture shift in which the performance quality is not equivalent to the player’s identity and value as a musician and person.

Sympathetic Vibrations

I’m starting to acknowledge,
My own perspective is skewed.
That was not ‘normal’ or healthy.

Eventually, I figured out
It wasn’t effective:
Over and over and over and over,

The key to improving
Is not just locked
Inside a practice room.

Trying to disconnect
My value as a musician,
From as a person,

I shifted.
Comparing myself
Won't help me get better.

I'm not as broken down.
If I must sacrifice the wants of others,
Too bad for them.

A trade off I've learned
To not feel guilty about.
Not everything I do has to be perfect.

Shirking off the guilt,
Prioritizing myself as me,
Not myself, the musician.

This is me trying to stay
In a growth mindset.
I won't tell myself I can't achieve.

To be healthy, I have to sleep,
Put things down, Do things for myself;
That can be really hard.

There's still that voice
In the back of my brain, saying
You're never done.

The struggle to block out
That teacher's voice.
Nightmares before performances.

I would never
Impose that
On my students.

Negative voices tend to

Ring louder and longer
Than positive ones.

Am I doing enough?
Am I good enough?
I don't know if it will ever go away.

One of the pieces didn't go great,
Yeah, the others were fine...
But, *that's* the one I remember.

For two weeks, I had to
Shake myself out of
Reverting back to old ways.

Let it go, you're better
Than that. I'm not going to
Listen to that voice anymore.

Braver today;
It might not be perfect,
But that's okay.

It's a lifelong process,
And a little bittersweet,
But I think it's worth it.

This final poem in the set, “Sympathetic Vibrations,” reflects on the weight of past experiences, even in the light of support and healing. The poem begins with realizing and acknowledging that past experiences were not “normal” or healthy. Interview #4 stated: I had started to acknowledge that my perspective was skewed, which was not normal; this was not a healthy experience. And even though I knew something was uncomfortable I hadn't really put words to it until that point.” Beyond that, those were formative experiences that can shape and skew perspectives without permission.

A central theme in this poem is a continuation of the exploration of the separation of self and performer. Many interviewees expressed that while consistent practice is essential, it is

equally important to spend time outside the practice room sleeping, going to the gym, and spending time with their loved ones. If the balance between those aspects of their life became tipped toward practicing as much as possible, those other things would be neglected, resulting in a lower quality of life. For example, Interviewee 2:

The expectations of the program really don't let up...if I need to not do as well on an assignment so that I can get some sleep, that's a trade off that I've learn to make and to not feel guilty about... ..but I've had to learn that if I'm going to stay on top of things I'm going to be healthy, I have to rest, I have to sleep, I have to put the stuff, I have to do things for myself that have nothing to do with school, or work. That can be really hard...There's a part of my brain that's always like, well you could be doing XYZ, because you're never done...I was really comparing myself to a lot of other people...but I eventually figured out that's not effective...you don't need to just sit and repeat things over and over and over and over.

Interviewee 5 said:

I've come to realize that people who are truly good at their instrument are the people who have found a balance between what they love to do and what they do for work. I have been prioritizing self-care over school lately, and I feel like that has made me better at school in some ways because I'm not as broken down...I'm not using my instrument to hide from the world...It's not about how much you do, but how well you do the things you are doing.

Relevant to this realization of a need for balance is the overarching theme of personal growth in this poem. Essentially, this poem is an organization of statements of personal growth and the interviewees' realizations. A central part of this personal growth for the interviewees was a rejection of perfectionism, shown through a search for balance in their practice and statements such as, "Not everything I do has to be perfect." While the trade-off might include not pleasing everyone and might have previously caused guilt, it is also framed as necessary for growth as a person apart from being a musician.

As compared to previous poems in the set, which showed difficulty in grasping a balance between music and the rest of life, this poem acknowledges the necessities of sleep, personal

time, and doing things for oneself, recognizing now their importance, but at the same time, recalling the times in which these elements were out of balance. As recognized in previous poems, the culture sacrifices these essential elements of well-being to be replaced with another essential deed: practice as much as possible within the schedule of countless other requirements, such as classes, teaching, rehearsals, homework, work, etc.

Although this poem is written from the perspective of growth, critical voices have lasting impacts, making it difficult to fully overcome a negative internal dialogue passed down to them by their teachers and surrounding culture. One interviewee mentioned how difficult it is to parse out what advice her professor gave her was good and what was just ulteriorly driven. Even after having several positive mentors after that teacher, his misguidance would haunt her through upcoming performances and post-performance self-criticism. For example, Interviewee 4 said: “I definitely have still struggled to block out voices from this teacher. And to be frank, every time I have a recital coming up, I almost always have a nightmare that involves him still to this day.” Moreover, Interviewee 2 shared: “I still struggle with guilt...because the work is never done...that imposter syndrome feeling of am I good enough? Am I doing enough? I don’t know that ever is gonna go away completely.”

Even though it is a constant struggle, this lasting impact of negative guidance is exemplified through the statement, “I would never impose that on my students.” This statement not only shows a recognition that what they went through was wrong but also a desire to break the cycle of abuse and negativity they experienced. They also show growth beyond what their teachers could teach them, showing remarkable resilience in adversity. It shows a spirit of empathetic change underlying the sentiment, in which the speaker takes the role of the teacher they were not given. Finally, the last two stanzas highlight a theme of continual growth and the

unresolved nature of the difficulties outlined in the rest of the poem. Although there is no easy resolution or solution, it is a process that takes time and will face inevitable setbacks along the way. Interviewee 4 said: “It’s taken a long time to even feel like that is something I can talk about. Or that it was valid. It’s not an overnight process. It’s like a decade-long, lifelong process, but I think it’s worth it.”

