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**Studio class purpose for performance**

A comparison on how a musical piece performed in a final recital concert is different when prepared in studio class

Till dokumentationen hör följande inspelning: xxx
Abstract

The purpose of this thesis was to find out if and how studio class improves a live performance at a final examination concert. Although the specific research described in this paper was about playing the viola, the argument is made that the exploration and knowledge of practice would be of benefit to any musician. This paper describes the studio class experiment during an academic semester within playing a musical piece and its full analysis. Information is provided about the studio class, its methods, variations, and practices. The application of studio class at the Royal College of Music in Stockholm to viola playing in general is discussed, and specifically to the preparation for the performance of Sonata for viola and piano by Jānis Mediņš. The results of the study indicates that studio class was really beneficial to the interpretation of the piece during a live performance at a final examination concert.

Keywords: Studio class, gemensam lektion, performance, inner and outer factors for performance, Jānis Mediņš, Sonata for viola and piano
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1. Introduction

American jazz saxophonist, band leader, and composer Charlie Parker once wrote: “Music is your own experience, your thoughts, your wisdom. If you don’t live it, it won’t come out of your horn.” But how can you master the best performance where you feel comfortable with your thoughts, the musical piece itself and being fully in the zone while performing on the stage? Does it have something to do with how many times you have played the piece on stage? Does the piece get more stable as a performance if you play it for an audience more than one time?

When talking about music we always think of emotions, feelings, mood, and atmosphere. From mothers singing to their babies to dancing rockstars, from virtuoso Janine Jansen to African djembe players- all of them share some of the same purposes. Expressing emotions, improving mental health, and even increasing brain power are the main purposes of music performing, sharing and making.

But why is it that when we talk about Classical music and musicians, we always imagine perfection in sound and stage presence. Which in most cases leads classical performers to stiffness and stage fright. Intonation, articulation, rhythm, style, bowings and even more to think about while performing. But sometimes it is too much to take care of for one little musician, right?

1.1. Purpose

The purpose of this thesis is to explore if and how studio class improves a final performance by focusing on inner and outer factors.

I want to investigate the difference between playing the first two movements from Jānis Mediņš’ Sonata for viola and piano every week in studio class and the third movement well worked by me and my professor but not performed in public before the final recital concert.

Musicians practice their instruments every day by themselves in a practice room. However, when it comes to performing, doubts and fear can lead to unwanted changes in a piece. These internal obstacles are the ones that interfere most with our performance. On the other hand, studio class is the right place to meet the outer factors such as an audience, critique, opinions, learn from fellow same instrument students, and to succeed in “playing excellently’.
1.2. Method

To be able to answer the questions, I am going to play the first and second movements from *Sonata for viola and piano* by Jānis Mediņš in every studio class. Meanwhile I will play the third movement without side opinion from studio classes. After that I am going to compare whether or not studio classes will prepare me better for the final recital concert.

The second method would be to do several mental exercises to get to the point where I do not care about audience. Meaning, I would explore more of my inner world such as thoughts and feelings, while I perform and before performance in studio class. For example, balancing the thoughts between performance, experience, and learning (A.W.T. triangle), choosing a focus for awareness, and knowing different degrees of distraction.¹ So, in this method I would prepare myself for the final recital. Mentally, I would know the right feeling no matter what piece I perform.

After playing in studio class, I would ask the professor and fellow viola students for their opinions, critiques, and further suggestions for improvements. Then I would write down my own feelings based on questions as: *Was I nervous? What was I thinking while performing? What about technique? Was I just simply enjoying music? Did I get that ‘special’ feeling?* After answering those questions, I would compare my growth throughout the entire process until the final recital concert.

¹ Method taken from Barry Green & W. Timothy Gallwey book *The Inner Game of Music*

2. Background

2.1. Studio Class as a teaching method

There are different kinds of studio classes all over the world. However, I am going to talk about it from the perspective of a viola class student in Royal College of Music in Stockholm. Studio class teaching is an approach that can be used to either replace the standard one to one lesson or be a separate academic lecture. The studio class purpose is to provide a great learning environment which leads toward to two main goals: better performance on stage and enhanced individual virtuosity.

The studio teaching is a way to get students to actively learn from each other and the professor. As well as to let them invent their own knowledge and capabilities. When we talk about studio class in the field of music it can be held differently. Some professors prefer to have it as a concert lesson, where all students play for each other and afterwards give comments on their performance. Others conduct studio class in masterclass format, where the
professor leads the lesson as if it was a one-to-one lesson. A third option is to use a critical response process.

