Course: CA1004 Degree project
30 Credits 2023
Master of Musical Performance
Kungliga Musikhögskolan

Examiner: Sven Åberg

David Somchai Howie

“How to apply Emotional Intelligence in music performance, practise, and working environments”

The sounding part consists of the following recording:

Johannes Brahms Clarinet Trio in A minor Op. 114
performed by the Danish Chamber Players
Clarinet: David Somchai Howie
Cello: Tobias Lautrup
Piano: Jakob Westh
ABSTRACT

The purpose of this thesis is to examine the benefit of emotional intelligence on musical development and performance. The paper sets out to explore how purposeful applications of emotional intelligence can benefit a musician's ability to manage; performance anxiety, musical development, focus and flow, and working successfully with others in ensemble environments.

KEYWORDS: Emotional Intelligence, performance anxiety, practise, flow, ensemble.

RESEARCH METHOD

Musicians and the processes behind music making involve a great level of emotional understanding and input to produce high level musical performances. Artistic decision making and musical choices are often guided by emotional and subjective values. Along with a high level of individual mastery, musicians must also be able to successfully navigate complex professional environments that are driven by emotional influences, both internally and externally. Through the study and analysis of various source materials along with my own experiences as a professional musician, I look at how emotional intelligence concepts can be related and applied to various musical situations. I will demonstrate different EQ concepts in my own practice as well as in performance through a submitted live recording. Attached to the paper is a live video recording of Johannes Brahms famous Clarinet Trio, recorded by myself and two of my colleagues; Tobias Lautrup (cello) and Jakob Westh (piano), from the Danish Chamber Players. The purpose is to demonstrate the result of the successful application of emotional intelligence competencies from an individual and group level to produce the desired performance outcome. The recording also shows emotional intelligence competencies at play both visually and audibly, through the way in which the musicians communicate through the music with each other and the audience.
Table of Contents

PART 1 ......................................................................................................................................................... 4
  WHAT IS EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE .......................................................................................... 4
  EMOTIONAL BRANCHES AND MUSIC: how can they relate to music? .......................... 5

PART 2 ..................................................................................................................................................... 10
  THE EMOTIONAL BRAIN .............................................................................................................. 10
  THE BRAIN: Old and New ............................................................................................................... 10
  WHY AM I SO NERVOUS? ............................................................................................................ 12

PART 3 ......................................................................................................................................................... 19
  THE ZONE: Emotional Intelligence and Flow ........................................................................... 19
  DELIBERATE PRACTICE AND FLOW ....................................................................................... 21

PART 4 ......................................................................................................................................................... 33
  EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE AND ENSEMBLE ........................................................................... 33

CONCLUSION ............................................................................................................................................. 38

REFERENCES ............................................................................................................................................. 39
PART 1

WHAT IS EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE

The term ‘Emotional Intelligence’ was first coined in the 1990’s by two researchers; Peter Salovey, Yale University and John Mayer, University of New Hampshire. They described emotional intelligence (EQ), as: “…the ability to monitor one’s own and other’s feelings and emotions, to discriminate among them and to use this information to guide one’s thinking and actions.” (Salovey and Mayer 1990, 189). The core concepts of EQ are built upon the recognition and use of one’s own and other’s emotional states to solve and regulate behaviour (189).

Emotional Intelligence, according to Salovey and Mayer (1990), is a subset of personal intelligences such as; social intelligence, intra- and interpersonal intelligences. Much of the research that led to development of Emotional Intelligence as a subset, came from studies in personal and social intelligences from leading researchers such as H. Gardner in his 1983 book titled, ‘Frames of Mind’ (Gardner 1983).

In Gardner's study, he describes a particular aspect of personal intelligence which Salovey and Mayer built the foundations of emotional intelligence upon:

“*The core capacity at work here is access to one’s own feeling life—*one’s range of affects or emotions:* the capacity instantly to effect discriminations among these feelings and, eventually, to label them, to enmesh them in symbolic codes, to draw upon them as a means of understanding and guiding one’s behaviour. In its most primitive form, the intrapersonal intelligence amounts to little more than the capacity to distinguish a feeling of pleasure from one of pain...*At its most advanced level, intrapersonal knowledge allows one to detect and to symbolise complex and highly differentiated sets of feelings.” *(Gardner 1983, 253).*