The form of this poem is four groups of five three-lined stanzas. The shifting spacing of the stanzas reflects the shifting nature of personal growth described in the poem. When the thought process of a stanza is focused on growth, it is shifted forward (right), and if it is reflective of old habits, it is shifted back (left).

The overarching title of the set, “Portraits of a Wonderful Musician,” refers to the Brothers Grimm tale, “The Wonderful Musician,” in which the fiddler is both a victim of his instrument and a perpetrator toward to animals he encounters along the way. This fairytale portrayal of the musician and his encounters is a relevant representation of the multi-faceted relationships experienced by those interviewed. Moreover, “Portraits of a Wonderful Musician” is inspired by the Grimm Brothers’ sometimes-brutal descriptions that reflect the reality of the stories told to them verbally. Collectively, these eight poems represent the essence of the lived experiences of the eight current or former graduate music students I interviewed.

CHAPTER FIVE: CHALLENGING TRADITIONS THROUGH PROACTIVE APPROACHES TO SUPPORTING STUDENTS

Collective Conscious Resistance

One solution to the issues raised by students in the previous chapter is collective and conscious resistance to the current neoliberal presence in educational spheres. For example, in September 2023, Cleveland Institute of Music students peacefully protested the dismissal of a Title IX investigation against the longstanding orchestral director. When the investigation was first announced in April 2023, Ann Midgette, writer for the New York Times and a prevailing writer on the #MeToo movement, declined an honorary doctorate and commencement address at the institution's May 2023 commencement. Midgette remarked:

Regardless of what the investigation determines, I am not convinced, based on my many conversations, that CIM has acted in the best interests of its students and faculty, and I am therefore uncomfortable appearing to support the institution's leadership at this particular time. I believe that I was chosen for this recognition not least for my work in addressing #MeToo in the classical music world; and I am thus especially unwilling to have my name linked to a situation in which many women I spoke to feeling unheard, afraid and angry...I hope and believe that they will take this gesture as a greater show of solidarity than my appearing in person could have been.¹²⁷

The anonymous students and faculty who reached out to Midgette and Midgette were performing “everyday resistance, [which] involves surreptitious acts by individuals in small groups to defend themselves. Such actions include work slowdowns, gossip, or symbolic gestures of defiance. The most likely environments for these micro forms of resistance are extremely oppressive or exploitative settings.”¹²⁸ In this case, students and faculty may not have

¹²⁷ “Candidate Declines Honorary Doctorate from Cleveland Institute of Music,” The Violin Channel, May 17, 2023

¹²⁸ Paul Almeida and Amalia Pérez Martín, *Collective Resistance to Neoliberalism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2022), <https://doi.org/10.1017/978110898000>.

felt comfortable speaking out publicly against their authority figures. However, instead, they utilized microforms of resistance to make an impact with their voices.

One student remarked they were compelled to protest further because “the current CIM administration has shown a disregard for the well-being of its student body, as well as for the community guidelines it claims to uphold.”¹²⁹ Students signed a petition to reopen the investigation on the director. They organized a silent sit-in that would entail students arriving at rehearsal but sitting silently without their instruments instead of participating. Despite not receiving outspoken support from faculty, several faculty members have “expressed sympathy” for student concerns. Unfortunately, “CIM’s lack of tenure positions and short-term contracts have prevented several of them from taking action in fear of losing their jobs or facing other repercussions.”¹³⁰ Beyond a lack of support for student voices, students who participated in the protest also faced threats of retaliation by receiving a message on Canvas stating that students who come to rehearsal without an instrument may receive an unexcused absence and, therefore, a lower grade. But students were united in their protest, with one student saying the only way for the protest to end would be if he “steps down as conductor of the CIMO. Entire sections of the orchestra refused to play under him. My colleagues are justifiably furious with how the upper administration has turned a blind eye to how he has treated them, and I stand with them.”¹³¹ Two weeks after this protest, the principal conductor of CIMO entered a ‘leave’ of absence for the foreseeable future.¹³²

¹²⁹ Lexy Jensen, “CIM Students Peacefully Protest during First Orchestra Rehearsal,” *The Observer*, September 15, 2023.

¹³⁰ Jensen, “CIM Students Peacefully Protest.”

¹³¹ Jensen, “CIM Students Peacefully Protest.”

¹³² Kabir Bhatia, “Cleveland Institute of Music Professor ‘enters’ Leave of Absence Following Protests,” *Ideastream Public Media*, October 3, 2023.

This case story illustrates neoliberal institutional practices prioritizing brand, public image, and business interests over the concerns and well-being of the students. Considering the discussion on neoliberal capitalism in Chapter II, this case story is an example of an institution practicing “neoliberal rationality.” Regardless of the guilt or innocence of the conductor, the issue was approached through business pragmatics without consideration for the legitimacy of the student’s experiences. Both students and faculty enacted resistance that has thus far led to some change, albeit not without fears of retaliation. Although protest is not a catch-all solution to the issues outlined in this chapter, it is a current and relevant example of student reactions toward the evolving environment of the university music school.