**Performance lesson**
Performance lessons are especially effective when preparing for class concerts or other events because playing for same instrument students makes the performer more nervous. At the same time, the performer gets efficient suggestions afterwards. The peer students know your instrument’s specifics, which is helpful and professional from the technical aspects.

**Masterclass**
In a masterclass, all the students (and often audience) watch and listen as the professor takes one student at a time. The student usually performs a single piece which they have prepared for the lesson. The professor then gives advice on how to perform it, often including details about the composer and the musical piece and will also demonstrate how to play certain passages, technical difficulties, or lyrical melodies. In light of the professor's comments the student is expected to play the piece again to attain perfection. Masterclasses tend to focus on the finer details of attack, tone, phrasing, overall shape and the student is expected to have complete control of more basic elements such as rhythm and pitch. The value of the masterclass setup is that all students can benefit from the professor's comments on each piece.

**Critical Response Process**
This method is quite recent in the teaching field and it is designed for getting useful feedback. It has four steps:
1. The performer offers a musical piece in progress for review. Students state what was meaningful, exciting and striking in the performance they have just witnessed
2. The performer asks questions to students about the performance
3. The professor initiates each step keeping the process on track, while students ask neutral questions, and the performer responds
4. Students state opinions with permission granted by the performer (the artist has the option to say no)

### 2.2. My own background and experience of Studio Class

During the course of my studies at the Royal College of Music in Stockholm, I attended academic lecture Gemensam lektion (studio class), which was held for all viola students almost every week. Out of curiosity and from seemingly big changes in my own abilities, I decided to further explore how this lecture benefits musicians.

My own background is this: At the age of 7, I started playing the violin on my own initiative because I had seen musical instruments in kindergarten that seemed so amazing to me. Although I do not come from a family of musicians, it did not prevent me from joining the Jāzeps Mediņš Riga 1st Music School, which is the second largest music school in Riga. I
started playing the viola when I was 14 years old. My teacher Anna Bulava suggested changing to this instrument because I had all the physical talents. It was quite a destiny to become a viola player! After graduating from high school, I started studying at the Jāzeps Vītols Latvian Academy of Music. Studies there were quite busy- filled with two private lessons per week, chamber lessons, orchestra, and many theoretical lectures. Although there weren’t studio class lecture or similar subject. My time at Jāzeps Vītols Latvian Academy of Music was filled with success, as I won a place in the Baltic Sea Philharmonic Orchestra, the Orkester Norden and the Baltic Academies Orchestra. It was an unforgettable experience to meet musicians from so many different European countries. Furthermore, inspiring to see creative activity and the rich music market beyond my home country. The joint tours not only merged musically, but also emotionally and managed to find like-minded musician friends. It was also a great encouragement to look outside Latvia. The opportunity to give concerts in so many different concert halls and to collaborate with world-class musicians made it seem that all dreams and goals are possible. Orchestra tours take place on average 3-4 times a year, but I wanted to be in such a concentrated music environment all year round. Shortly afterwards, in early 2020, I applied for the Erasmus exchange program in Stockholm and was accepted. During my exchange year I realized that I would like to stay in Stockholm because of my wonderful professor Steven Svensson and all the other musical activities that happen both within Royal College of Music and in Sweden. During my Bachelor studies I have participated in chamber music festival “Classicalive” for two years running, played in Stockholm Concert Orchestra, several concerts with Royal College of Music Symphony Orchestra, different chamber ensembles, jazz ensembles and had my first experience of studio class.

2.3. Background on the music in my thesis

This paragraph is going to be a short life biography of composer Jānis Mediņš: Raised alongside two musical brothers in Riga, Jānis Mediņš was born on October 9, 1890. At the age of ten, Mediņš began his musical studies at the Riga Zīgerts Music Institute, where he studied cello, violin and piano. In 1904 he began his orchestral music career as a violinist for the Riga Latvian Society’s orchestra and as a violist for the Latvju opera orchestra. During this time, he became known as a composer. Jānis Mediņš composed his first songs as soon as 1909, and in 1913 began work on his opera “Uguns un nakts” (Fire and Night). The opera was hoped to be completed in 1915, however, unexpected events entered into his life. During World War I, Mediņš was the conductor of the army orchestra. But at the conclusion of the war, he found himself in Siberia. Unfortunately, to decrease the weight of the baggage on the way home later on, approximately 30 of his compositions from that time in Siberia had to be burned in the taiga.