Up until Salovey and Mayers introduction of EQ as a theoretical subfield of psychology, much of what are now relevant concepts pertaining to EQ, were nothing more than ideas and bodies of research spread amongst various other journals, research papers, and examinations belonging to other psychological fields. Salovey and Mayer simply collected these bodies of scattered research ideas and collated them into a common framework, therefore shedding light onto an area of study that in fact already existed but had easily been overlooked due to a lack of previously defined theoretical concepts. They later refined the definition of Emotional Intelligence into four proposed branches which included: perceiving, using, understanding and managing emotions (Salovey and Grewal 2005, 281).
In relation to music, musicians and the processes behind music making involve a great level of emotional understanding and input to produce high level musical performances. Artistic decision making and musical choices are largely guided by emotional and informed subjective values. Along with a high level of individual mastery, musicians must also be able to successfully navigate complex professional environments that are driven by emotional influences, both internally and externally.

**EMOTIONAL BRANCHES AND MUSIC: how can they relate to music?**

The first branch of EQ according to Salovey and Mayer is ‘perceiving emotions’. This is the ability to detect and decipher emotions visually and orally in things such as faces, pictures, voices and sounds. It also includes the ability to decipher one’s own emotions. It is from this first basic emotional intelligence aspect that all other depth and processing of emotional information becomes possible (Salovey and Grewal 2005, 281).
Perceiving emotion in music is not just about what emotion we hear in the music, whether we can recognize the music as sounding happy or sad. A musician's ability to perceive emotion runs deep into our cognitive thinking as we navigate a piece of music. If we are playing solo we must be able to project our intended emotion to the audience. This means we must be able to accurately perceive the emotion in ourselves before allowing it to project outwards to those listening. If we can’t perceive the emotion within ourselves first, how can the audience or those around be expected to understand it either? Our body language, movements and physical gestures provide visual aid to the music being listened to. When musicians play together in ensembles or orchestras, we must be able to read the subtle gestures of our colleagues, so we are able to match and blend with them. We notice if the person sitting next to us is perhaps feeling nervous; their hands could be shaking, or they might be fidgeting. Or in another instance they could be playing boldly and confidently, sitting up tall, playing out to the last row of the hall. In both instances we perceive what they are feeling, and in turn we can adapt and react accordingly to their perceived emotional state.

The second branch is called ‘using emotions’. This includes the ability to use emotions to facilitate and aid various cognitive functions such as thinking and rational problem solving (Salovey and Grewal 2005, 281). A relevant example of this in musicians could be a situation where one is about to give an important recital or performance. To maximise the likelihood of a successful performance, the performer takes time leading up to the recital to put themselves in the optimal emotional state that will allow them to focus and play well. If they are too anxious, stressed or tense beforehand they may not play as well as they believe they could have. If they are happy, excited and confident then they increase their ability to perform well. The purpose of taking time to find the optimal emotional state before a performance is to use emotion to help aid a successful performance. In a working situation with colleagues, we can use their emotions and our own in different ways. For example, if a fellow musician sitting next to us is playing boldly and confidently, we can use their emotional energy to enhance our own playing to match and meet their level.

The third branch is ‘understanding emotions’. This includes the ability to comprehend and translate emotional language and navigate complicated relationships in various emotional situations and environments. Understanding emotions allows one to be sensitively aware of slight differences in emotions. This understanding helps us notice small variances and nuances between different emotions. For musicians, so much of our daily work, whether as a soloist or in a large orchestra, is working with emotion through the music we play.
Musicians must be able to emotionally interpret the music they are playing whether it be a short phrase or melodic line. Musicians must also anticipate the emotional direction of a piece of music, whereby the direction of the music evokes the transformation and fluidity of one emotion into another.