However, we cannot rely on collective conscious resistance to fix the issue. It can be a starting point for a call for change, but as educators, we must make changes firsthand while institutional change moves so slowly. This means collaborating with music fields outside of one’s specialization for solutions and perspectives, remaining vigilant on developments in teaching communities beyond one’s immediate sphere, and being willing to steer away from traditionalist, teacher-directed, student comparison-driven pedagogies and denounce them actively. We open the door to finding new practices that promote change by openly discussing and denouncing these practices that are detrimental to the student experience.

Traditional versus Expressivist Pedagogies

As many interviewees described, their most negative learning experiences stemmed from a traditional model of teaching, which, if shifted to an expressivist model of teaching, can instead support students’ creativity and autonomy.¹³³ As described in “Teaching Music: Old Traditions

¹³³J. I. Pozo, J. A. Torrado, and L. Baño, "Teaching Music: Old Traditions and New Approaches," in *Learning and Teaching in the Music Studio*, ed. J. I. Pozo, M. P. Pérez Echeverría, G. López-Íñiguez, and J. A. Torrado, vol. 31, *Landscapes: the Arts, Aesthetics, and Education* (Singapore: Springer, 2022), 42, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-19-0634-3_2.

and New Approaches,” a traditional teaching model sees musical expressivity as “something which will happen that is dependent on individual talent; we are not all musicians.”¹³⁴ Much like the mechanist pedagogues described earlier, it focuses on teaching toward a “mastery of code and technique.”¹³⁵ In contrast, the expressivist model sees expressivity as the starting point of musical and instrumental teaching; “we are all humanly musical.”¹³⁶ Focus and teaching methods of the expressivist model include expressing and understanding sound and musical parameters and how that relates to body mechanics and management. To summarize, in a traditional model, expression is earned by reaching a certain level of mastery. In contrast, in an expressivist model, the experience and expression of the student is the starting point. Through a shift from traditional methods to an expressivist model, “it is possible to propose a music education guided by motives, goals, and positive emotions... Instead of having students who are always immersed in these negative emotions.”¹³⁷

However, educators at all levels and experiences should acknowledge our susceptibility to falling into traditional patterns of pedagogy. We must not be complacent with ourselves and our colleagues in holding high standards for using up-to-date pedagogies in music lessons and classes. For example, “teacher selection continues to this day with a strong tradition that high-level performers must be recruited to teach, despite having no formation on pedagogy.”¹³⁸ Moreover, “research indicate[s] that the most constructive conceptions centered on promoting metacognition and autonomy in the students are appreciated in new teachers, whilst teachers with

¹³⁴ Pozo, Torrado, and Baño, “Teaching Music,” 22.

¹³⁵ *Ibid.*, 12.

¹³⁶ *Ibid.*, 18.

¹³⁷ *Ibid.*, 36.

¹³⁸ Amalia Casas-Mas and Guadalupe López-Íñiguez, “Instrumentalist Teacher Training: Fostering the Change Towards Student-Centered Practices in the Twenty-First Century,” in *Learning and Teaching in the Music Studio*, ed. J. I. Pozo, M. P. Pérez Echeverría, G. López-Íñiguez, and J. A. Torrado, vol. 31, *Landscapes: the Arts, Aesthetics, and Education* (Singapore: Springer, 2022), 355, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-19-0634-3_17.

more years of experience tend to simplify their ideas towards more traditional stances.”¹³⁹ And while new teachers may employ a more controlling and traditional stance than advanced teachers, who tend to offer “students more space for developing autonomous practices,” it seems to be long in-service teachers as a group that “need incentives in psycho-educational updating and to reflect on the activation of autonomic ideas,” possibly due to “the inertia of the conservatory culture and curriculum demands, lack of education on constructivist and updated pedagogical principles, or burnout from a profession that is highly gratifying in itself, but which demands great preparations and dedication with a salary substantially lower” than the work it requires.¹⁴⁰ To promote educational changes that prioritize a student’s “artistic agency and autonomy,” educators must practice reflexivity in order to “reconstruct individual concepts from their uses in practice.”¹⁴¹ In the following sections, I will discuss various expressive pedagogy techniques and practices and how they can be used to improve student experience.

Relational Connection

Foundational to an improved student experience is teaching through empathy. *Relational connection*, as used by Jessie Welsh in the context of piano pedagogy research, refers to:

An authentic exchange between teacher and student in which the teacher explicitly and implicitly expresses and the student experiences that he or she is valued, accepted, and empowered as an individual and musician; also a professional interchange in which the exchange of ideas, sharing of stories, development of skills, and building of trust takes place.¹⁴²

Welsh also points to the fundamental difference between relational connection and general connection, in which a teacher and student might be able to “connect through music or

¹³⁹ Casas-Mas and López-Íñiguez, "Instrumentalist Teacher Training," 355.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid. (356).

¹⁴¹ Ibid. (357).