Jānis Mediņš was actively involved in musical and cultural field in the newly founded Latvian state after returning back from Siberia. At the Latvian Conservatory he taught conducting and instrumentation classes. He was one of the conductors of the Latvian National Opera.
beginning in 1920. Jānis Mediņš was the conductor of the newly founded Latvian Radio Orchestra from 1928 to 1944, tirelessly making efforts to popularize Latvian music.

After the reoccupation of Latvia in 1944 by the Soviet Union, wishing to retain freedom for himself and his art, he fled Latvia. Mediņš’ family lived in refugee camps in Germany for four years– Segeberg and Blomberg. In 1948 Jānis Mediņš’s home was Stockholm. During this time, Mediņš mainly composed chamber music (Sonata for viola and piano was written in 1959).

The compositions of Jānis Mediņš has a significant place in Latvian music culture. “Uguns un nakts” began the Latvian national classical opera genre. He composed the first Latvian piano concerto in 1932, the first ballet “Mīlas uzvara” (The Victory of Love), the first piano trio in 1930, and the first single movement symphonic sketch “Imanta” in 1923.

Jānis Mediņš created impressive number of compositions, in total around 300 works. The works of him are significantly influenced by personal experiences. In his rich and colorful orchestration one can hear the influence of the symphonic poems of Richard Strauss. Critics have noted Richard Strauss and Richard Wagner as his musical idols. As well as something of French Impressionism in Mediņš’s harmonies one can hear. And a particularly vital influence in his works is Latvian folk music- colored melodic and harmonic language.

A vital turning point in the stylistic of Jānis Mediņš appeared during his years living abroad – his music began to be more constructive and rhythmic. Apkalns wrote: "...he reacted to a lost Latvia in a way that his art was broken. It did not become worse, perhaps quite the opposite."

Jānis Mediņš expressed himself in symphonic works in the style of late Romanticism, and truly Wagnerian dramaticism in his opera “Uguns un nakts”, to the heartfelt lyricism of his solo songs and Rationalism and Constructive Modernism in his later chamber music compositions.

**Time in Stockholm**
Composer Ēnis Mediņš wrote a book in 1964 about his life and music. Since I am also Latvian and have moved to Stockholm to further pursue music, his connection to Stockholm was very relatable to me. Here is a small paragraph from the last chapter of the book:

"Soon after arriving in Stockholm, I went to Latvia Assistance Committee to speak to its chairman, Jānis Breiks. In addition, I think I should try to make contact with the Swedish music elite. I arrived at the Swedish Academy of Music and looked for an internationally renowned Kurt Atterberg, then Vice-Rector of the Academy. I had performed Atterberg’s works in international concert programs back in Riga, as well the so-called Dollar Symphony (Symphony no.6 in C major). I showed him the Riga Radio program booklet where it appears. I also showed my third orchestra suite score for Atterberg, to see my talent as a composer. Without knowing any other advice, he asked if I would be happy to teach piano for beginners. Of course, I needed to be at peace with everything. At the end of the conversation, Atterberg called to archival worker Nordström. After a while, he sent me an invitation to visit him. We talked about this and that, and then Nordström said that he would like to give me job as an archivist, but at that time nothing was available."

2 Quote from the book by Ēnis Mediņš: Toņi un pustoņi (1964): page 190
Jānis Mediņš wrote *Sonata for viola and piano* in 1959, at the time he lived and worked in Stockholm. He dedicated this sonata to violist Jānis Brēdermanis who was an orchestra musician at Royal Swedish Opera from 1963 to 1971. This dedication is written in Latvian in the first page of composition: “*Jānim Brēdermaņa kungam*” (An homage to Jānis Brēdermanis).
Sonata has 3 movements:

I. *Moderato con moto*

II. *Andante*

III. *Allegro moderato*

Duration is approximately 16 minutes. I found this sonata on Spotify when I was looking for viola pieces by Latvian composers. Somehow, I came across recording made by Latvian viola player Andra Darzins and her CD with Latvian chamber music.