The fourth and final branch as outlined by Salovey and Mayer is called ‘managing emotions’. This is the most complex, and intricate branch of emotional intelligence as it involves the ability to regulate emotions in oneself as well as handling relationships and emotions in others (Salovey and Grewal 2005, 282). It is perhaps the most important branch because it involves a deep understanding of the human condition and the neurological processes that are initiated when one begins to feel strong emotions in a particular situation. Everyone has experienced times throughout their lives where they have been completely taken over by their emotions. Daniel Goleman (2009) describes this in his book ‘Emotional Intelligence: Why it can matter more than IQ’ as a situation whereby a person has “become a victim of ‘neural hijackings’…”. (Goleman 2009, 31). These hijackings take over to the point where one temporarily loses cognitive control of their emotions, having an outburst or become suddenly incapacitated to reason or rationalization. This fourth branch, therefore, highlights the ability to manage these emotional outbursts, or neural hijackings, becoming aware of them in the moment and managing them as required. This ability to regulate and manage one's own emotional output can in turn help influence the emotions of others (Salovey and Grewal 2005, 282). Regulating one's own emotions as a musician can for example, involve the ability to manage the emotional symptoms of stage fright or performance anxiety. A musician's ability to regulate the emotions of others is closely aligned with being able to evoke intended emotional reactions in the audience such as sentimentality and nostalgia in the slow movement of Mozart’s Clarinet Concerto, or passion and heartache in the third movement of Rachmaninoff's 2nd Symphony.
Below is a simplified Emotional Intelligence chart which accordingly interprets each branch as it relates to music and musicians:

**fig 1.1: Emotional Intelligence branches relating to music**

Other researchers in the field of emotional intelligence have also developed their own structures and concepts of emotional intelligence, most of which firmly relate to and affirm the four branches developed by Salovey and Mayer. Daniel Goleman (2009) further developed the idea of the four branches and presented five EQ domains that further define the concepts of Emotional Intelligence categorising them with respect to how one can successfully live their lives.

These domains include:
1. Knowing one’s emotions: Self Awareness
2. Managing emotions: Handling feelings appropriately so they build on self-awareness
3. Motivating oneself: Directing emotions in service of a goal is essential for attention, focus, self-motivation, mastery and creativity.
4. Recognizing emotions in others: empathy, another ability that builds on self-awareness.
5. Handling Relationships: An essential skill in managing the emotions of others.

(Goleman 2009, 72)
These domains are all very closely aligned to the four branches of Salovey and Mayer, but with the addition of ‘motivating oneself’. Motivation is an important concept of emotional intelligence and one that relates closely to a fundamental aspect of a musician’s ability to develop and master their craft. Motivation is what drives any musician to push themselves technically and artistically. It involves a determination to meet personal needs and goals. It also allows for greater immersion in an activity such as performing or practising which in turn brings more frequent experiences of ‘flow’ state or being in the ‘zone’. Those who can find themselves in a flow state are able to be highly productive and super focused. Without motivation for the goal of achieving one's best, there is a loss of meaning for doing the task in the first place (Craig 2022).

With this explanation of Emotional Intelligence and its relation to music and musicians, we can further dive into how EQ can benefit musicians, internally and externally in their professional environment. Next, we will discuss the emotional processes involved in performance anxiety and how to manage these processes. Later, we will look more closely at various situations where the application of EQ can greatly benefit musicians in the practise room and on stage, finding focus and flow, and helping us successfully navigate and interact with the musical world around us.
PART 2

THE EMOTIONAL BRAIN

For the individual musician, whether we are an aspiring young student, or a seasoned professional, emotions play a huge role in our musical lives. As a clarinettist myself, having studied, worked and performed in different countries across a variety of cultures and environments, I can list from my own personal experiences the wide range of emotional situations I have found myself in. From the nerves and pressure of a big solo performance, the insecurity of playing somewhere you have never played before, the joy and jubilation of a successful audition, or the disappointment and embarrassment of making a noticeable mistake in a concert; we musicians can experience a rollercoaster of emotions in our day-to-day musical lives. We must therefore be prepared to learn how to manage and regulate these emotions to best assist us in being the musician we can be in any given situation.

On one end of the spectrum, our emotions, when uncontrolled, can take over and be detrimental to the way we perform, acting as an obstacle trying to sabotage all our hard work and practice. On the other end of the spectrum, our emotions when managed and regulated can be key to achieving a true sense of focus and freedom in our playing which in turn, rewards us with exceptional and memorable performances, along with feelings of achievement and satisfaction.

In this part of the paper, we take a closer look at the neurological processes and reasoning behind performance anxiety and nerves. But to understand this better, we must discover the areas of our brain most responsible for our emotional actions and reactions.

THE BRAIN: Old and New

The human brain has evolved far beyond our closest evolutionary cousins and its evolution has resulted in today's homo sapiens as being one of the most complex and smartest species on the planet.