¹⁴² Jessica Welsh, "Student-First Piano Pedagogy: Best Practices for Creating Dynamic Relational Connections in the Piano Studio" (DMA diss., Texas Christian University, 2021), 7.
<https://repository.tcu.edu/handle/116099117/49747>.

ideas, and yet remain isolated from one another in an interpersonal sense.”¹⁴³ So, relational connection is a combined interpersonal, musical, and pedagogical exchange between the teacher and student, centering the student experience above skill acquisition. Relational connection is a practice in Student-first pedagogy, which Welsh defines as “the application of humanist learning theories and philosophies, that prioritize the learner herself over the material, to the piano lesson,” a teaching philosophy shared and pioneered by Frances Clark, an esteemed piano pedagogue.¹⁴⁴ Considering the detriments of old-school, traditionalist, mechanist, and archaic pedagogical practices, it is not enough to leave them behind or vow not to practice these methods. First, educators must acknowledge how unhelpful strategies can affect student experience and then choose to replace these methods with student-centered approaches. In applying relational connection to music pedagogy, Jessie Welsh outlines Twelve Characteristics of Relationally Savvy Piano Teachers that I see as equally relevant and applicable to music teachers in higher education:

1. Attune
2. Speak honestly
3. self-reflect
4. apologize
5. accept responsibility
6. promote autonomy
7. notice body language
8. normalize challenge
9. acknowledge the student's feeling
10. incorporate play
11. accept student goals
12. release perfectionism¹⁴⁵

Teachers might also find Welsh’s Eight Opportunities to Connection with Students engaging. It has more specific directions and details to guide lessons to a more student-led

¹⁴³ Welsh, “Student-First Pedagogy,” 6.

¹⁴⁴ Ibid., 7.

¹⁴⁵ Ibid., 65.

approach.¹⁴⁶ Importantly, Welsh also cautions that the line between caring professional and friend must be drawn and held by teachers, always acknowledging the significant influence of teachers in the lives of students and being committed to using that influence only for goodwill—not for unhealthy, unethical, illicit relationships, or sacrificing a student’s experience for short term results.¹⁴⁷ While these insights are initially suggested for the younger private piano student, as many university music schools take a similar conservatory style training, with master-apprentice relationships between the teacher and students, these suggestions should be applied more widely. “Portraits of a Wonderful Musician” gives insight into one of Welsh’s suggestions for further research; “How does a teacher’s philosophy of connection impact student perception?” showing that the teaching style of specific teachers and a culturally learned atmosphere of musical training can significantly impact a student’s outlook.¹⁴⁸

Student-Centered Teaching and Learning

In the 21st-century classroom, “student-centered learning is accepted as best practice,” yet, as chapters 2 and 4 show, these practices do not always translate into higher education and private teaching settings.¹⁴⁹ Moreover, as the poetic portrait has shown, it is not enough for “some” or “most” educators to practice these modern baselines in their teaching. “One bad apple spoils the bunch” does not refer to the acts of a few teachers spoiling the positive efforts of others; it is that regardless of how many great teachers a student can encounter, it only takes one bad interaction with an authority to cause students to lose trust in their education. It only takes one educator to instill fear and a sense of inadequacy in the hundreds of students they might

¹⁴⁶ Ibid., 112.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid., 147.

¹⁴⁸ Ibid., 149.

¹⁴⁹ Joyce Holoboff, "Building Ideas for Student-Centered Musical Learning (Principal Themes)," **Canadian Music Educator** 57, no. 1 (2015): 32-33.

encounter over their careers. Moreover, it only takes one memory of a negative experience to haunt all present and future experiences. We must not let our students bear this burden alone; instead, we must guide them through their unique educational journeys. Interviewee 2 cautioned me when I asked if she had anything else to add before we wrapped up our discussion. “It has taken away our children,” she said without hesitation. The severity of this statement speaks to the far-reaching nature of the problem outlined by the graduate students with whom I spoke and influenced by the historical and societal pressures that are too often forgotten by those impacted the most.

A key difference between a student-centered model versus a traditional maestro-pupil model is that in centering the student, teachers must step away from the role of the “director” and “expert” to assume the position of continuous learner alongside their less-experienced student learners. A student-centered approach to pedagogy implies a dynamic relationship between the student and teacher based on reciprocity built from trust and curiosity from both sides. Compare this approach to the traditional maestro-pupil model, which implies a static, unchangeable relationship in which the teacher gives information, and the student quietly accepts and learns it.

Teaching students how to apply their learning to their own experience can result in an increased and sustained enthusiasm for music, confidence, and flexibility in tackling changes in their careers. For those who do not pursue music further, it still gives fond memories and day-to-day applications. Moreover, it can result in a sense of self-efficacy, or a sense of confidence in one’s own abilities. In considering the desired results of self-efficacy, “student-centered education is none other than that which starts with the students’ own traits,” which inherently “involves knowing how students really face these different learning situations, what their

techniques and strategies are, their fears, their insecurities and their convictions, and how they emotionally react to their instruments.”¹⁵⁰

Another vital aspect of student-centered learning is that evaluation becomes a tool for self-analysis, an integral part of the learning process, rather than for arbitrary grades, scores, or ranks. Therefore, “teachers should critically reassess the role of musical education access systems and exams, including giving a score to interpretation exams, tests with scores of any type, music competitions or contests, or awards where the aim is to motivate the students from outside.”¹⁵¹ In practicing a student-centered learning model, educators gain insights from students' unique ideas and preferences. Additionally, students gain confidence, connection, and a sense of self-efficacy that will guide them when they do not have a teacher someday.