2. *From the left side Janis Brēdermanis viola, Bengt Widlund cello, Salmo Sahlin and Lars Fresh violin*

### 3. Analysis and results

3.1 Analysis of the viola sonata

I. *Moderato con moto*

First movement has sonata form which is a musical structure generally consisting of three main sections: exposition, development and recapitulation. This form has been used widely since the middle of the 18th century (the early Classical period). The first section is the exposition with two themes: Prime and Transition (in G minor and B-flat minor), they both start with the same interval sequence and land on the tonic note. Connected by a modulating transition to a lyrical second theme group (in B-flat minor and C minor) exposition concludes with a closing theme.
Exposition (bar 1-72)

3. **Prime theme in G minor**

4. **Transition theme in B-flat minor**

5. **Second lyrical theme group in B-flat minor**

6. **Second lyrical theme group in C minor**
Development (bar 73-110)

Development moves through many different keys during its course and consists of Prime theme from the exposition altered and juxtaposed and include new material both in viola and piano parts. Another new nuance is how the composer takes the Prime theme and breaks it into 8-notes (transposing it in A minor).

7. Development Prime theme rhythmical variation in A minor

At the end (bar 105), the music returns to the tonic key in preparation of the recapitulation. The transition from the development to the recapitulation is a crucial moment in the work. The last part of the development section is called the re-transition (Prime theme is in piano part this time).

8. Re-transition Prime theme in G minor in piano part right hand

Recapitulation (bar 111-165)

The recapitulation is a repeat of the exposition, and consists of the first and second theme groups which are given prominence as the highlight of a recapitulation. They are in exactly the same key and form as in the exposition.

The coda is usually optional in Classical-era works, but became essential in many Romantic works. In this movement after the final cadence of the recapitulation, the movement continues with a coda (bar 157), that contains material from the Prime theme. The coda ends with a perfect authentic cadence in the original key (G minor).
9. Coda with rhythmical Prime theme variation in G minor

II. Andante

In this movement we can find rondo form, a principal theme (refrain) alternates with two contrasting themes (episodes). This movement has the ABACA, which is often referred as five-part rondo. The number of themes can vary from piece to piece.

Refrains

The principal theme is in the key of E minor. The first two times it comes in the viola part, but the last time is in the piano part (right hand). The lyrical melody goes downwards, starting from a quite high register on viola which has almost two octave range. The piano part is accompanying the viola with chromatic downward melody in left hand and repetitive 8-note rhythm in right hand. The last time, the refrain is solo piano, where all three themes come together; lyrical melody, chromatic downward melody, and repetitive 8-note rhythm.

Episodes

B episode combines triplet and 8-note rhythmical variations in viola part which leads to 16-note mysterious pattern.

C episode is a bridge to the last refrain and has an ascending melody which reaches it is climatic F# in second octave. And comes back to the tonic key of E minor.
A (bar 1-26)

10. Refrain A in viola part

B (bar 27-46)

11. Contrasting Episode B

A (bar 47-52)

12. Refrain A in viola part
C (bar 53-64)

13. Contrasting Episode C

A (bar 65-96)

14. Refrain A this time in piano part right hand

III. Allegro moderato

This movement has a sonata rondo form which combines features of the five-part rondo and sonata form. The simplest kind of sonata rondo form is a sonata form that repeats the opening material in the tonic at the end of the exposition and recapitulation sections. By adding in these extra appearances of A, the form reads as ABACABA.

Although this movement travels through many keys as in the first and second movements, the main key is G major. Which is quite surprising since this is the first time, we can hear a major key in this sonata.

Principal themes

Opens theme movement with an energetic pattern in a three-octave range in the viola part and remains the same for all refrains.

Contrasting themes

B episodes are the same, but in different keys. First of all, in D major, then F minor.

C episode is somewhat a development, but at the same time carries reminiscence of the 2nd movement with lyrical melodies.
A (bar 1-16)

15. Refrain A in D major

B (bar 17-52)

16. Episode B in D major

A (bar 53-67)

17. Refrain A in D major
C (bar 68-126)

18. Episode C in F# minor

A (bar 127-142)

19. Refrain A in D major
16

B (bar 143-175)

20. Episode B in F minor

A (bar 176-184)

21. Refrain A in D major

3.2. Description of my Studio Class sessions

This is a Studio class experiment throughout the spring term at Royal College of Music in Stockholm.

Questions to answer for inner factors section: Was I nervous? What was I thinking while performing? What about technique? Was I just simply enjoying music? Did I get that ‘special’ feeling?
8/3/22

Sonata 1st movement

Held as a performance lesson

**Inner factors:** I was a bit nervous. My bow was shaking. I played few wrong notes, and in some places out of tune. Not all of the notes had enough vibrato and maybe I was unsure about the phrasing. I liked the character and mood and I enjoyed playing for others. I was asking myself if I was playing at the level I wanted and what others would think of how I played the movement. I was so focused on performance anxiety that there was little to no room left for the music.