Over millions of years, the human brain has evolved and grown from the bottom up with its higher centres such as the prefrontal cortex, having developed from its lower ancient parts such as the amygdala and hippocampus (Goleman 2009, 26). The oldest and most primitive part of our brain is responsible for the regulation of our basic life functions such as breathing, metabolism of body organs and controlling of reactions and movements.
It does not have the capacity to think, process or rationalise information, but rather acts as a basic automated program that keeps our bodies running without our conscious effort. It is an ancient part of the brain which is shared with all mammals. In this primitive brain, we find the emotional centres of our brain, one of which called the ‘limbic system’, plays a heavy role in our day to day lives. This part of the brain is responsible for most of our emotional reactions. For example, when we find ourselves in moments of high emotion such as anger, fury, passion or dread, it is the limbic system that is responsible for this. The limbic system evolved to refine two crucial tools, learning and memory. This important development allowed the brain to adapt and change its reactions depending on the situation. It was an important survival mechanism which allowed a mammal to learn for example, if a certain food led to sickness, then it could be avoided next time (Goleman 2009, 26) This ability to adapt and remember was a vital evolutionary development that helped keep our ancient ancestors alive as they survived from one day to the next. Today, the average person does not have to deal with life-or-death survival situations in their day to day lives. However, the limbic system still functions as it did in ancient times by reacting during stressful situations as though it were a matter of life or death. For example, I have noticed that whenever I have a big solo, I get nervous and begin to stress. My limbic system activates, and my body and brain react. My heart rate elevates, my mouth dries and I have the tendency to tense and lift my shoulders whilst I lean back into my chair and begin to hunch my shoulders forward slightly as though to protect my vital organs. This is by no means the optimal performance posture, and if anything, is probably impeding my ability to play the solo the best way possible. But this is my body's way of trying to ‘protect’ itself from what my emotional brain has classified as danger. Perhaps because I didn’t make any huge mistakes the first few times I performed with this bad posture, my brain and body have learnt that this bad postural movement lifts my ‘survival’ odds in the face of the threat that is the stress of playing a solo, therefore creating a habit that kicks in automatically during stressful performance situations. The difference between our ancient ancestors trying to survive to the next day and my bad solo posture, is that I know I am not in a survival situation. Our modern-day brains have also evolved higher centres which allow for more cognitive thinking and awareness. I can therefore question myself why I react in such a way when under stress, and more importantly, how can I learn to manage it? This higher thinking awareness is thanks to an evolutionary development that has given homo sapiens the intellectual and thought processing edge over all other mammals. It is an area of the brain known as the ‘neocortex’ (Goleman 2009, 26) The neocortex comprehends and judges what our senses perceive. It also takes emotions, adding nuance and cognitive thought to our feelings and attributes those feelings accordingly to our experiences (26). For example, the limbic
system tells us we are hungry and need to eat food, but the neocortex might tell us we want to eat Dad’s homemade chicken pie because it’s comfort food that reminds us of being inside a nice, cosy, warm home with our family in the middle of winter.

The growth of the neocortex inevitably added an extraordinary increase in neural connectivity within the different centres of our brain. These connections have resulted in our ability to complete complex cognitive functions, and the more connections made, the more possible responses we created in our repertoire to think, process and experience daily functions. Naturally, this allows us to display and experience a much larger range of emotions and reactions than any other species (Goleman 2009, 28). Some of the roles of the neocortex include sensory perception, conscious thought, motor commands, episodic memory, complex language processing, social and emotional processing, and sleep, memory and learning processes (“Neocortex | Functions, Anatomical Structure, Facts & Summary” 2019). Although the responsibility of emotional processing belongs to the neocortex, the emotional centre of the brain belongs to our limbic system. Due to the myriad of connecting circuits between the limbic system and neocortex, the emotional centre therefore has many strong connections to all the higher centres of the brain, and as a result gives it a sort of power and influence in the overall functioning of the rest of the brain, including the neocortex (Goleman 2009, 28). This has given researchers reason to believe that even in the modern-day world with all our evolutionary advances, human behaviour is still very much influenced and affected by the most primitive and oldest parts of our evolutionary brain.

WHY AM I SO NERVOUS?