Deliberate Practice

In considering student experiences discussed throughout Chapter IV, issues with balancing practice time were mentioned many times. In this context, it is important to define deliberate practice. Task-based and skill-based activities are closely related to deliberate practice. Deliberate practice is a method of training in which the person practicing receives feedback to identify mistakes and find methods to fix those mistakes. Then, those methods are used until the mistakes are gone. This practice method has been said to play a role in acquiring expert performance. It is also essential to distinguish between experience in a task and deliberate practice. Experiences in tasks that may include non-deliberate practice, such as performing,

¹⁵⁰ G. López-Íñiguez, M. P. Pérez Echeverría, J. I. Pozo, and J. A. Torrado, "Student-Centered Music Education: Principles to Improve Learning and Teaching," in *Learning and Teaching in the Music Studio*, ed. J. I. Pozo, M. P. Pérez Echeverría, G. López-Íñiguez, and J. A. Torrado, vol. 31, *Landscapes: the Arts, Aesthetics, and Education* (Singapore: Springer, 2022), 370, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-19-0634-3_18.

¹⁵¹ López-Íñiguez et al., "Student-Centered Music Education," 377.

observing other performances, or playing for fun, are essential but do not fall under “deliberate practice.”¹⁵²

Because deliberate practice’s definition depends so heavily on what methods are used to improve a task's performance, it is essential to consider the idea that more time spent practicing a specific task, the better the performance will become. Although this idea is widely regarded as accurate, there may be other factors involved to consider. The running theory that 10,000 hours spent in any field can create an expert has been debunked in multiple studies showing that the amount of time spent practicing does not necessarily correlate to musical achievement. Motivational factors are determinants in the quality of practice, and the time spent practicing has been found to only correlate to musical achievement when that time consisted of deliberate practice.¹⁵³

K. Anders Ericsson, a leading voice in the study of expertise, asserts that while the amount of time spent practicing is irrelevant, only the intensity of the practice matters.¹⁵⁴ Moreover, the core elements of deliberate practice are consistent with experiential learning theory and include goal setting, frequent feedback or self-assessment, motivation, pushing the

¹⁵² Florian Platz, Reinhard Kopiez, Andreas C. Lehmann, and Alexander Wolf, "The Influence of Deliberate Practice on Musical Achievement: A Meta-Analysis," *Frontiers in Psychology* 5 (2014): 1-86, <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2014.00646>.

¹⁵³ Amélie Bonneville-Roussy and Thérèse Bouffard, "When Quantity Is Not Enough: Disentangling the Roles of Practice Time, Self-Regulation, and Deliberate Practice in Musical Achievement," *Psychology of Music* 43, no. 5 (2014): 686-704, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0305735614534910>.

¹⁵⁴ K. Anders Ericsson and Karina W. Harwell, "Deliberate Practice and Proposed Limits on the Effects of Practice on the Acquisition of Expert Performance: Why the Original Definition Matters and Recommendations for Future Research," *Frontiers in Psychology* 10 (2019): 1-82, <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2019.02396>.

boundaries of ability, and break time.^{155 156 157 158} Self-regulation is the ability to manage emotions, behaviors, and thoughts consistently and thoughtfully and consider possible consequences and results of actions. Self-regulation skills are imperative to practice deliberately: because deliberate practice requires the ability to self-assess mistakes, the insight of self-regulation is required. Students of all ages and levels can struggle to self-regulate during practice because the habit is multifaceted. McPherson et al. (2001) identify six dimensions of self-regulation: the motive to practice the task, methods chosen, time spent, performance quality, outcomes of the activity, physical environment while doing the task, and social factors possibly involved.¹⁵⁹ It is also essential to consider that students are not always accurate reporters of their practice habits.¹⁶⁰ Even more so, students have been found to find deliberate practice less enjoyable, preferring to engage in less purposeful practice, such as playing full run-throughs or not stopping to correct mistakes.¹⁶¹ Students have even been found to react to student-centered learning with initial resistance due to the dynamic requiring more personal accountability. They

¹⁵⁵ Peter J. Fadde and Gary A. Klein, "Deliberate Performance: Accelerating Expertise in Natural Settings," *Performance Improvement* 49, no. 9 (2010): 5-14, <https://doi.org/10.1002/pfi.20175>.

¹⁵⁶ Andreas C. Lehmann and K. Anders Ericsson, "Research on Expert Performance and Deliberate Practice: Implications for the Education of Amateur Musicians and Music Students," *Psychomusicology: A Journal of Research in Music* 16, no. 1-2 (1997): 40-58.

¹⁵⁷ Erno Lehtinen, Minna Hannula-Sormunen, Joni McMullen, and Hans Gruber, "Cultivating Mathematical Skills: From Drill-and-Practice to Deliberate Practice," *ZDM* 49, no. 4 (2017): 625-636, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11858-017-0856-6>.

¹⁵⁸ Amy L. Simmons, Sarah E. Allen, Chelsea D. Cash, and Robert A. Duke, "Effects of Early Break Intervals on Musicians' and Nonmusicians' Skill Learning," *Psychology of Music* 47, no. 1 (2017): 83-95, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0305735617735373>.

¹⁵⁹ Gary E. McPherson and Julia M. Renwick, "A Longitudinal Study of Self-Regulation in Children's Musical Practice," *Music Education Research* 3, no. 2 (2001): 169-186, <https://doi.org/10.1080/14613800120089232>.