**Outer factors:** One of the viola professors suggested that I should use more vibrato and a greater variation of colour. He also mentioned that I should think more about my left-hand thumb position. Viola class students complemented me about my tone and rich sound, good phrasing, and sympathetic choice of piece.

5/4/22

Sonata 2nd movement

Held as a masterclass

**Inner factors:** I was very confident and felt very comfortable being on stage. From the inaugural measures I really felt myself and did enjoy every single note and phrase. I wasn’t nervous. There were still some places which technically could have been improved but in performance context I can truly admit that this was the best performance in studio class ever. I got goose-bumps from my viola sound.

**Outer factors:** The professor and other students complimented me on a great performance and fantastic viola sound. It was suggested that my vibrato could be more intense throughout the bigger phrases and last till the end of each note as well as note to note.

12/4/22

Sonata 1st movement

Held as a critical response process

**Inner factors:** This time I played for a viola professor to whom I hadn’t played before therefore I was anxious. But that emotion was not reflected in the sound so I was satisfied with how it came across. I think my performance went as I wanted it to go. I did make some small mistakes but I wasn’t affected by them.

**Outer factors:** This studio class was very different from other ones. The professor told me to ask an open-ended question to my peer viola students. I wasn’t prepared for this so I was a bit
confused and it left me thinking for few days. This is because I sometimes forget to think deeper about the piece, composer, music itself, characters, mood and technical tools to achieve musical thoughts.

3/5/22

Sonata 1st movement

Held as a performance lesson

**Inner factors:** Again, I was slightly nervous but in sound it didn’t reflect. Since the first note my performance was very confident and executed with outstanding energy. But I did play few wrong notes and intonation was sometimes unstable. I was thinking about playing the correct notes and having a nice flow through phrases. The tempo felt quite fast which took me by surprise and led to an unexpected experience.

**Outer factors:** The professor suggested to delve deeper into the piano part and find a tempo in which I feel more comfortable. A peer student complimented me on my eccentric energy and confidence.

10/5/22

Sonata 2nd movement

Held as a performance lesson

**Inner factors:** I felt quite confident but still nervous. Since the final concert is approaching, everything felt more stable and calmer from a technical aspect.

**Outer factors:** The professor gave one critique and it was about different dynamics. That I should really bring out more forte’s and fortissimos’s and soft parts can be even less louder. Also, he mentioned that I can be more decisive about my phrasing in Episode parts B and C. A peer student agreed with the professor about the dynamics.
3. Discussion and final reflection

Studio class lectures were very helpful for my final examination concert. By playing for my peer viola students and professor every week it gave me more confidence and stability to performing the Sonata. Since this particular Sonata is very advanced and technically challenging, I got the chance to play all the difficult parts and passages in it. Though every studio class was different from each other, depending on my own inner feelings and studio class approach: performing, masterclass or critical response process. In my opinion, I gained a lot from this experience and felt very ready for my final examination concert. When the concert day came, I was occupied by many technical things such as managing lights in the concert venue, setting up the video camera and zoom recorder, fixing the concert dress and a lot more of other things. It took my energy and mind off from the performance but on the other hand it let my brain rest and get ready for the evening blast.

When the performance started I was very nervous because in my mind I was still dealing with technical issues. I felt as if I was not even on the stage and everything felt unreal. I think the first movement of the Sonata was performed very hectic and messy. I tried to calm down my nerves and by each bar it really got better and better. My bow was shaking and both of my arms weren’t very connected in sound. But starting from the second movement of the Sonata everything fell in the right place. I found my peace of mind and started to play ‘music’. I was in an absolute clearness of mind.

Was there any difference between movements which I prepared in studio class and the last movement which I prepared on my own? Yes, in my opinion, the 2nd and 3rd movements were the best. I think first of all, I finally felt confident with being on stage and could just enjoy playing music. So it leads us to conclusion that the inner world is very important for the performer.

Glenn Gould once said: “I am fascinated with what happens to the creative output when you isolate yourself from the approval and disapproval of the people around you.” Let this quote stay with me and every musician out there.
References

Literature


Digital media


Discography
Jānis Mēdiņš

SONĀTA

altam un klavierēm

16 min.

MODERATO CON MOTO d. 66

Jānis Mēdiņš