A good example in music of how the emotional brain can heavily influence our state of being comes in the form of ‘stage fright’ or ‘performance anxiety’. Any musician that has experienced performance anxiety knows it can be a crippling state to be in, and one that can make you want to curl up into a ball and hide. It can affect anyone, and even the most famous musicians such as Glenn Gould, Vladamir Horowitz, and Renée Fleming have all suffered from stage fright (Angel 2015). Typical symptoms of stage fright can include shakiness, dry mouth, butterflies in the stomach, perspiration, and elevated heart rate. All these symptoms make it impossible to perform at one's best and in the worst case will deter performers from returning to the stage to perform out of such high levels of fear. But what is happening to our bodies and why do we experience such a seemingly frustrating and uncontrollable response?
The answer to this stems from the emotional centre of the brain, and there is one area in our brain within our limbic system that plays a pivotal role in the whole process. This part is known as the amygdala. The amygdala is an almond shaped paired structure, with one located in each hemisphere of the brain and is primarily associated with emotional processes (“amygdala | Definition, Function, Location, & Facts | Britannica” 2022). The amygdala’s role is to mediate many aspects of emotional learning and behaviour. But its most important role is to keep us alive in many life-threatening situations. Incoming signals from our senses allow the amygdala to scan for any perceptible trouble or threat. It constantly scans the environment looking for anything that could be of danger. It’s most attentive especially in situations of uncertainty or environments that put one outside their comfort zone. When the amygdala perceives potential danger it sends urgent neural messages to every major part of the brain and triggers the body’s fight, flight, freeze hormones. It mobilises the centres for movement and activates the cardiovascular system. It also heightens the reactivity of the brain, making it much more alert, setting the brain on edge (Goleman 2009, 36). For a musician performing with anxiety, therefore they can suddenly feel very sensitive to distractions around them, such as a colleague shifting their seat or the sound of a cough in the audience. In a rehearsal situation, such small distractions would probably go unnoticed, but in a performance situation the brain is super alert and hyper aware of everything in the immediate environment. This function was incredibly useful for our caveman ancestors who had to always be on lookout for potential predators in their surrounding environments, but in a modern-day society where we don’t face the same type of daily threats; this emergency response can impede our ability to perform the task at hand. Unfortunately, the amygdala cannot not differentiate between the threat of a hungry bear in the wild or the imminent performance in a sold-out concert hall, and so it reacts the same way in both. This is because the amygdala is so efficient it reacts before we are even aware of it. The neural connectivity is so efficient that reactions happen before the visual centres of our neocortex have time to fully process what is happening (“Understanding the stress response” 2020). In many cases a musician isn’t even aware of an elevating heart rate or the onset of shakiness until it has already happened.

The conventional view used to be that sensory information received to the thalamus was sent to sensory processing areas of the neocortex, where the signals were translated into the objects, we see them as. From the neocortex, it was believed that signals were sent to the limbic system and from there the appropriate emotional response was administered to the rest of the body. And for the most part that is in fact how we process information. However, it was a neuroscientist at the Centre for Neural Science at New York University, named Joseph LeDoux who discovered a small bundle of neurons that lead directly from
the thalamus to the amygdala (Goleman 2009, 34). This small but significant connection between the thalamus and amygdala allowed pieces of unprocessed sensory information to pass directly from the thalamus to the amygdala therefore allowing it to kick start a response before the information had been registered and processed by the neocortex. Because of this sneaky express route between thalamus and amygdala, the survival response is activated whilst the neocortex is still processing the sensory information to then decide how to plan a more cognitive reaction (38).

![Diagram of brain pathways](image)

*Fig 2: illustration of the fight flight freeze response reaction (Goleman 2009, 40).*

Once the amygdala has reacted like a neural tripwire initiating an immediate response, it is the job of an area of the neocortex known as the prefrontal cortex to take responsibility of processing the incoming and outgoing signals and make the cognitive decision to judge whether the situation is indeed threatening or not. Once the prefrontal cortex has had the time to process and judge the situation as non-threatening, it can trigger the parasympathetic nervous system or our ‘rest and digest’ system to bring our body back to normal levels. The prefrontal cortex is thus able to dampen the signals of activation sent out by the amygdala. But this coordination between the prefrontal cortex and amygdala is somewhat like a battle between the two to hold onto or gain control. The prefrontal cortex is also responsible for our capacity of attention that retains facts essential for completing tasks or problem solving (Goleman 2009, 52). This could be a task such as playing an A major scale and remembering what the correct key signature is; or knowing which specific fingering you are going to employ over a technically challenging passage in the piece of music you are playing. This capacity to retain all these facts is known as our ‘working memory’. But during a situation where an intense emotional response has been activated
(such as anxiety), the coordination between the prefrontal cortex and amygdala can create a sort of neural static which impedes the ability of the prefrontal cortex to maintain working memory (52). Therefore, sometimes during a performance a performer can suffer from a ‘brain slip’ or ‘mind blank’ where a mistake that has never happened before is made seemingly out of no-where, or perhaps the performer loses count of the number of bars rest before they should enter.