¹⁶⁰ Pamela D. Pike, "Self-Regulation of Teenaged Pianists During At-Home Practice," *Psychology of Music* 45, no. 5 (2017): 739-751, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0305735617690245>.

¹⁶¹ Ronald Hyllegard, "Deliberate Practice Theory: Relevance and Inherent Enjoyment in Music Practice," *Perceptual and Motor Skills* 107, no. 6 (2008): 439-448.

prefer the familiarity of the lecturer-listener dynamic, which requires less active participation from the student.¹⁶²

Educators should talk directly with students about developing the meta-cognitive skills of self-regulation and deliberate practice when teaching deliberate practice strategies. Without a student's awareness of these crucial skills, they cannot become self-sufficient musicians.¹⁶³

Moreover, teachers should consider other factors and circumstances in their students' lives when teaching deliberate practice and self-regulating habits. Socioeconomic status, genetics, and network support have all been cited as outside factors affecting a student's inclination and ability to practice.¹⁶⁴

Curious, Collaborative, Creativity (CCC Concept)

Beyond teaching and modeling relational connect and deliberate practice strategies, educators can refer to guided methods of student-centered teaching and learning. Carol Collins, an educator from the Crane School of Music at the State University of New York-Potsdam, developed CCC to implement student-centered learning in performing ensembles. These steps guide student-centered learning for ensembles, but I argue that a broader implementation could be even more beneficial. The curious, collaborative, creativity (CCC) concept:

offers solutions to the limitations of traditional models...foster[ing] curiosity by guiding students to determine their own musical interests and selection of the repertoire to be studied and performed. Musicians are placed into teams that collaboratively share the responsibilities of instruction and leadership...musicians are provided with opportunities to develop creativity by designing their presentation or "informances" rather than formal performances.¹⁶⁵

¹⁶² Stanley E. Fawcett, Florence C. Giraud Carrier, and Amy M. Fawcett, "Using Deliberate Practice to Transform Learning Culture: Helping Students Put Real Skills in their OSCM Toolbox," *Decision Sciences Journal of Innovative Education* 18, no. 2 (2020): 172-202, <https://doi.org/10.1111/dsji.12204>.

¹⁶³ Eleonora Concina, "The Role of Metacognitive Skills in Music Learning and Performing: Theoretical Features and Educational Implications," *Frontiers in Psychology* 10 (2019): 1-45, <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2019.01583>.

¹⁶⁴ Miriam A. Mosing et al., "Practice Does Not Make Perfect," *Psychological Science* 25, no. 9 (2014): 1795-1803, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0956797614541990>.

¹⁶⁵ Danni Gilbert, "Curious, Collaborative, Creativity," *Music Educators Journal* 103, no. 2 (2016): 27-34, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0027432116677553>, 28.

Considering possible student reactions and experiences playing repertoire they do not like, for example, in Critic's Cadence/Counterpoint, teachers must weigh the consequences of assigning required repertoire. Letting students choose their own repertoire fosters creativity while giving the teacher more information about who a student is and how they can best guide them. Scaffolding techniques can be applied to ensure students choose repertoire that is a suitable level for them—this requires guidance rather than instruction from the teacher. Collaboration can be encouraged in all music education settings, not just ensembles. Beyond weekly studio permanent classes or recitals, collaboration should replace comparison in these environments, and it is up to the teachers to foster this atmosphere.

Critic's Cadence/Counterpoint shows that actions like ranking student peers against each other can harm a student's confidence and relationship with music. Encouraging creativity can take many forms in music education but requires replacing traditional pedagogies with Expressivist teaching techniques. Prescriptive feedback must be replaced with a prioritization of student creativity. CCC is flexible, and "it is important for [teachers] to keep an open mind to the possibilities that may emerge...there can be as many different ways to apply the plan as there are [educators] willing to try it."¹⁶⁶ Considering educators' collective tendency to fall back on traditionalist pedagogies, "educators must be willing to sit with the discomfort of relinquishing total control" to "nurture a student[']s decision making and influence" in order to guide toward "more understanding, ownership, enjoyment, and independence in their music making."¹⁶⁷ Gilbert advocates that "change is a necessary component of student-centered learning," which opposes traditionalist teaching styles.¹⁶⁸ Notably, "there is a common misconception among

¹⁶⁶ Gilbert, "Curious, Collaborative, Creativity," 33.

¹⁶⁷ Ibid., 32.

¹⁶⁸ Ibid., 32.

[educators] that taking the time for students to participate creatively ‘wastes’ rehearsal [or lesson] time, and does not adequately prepare students for successful outcomes.”¹⁶⁹ However, giving more time in lessons and “rehearsals for student contributions can...lead to more advanced music making.”¹⁷⁰ CCC can help educators “reach goals more quickly than instruction solely delivered in traditional formats,” and students participating in CCC “demonstrate stronger musical knowledge, increased participation, and a deeper level of enjoyment in the process.”¹⁷¹ Clearly, implementing student-centered learning and teaching strategies like CCC to educators can be a tangible and effective way to institute positive change in student learning environments.