So far from what has been written, it would seem our limbic system, and especially, our amygdala, is somewhat of a villain that is causing us more harm than good in our efforts to regulate our emotional reactions. But it is important to acknowledge that whilst the amygdala is responsible for activating an emotional stress response, it is also responsible for the intense positive emotions we experience such as the jubilation, excitement and joy when we finish performing or listening to an amazing concert. If the amygdala were severed from the rest of our brain, we would lose all ability to gauge any emotional significance of events. All our passions for the things we love are dependent on the function of the amygdala. And even though it can cripple us in a performance; it can also elevate the expression and beauty in our playing and be responsible for a reciprocated reaction from the audience.

So how can we use emotional intelligence to help with episodes of stage fright and performance anxiety? The first area we can explore comes from the first branch of Emotional Intelligence as outlined by Salovey and Mayer; ‘Perceiving emotions’. Our ability to perceive our own emotions leads to a higher level of self-awareness, which is a keystone of emotional intelligence and is a crucial first step in attaining psychological insight and self-understanding (Goleman 2009, 72).

Self-awareness is also a fundamental part of mindfulness. A study in 2015 on the effects of a targeted mindfulness course on learning vocal technique, published in British Journal of Music, concluded mindfulness practice was a beneficial contributor to a musician’s ability to manage fear, stress and anxiety, as well as helping them achieve their greatest potential (Czajkowski and Greasley 2015, 226). Other studies conducted on the impact of mindfulness in performance enhancement and optimal performance have concluded that mindfulness practices can decrease anxiety, stress and pain as well as support emotional regulation, attention regulation and speed up recovery time from stress (Goleman and Davidson 2017).

Although a majority of these studies have been associated with athletes and sports performance; the concepts, techniques and tools have been easily transferred to musician mentality. Today there are several ‘audition and performance preparation’ courses musicians can access. One of the most attested programs offered to musicians looking to overcome their performance anxiety was developed by former classical musician turned
performance psychologist and coach, Noah Kagyamas. Kagyama. His program named ‘Bulletproof Musician’ offers online support in the form of masterclasses, short live seasonal courses and his self-help course, ‘Beyond Practising’ (Kageyama n.d). The Beyond Practising course builds itself on the development of emotional intelligence concepts using mindfulness and regulation of emotion through step-by-step methodology presented in a series of downloadable workbooks. In his first workbook titled, “Activation Strategies”, Kageyama (n.d) states that one of the key misconceptions about performance anxiety is that it’s a bad thing, however too little or an absence of it altogether has just as negative effects (5). This supports the idea that if the amygdala were severed and we were not able to feel nerves or anxiety, then we would be detached from all meaningful feeling good or bad, and thus defeat the purpose of even performing at all. Kagyama offers: “Each of us has a unique individually optimal zone of optimal functioning, where we will tend to have our best performances.” (6). For some people the optimal zone is low to mid-range levels of anxiety, but for most the zone lies somewhere in the upper range. World famous violinist Itzhak Perlman was once asked how to deal with performance anxiety to which he replied, “know thy enemy” (6). According to Kagyama, “we must understand how we react to nerves, so that we can come up with appropriate strategies to address what happens to us”. (6). This act of self-awareness to one’s anxious emotions is further supported by Goleman (2009) when he states: “…having the self-reflexive thought “This is anger I’m feeling” even as you are enraged, presumably signals that neocortical circuits are actively monitoring the emotion, a first step in gaining some control.” (76).