Growth Mindset

At the core of each of the above principles and methods is a growth mindset. In its most basic form, a growth mindset is the belief that a person’s abilities can be developed through time and effort. This contrasts with a fixed mindset, where a person’s abilities are believed to be innate and unchangeable. Carol Dweck’s book, *Mindset: The New Psychology of Success*, popularized her long-standing research on growth mindset. Dweck’s research on fixed versus growth mindset shows that those who hold a growth mindset in the face of adversity can improve and even thrive, while those who hold more of a fixed mindset may “shy away from challenges or fail to meet their potential.”¹⁷² Students may exhibit a fixed mindset through a “great focus on validating one’s ability and drawing negative ability inferences after struggle or failure,” and this behavior “has been found to predict lower achievement among students facing academic challenges or difficulties,” compared with a growth mindset, which focuses more “on

¹⁶⁹ Ibid., 33

¹⁷⁰ Ibid., 33.

¹⁷¹ Ibid., 33.

¹⁷² David S. Yeager and Carol S. Dweck, “What can be learned from growth mindset controversies,” *American Psychologist* 75, no. 9 (2020): 1270, <https://doi.org/10.1037/amp0000794>

developing ability and on question strategy or effort after failure.”¹⁷³ Mindset theory focuses on “responses to challenges or setbacks” and is “not a theory about academic achievement in general.”¹⁷⁴ In other words, mindset theory helps educators and students understand how to respond to challenges, not achievements. A fixed mindset is “associated with a meaning system of performance goals, negative effort beliefs, and helpless attributions” that can prevent students from reaching their full potential.¹⁷⁵ Performance goals might even include avoidance of “situations that could reveal a lack of ability” due to a student’s fear of failure or comparison between themselves and peers.¹⁷⁶ Moreover, negative effort beliefs refer to the “belief that the need to put forth effort on a task reveals a lack of talent,” making students in a fixed mindset more likely to feel a sense of shame for needing to put effort into their abilities.¹⁷⁷ Finally, helpless attributions refer to the attribution of failure to a “stable flaw in the self” that cannot easily, if at all, be overcome.¹⁷⁸ Consider Chapter IV’s discussion of multiple poems that portrayed fixed mindset beliefs, including having missed a now intangible window of opportunity, to emphasizing having or missing innate qualities or talents. An example of helpless attribution caused by a fixed mindset from the poetic portrait would be students feeling as though they have missed a window of opportunity for success and are unable to do anything to change now because that time has passed. A growth mindset, instead, involves “learning goals, positive effort beliefs, and resilient attributions.”¹⁷⁹ Students must develop a growth mindset and sense of self-efficacy to overcome helpless attributions.

¹⁷³ Yeager and Dweck, “What can be learned from growth mindset controversies,” 1271.

¹⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 1272.

¹⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 1274.

¹⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 1274.

¹⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 1274.

¹⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 1274.

¹⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 1274.

Recent research has found that interventions targeting student mindset have proven effective for student resilience and achievement, but “interventions targeting teachers have not yet been effective.”¹⁸⁰ Amongst questions for further research, Yeager and Dweck list “which teacher practices feed into and maintain students’ fixed and growth mindsets” and how to alter teacher practices in a way that “affects students perceptions and behaviors and that enhances students’ outcomes.”¹⁸¹ This dissertation has provided discussion and suggestions in these fixed-mindset areas, where teacher practices such as traditionalist and mechanist pedagogies emphasizing prescriptive feedback and peer-to-peer comparison can harm students' mental health and well-being. Additionally, this dissertation has shown that constructs and concepts of talent promote outdated and fixed-mindset beliefs about skill, leading many to perceive talent as an innate and unchangeable characteristic that correlates to one’s value as a musician. Areas such as student-centered learning, relational connection, and CCC require active changes by educators. However, as mentioned in the section on student-centered learning, “changing teacher behavior through professional development is known to be exceptionally challenging,” and all teachers are at risk of falling into comfortable and traditional pedagogies.¹⁸²

However, the lived experiences of graduate music students outlined in the poetic Portraits of a Wonderful Musician make clear that teacher behavior, both in direct and indirect educational environments, directly influences student experience, perceptions, and habits. Dweck and Yeager suggest circumventing the difficulty of teacher reformation by “administering a direct-to-student program to teach students a growth mindset” and then focusing on “helping teachers to support its effects.”¹⁸³ However, if evidence has shown students to be willing

¹⁸⁰ Ibid., 1269.

¹⁸¹ Ibid., 1281.

¹⁸² Ibid., 1281.

¹⁸³ Ibid., 1281.

participants in growth mindset interventions when teachers have not, I would argue that the crisis remains solely in teacher intervention. Circumventing teacher intervention for direct-to-student intervention may cause the divisiveness between teacher and student outlined throughout this dissertation. Moreover, this style of teacher circumvention will only delay the issue, causing more students to suffer under traditionalist pedagogies until they either decide to leave the profession, perpetuate the issue, or be a part of the solution.

CHAPTER SIX: CONCLUSION

Cultivating relational connection and practicing student-centered learning has proven to be a foundational and impactful means of engaging with and guiding students in music education. Teaching and modeling deliberate practice strategies and a growth mindset are crucial to supporting students' well-being. Moreover, methods such as expressivist pedagogy and Carol Collin's CCC can be practical tools to inform ensemble, group, or classroom education and private teaching and performance realms. Despite vast research in these areas, as discussed above, in the music education sphere, multiple interviewees mentioned minimal overlap in their experiences in music education and performance realms, and the two spheres remain separate.

Interviewee 3 said:

I found myself in a unique position where I was able to...be with full-on performers and, at the same time, with my classmates and colleagues in the musical education side. I saw how sometimes this [performance and education] is so disconnected. Maybe we need to do something to connect these worlds more so that they learn from each other.

Interviewee 4 said:

Those two degree programs [performance and education] were at odds. For example, my music education professors were frustrated that I wasn't out in the classroom more than I was in a practice room six hours a day, and my piano professor was upset that I had to go to all these other things rather than focusing on my instrument.

I argue that rather than ignoring research done in music education in place of adhering to traditionalist pedagogy, higher music education and private lesson teaching must build off the strategies outlined by music education research to better connect with students. Continuing education must be required for long-standing teachers, who, even with years of experience, risk slipping into traditionalist teaching methods without practicing reflexivity. While these proactive

measures are not catch-all solutions to the issues highlighted in this project, they provide a tangible starting point to change that highlights collaboration over comparison.

This paper has outlined the historical, social, and cultural contexts that influence the current educational landscape for graduate music students and how it affects their lived experiences, perceptions, and attitudes, especially concerning their mental health and well-being. In Chapter II, I discussed the construction and conception of talent, misconceptions on the healing power of music practice, nineteenth-century mechanistic pedagogies, eugenicist Carl Seashore's measures of musical talent, and how these histories provide essential context for modern music education practices and its influence on the student experience. Additionally, I provided an overview of U.S. studies of the reported mental health symptoms of U.S. University Music Students, organizing and presenting the reported symptoms in three main categories: personal, contextual, and relational. In Chapter III, I presented the historical context for my method and methodologies. I summarized my research design primarily by interviewing eight current or former US graduate music students. Through a thematic analysis and poetic inquiry of these interviews, I created a poetic portrait of eight poems that reveal the essence of the lived experiences of those graduate music students. Subsequently, I outlined and crystallized my research by providing crucial definitions and discussions of arts-based research, phenomenology, thematic analysis, and poetic inquiry. In Chapter IV, I presented the product of my research: "Portraits of a Wonderful Musician," which consists of eight poems that explore different facets of the graduate music student experience based on the codes from my thematic analysis: Identity, self-perception, pressure, expectations, urgency, anxiety, the pursuit of perfection, guilt, depression, criticism, comparison, talent, practice, teaching, legacy, resilience, and reflection.

Finally, in Chapter V, I provided an overview of social, pedagogical, and personal interventions that can act as starting points for promoting change in the issues outlined in Chapter IV.

The thematic and poetic inquiry of eight interviews with current or former U.S. graduate music students revealed that traditional, mechanist, prescriptive pedagogies encourage students to exhibit fixed mindset traits such as equating performance quality to personal value and identity. Additionally, these pedagogies can lead to negative lived experiences by students, characterized by anxiety, pressure, pursuit of perfection, comparison, and fears of failure. In contrast, expressivist pedagogies, such as student-centered learning, relational connection, and CCC, prioritize a student's unique musical voice, supporting their autonomy and creativity through connection and inquiry. Moreover, fostering deliberate practice habits and a growth mindset in students and teachers is fundamental to preventing the ever-looming comfort of traditionalist pedagogies. While students are receptive to interventions with a growth mindset, more accountability must be placed on educators to model healthy practice, performance, and collaboration habits and teach them directly to their students.

The lived experiences of graduate music students in this dissertation highlight significant problems in the current model, such as identity struggles, unrealistic expectations, and the detrimental effects of constant comparison and criticism. These findings underscore the need for a shift from traditionalist to expressivist pedagogy in all types of music education, especially in private lesson environments. Educators should prioritize relational connection at the heart of empathy and student-centered learning. Moreover, the separation between music education and music performance must be bridged through a collaboration between higher music education and private lesson teaching to integrate strategies from the vast wealth of music education research

without prioritizing performance abilities over pedagogical quality. Addressing these issues can lead to a more holistic and supportive learning environment for students.

While this study provides valuable insights into the lived experiences of eight current or former U.S. graduate music students, it is limited by the small sample size and the demographic of those interviewed. Further research should explore a broader demographic of student experience from international music schools and broader music degree programs. Other questions for further research include: What are the short-term and long-term impacts of pedagogical shifts on student experience? What strategies can effectively integrate and implement broader music education research and practices into higher music education and private teaching? What resources and support are necessary for educators to implement deliberate practice, growth mindset, and student-centered learning approaches confidently and consistently?

Although studies show teachers may resist professional development, educators must engage in continuing education at all stages of their careers to prevent entrenchment in traditionalist methods and promote collaboration and reflexivity in their teaching practices and current trends. Proactive approaches like relational connection or Carol Collin's CCC can provide a framework for student-centered learning in group and private settings. While collective conscious resistance, such as the Cleveland Institute of Music student protests, can initiate change, educators must lead the way through more initiative-taking efforts. We must openly discuss and denounce the detrimental traditionalist practices, prioritizing our students' well-being and experience over comfort, personal preference, or raw results. It is not enough to be complacent, as we have learned that one educator is sufficient to have lasting impacts on a student's experience. Through promoting a culture of empathy, collaboration, student-centered

learning, and interdisciplinary study, educators can support the well-being of their students while creating an educational landscape that promotes student creativity, autonomy, and success.

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