Once the musician has identified their own anxious emotions and have begun to understand what is behind that emotional process, they can then learn how to manage those emotions using the tools and techniques outlined in the Beyond Practise course. Throughout the course, Kagyama emphasises many strategies which involve the musician becoming totally connected to oneself mentally, so they are able to focus their energy and emotion towards positive performance outcomes. One of the first strategies presented in the “Effective Practice” workbook (Kageyama n.d) involves developing a solid pre-performance routine. This routine bases itself on allowing the musician to ‘centre’ themselves mentally and emotionally before their performance. One of the most important steps of this centering process is forming a clear intention in which a specific goal is identified around what the musician wants to happen on stage and what the outcome of the performance is that they wish to achieve (12). The key to forming a clear intention is focusing on what you want and not what you don’t want. Ie, having the thought “I want the first note of my concerto to be a beautiful round, warm sound that projects to the back of the hall” versus “I hope I don’t articulate the first note too hard otherwise it will ruin my sound from the very first note”. It is a common trap to lean more towards negatively
geared thought patterns, especially when we are suffering from nerves or anxiety (13). To further enforce positive thoughtful intention building, Kagyama also recommends “hear before you play”. I’ve also heard this from many of my former teachers in relation to intonation, whereby the musician hears the note in their mind that they want to play before playing it. It positively gears the brain to focus only on playing what you want to play, rather than allowing it time to be worried about things going wrong.

Kagyama’s pre-performance routine also includes a simple yet effective breathing exercise which involves the musician learning how to breathe diaphragmatically. This act of diaphragmatic breathing, or mindful breathing, is also a common breathing technique found in yoga and other forms of mindfulness and self-awareness practices. In a performance situation when the body's flight or fight mode kicks in, the heart rate increases and breathing becomes shallow, learning how to breathe mindfully with the diaphragm activates and encourages our parasympathetic nervous system to regain control, slowing the heart rate and bringing our breath back to normal (14). The simplest way to encourage diaphragmatic breathing is by placing one hand on your chest and the other on your stomach. Take your first breath into your chest to feel what happens when the air only fills the top half of your torso. With the next inhalation, try and expand from the bottom of your stomach where your other hand is, and observe how that fills to allow the bottom of your lungs to fill up too (14).

fig2.1 Example of diaphragmatic breathing ("The Benefits of Diaphragmatic Breathing Technique" n.d)
It’s very easy to incorporate a short breathing exercise into a pre-performance routine. For some musicians, even just 3-5 deep, self-aware diaphragmatic breaths is enough to help them centre themselves and find calm before stepping onto the stage.

This combination of mindful, diaphragmatic breathing alongside positive intention building strongly encourages the biomechanical process of activating the parasympathetic nervous system and positive emotional regulation through self-awareness and focussed thought. Keeping with this routine is an important part of enhancing a musician's ability to overcome if not learn how to perform with anxiety. It’s not about getting rid of nerves and anxiety altogether, but learning how to gain control, understanding and changing the relationship one has toward it.
PART 3

THE ZONE: Emotional Intelligence and Flow

For many musicians, being able to perform free from hindrances of performance anxiety is a great feeling, and once a musician has overcome their inhibitions, they can focus on taking their performing abilities to a new level. A motivating factor for any performer is to be able to perform at the highest level possible, knowing that one is doing their absolute best to achieve their absolute best. All performers at one stage or another, even if for a short moment, have experienced a feeling of such ease and joyful engagement where one feels totally immersed in what they are doing, almost to the point of losing sense of time and awareness to distractions around them. It is the most optimal zone of performance one can be in and it is a state of being that is commonly referred to as “flow state”. According to Mihaly Czikszentmihalyi, psychologist at the University of Chicago and creator of the flow state theory, flow is “a state in which people are so involved in an activity that nothing else seems to matter.” (Csikszentmihalyi 2009,15).

Being able to experience flow state is described by Goleman (2009) as “emotional intelligence at its best”, as it represents the ultimate state of harnessing emotions in the service of peak performance and learning (142). When experiencing flow, a musician is so absorbed in their performance that they lose all self-consciousness and the mind clears itself of any other small distractions or thoughts such as “I need to be remember the A sharp accidentals in this next phrase”, or “The person in the second row of the audience keeps leaning over and talking to their friend”. Instead, flow is the ultimate state of mind that is free from worry or rumination, from self-judgement, whether it is positive or negative (142). This is because flow is an egoless experience whereby one is not concerned with how they are performing in that moment. Their mind and body are coherently focussed only on the task at hand, seamlessly adapting as the challenge of the performance unfolds. If one begins to reflect too much on what is happening, even if it is to have the thought “wow, I’m playing this really well”, that can itself be enough to break the feeling of flow as one begins self-consciousness of critical thinking. Being in flow means the musician is unaware or indeed unconcerned with how they are doing, with any sort of judgement towards success or failure, instead the pure pleasure and absorption in what they are doing in that moment is what motivates them and holds them in this peak performance state. It simply allows the musician to be in the moment, and not concern themselves with the outcome.
There are many ways to enter a flow state, but all of which essentially involve three main ingredients:

1. **You need a goal**, something that motivates you. (a key domain of Emotional Intelligence)
2. **This motivation needs to be something meaningful to you.** If you have no real interest or emotional investment in it, then ultimately you will not allow yourself to become completely involved in it.
3. **Your goal needs to be just outside of your limits of comfort on the very edge of your abilities.** Too challenging, and the goal becomes unattainable and brings about thoughts of self-doubt, anxiety and negative emotional experiences. Too easy, and working towards the goal becomes tedious, uninspiring, unrewarding, and often leads to boredom. Therefore, flow exists somewhere in the space between boredom and anxiety (Goleman 2009, 144).

An example of a meaningful goal could be the love a musician has towards a certain piece of music, and their desire to master and perform it. For a clarinettist it could be Mozart’s Clarinet Concerto. Not only is it one of the most beautiful pieces written for the instrument, it is also one of the most challenging and most commonly requested pieces of repertoire in an audition. The technical and musical demands of the concerto push any seasoned professional to the edge of their performing abilities. It is also one of the most well-known pieces in the repertoire which motivates so many clarinettists to master it, and find their own unique interpretation of it.

Goleman characterises flow as emotional intelligence at its best because flow is incompatible with emotional hijackings, in which our limbic system activates and sets us into a primal emotional response. It is a level of effortless focus that is the opposite to strained attention where one might also be experiencing intrusive feelings, negative self-talk, or anxious thoughts (Goleman 2009, 44). What is fascinating about being in a state of flow is that the brain becomes relatively quiet, whereby there is a lessening in the brain's cortical activity. This goes against the expectation that being in the middle of performing an intense, difficult piece of music, would require even more activity in the brain to produce the level of focus needed to execute a successful outcome (147). When concentration is strained during a performance it is usually because you are worried about how it is going or because you were not necessarily prepared as well as you could have been. This type of concentration produces more cortical activity and unnecessary chatter in the brain which in turn causes the brain to expend more energy than should be needed. If a lack of preparation and worry can lead to over-expanded mental energy and strained concentration during a performance, it makes sense that a performer would feel easily
fatigued and distracted by things around them which further feeds the limbic response in a stressful situation. In many ways we become our own worst enemy because as we stress more during a performance, we try to hold onto as much control as possible, causing more physical tension alongside our strained concentration, further getting in our own way. Flow allows the performer to release themselves from this instinct to tense and control, and truly allows the performer to simply be in the moment and be completely present. The number one factor that increases a performer's ability to find this emotional paradise of flow starts with being well prepared and knowing what they are performing inside out. In most cases, being a skilled performer requires one to also be skilled at practising. I remember being in a clarinet lesson with a well-known Clarinet Professor. We were talking about a recent clarinet performance by a world-famous Clarinettist. I asked the professor what he thought made this famous performer such an amazing clarinettist, to which he replied, “He must be incredibly good at practising”.

**DELIBERATE PRACTICE AND FLOW**

Developing a healthy, motivating and emotionally intelligent practice routine paves the way for peak performance and more frequent experiences of flow state that allow the performer to be at their best. Flow is not just for the performance on stage, but can be beneficial in the practise room too. The motivation to get better and better at playing an instrument in part comes from the experience of staying in a flow state whilst playing it. I know from my own experience that I have days where I procrastinate getting my clarinet out to practise. I will find some other chore or activity that needs to be done first before opening my case and unpacking my clarinet. But almost always, I find once I start practising, I get deeply immersed in it. Sometimes I feel fully focussed for only a short amount of time, five or ten minutes. Other times it can be longer, but I usually find myself in what I would call a state of flow at least for a small part of my daily practice. I believe it comes more regularly to me now than before because I try to discover new and meaningful ways to practise and develop different approaches and techniques to getting better at playing the clarinet. When I get into a flow state in my practice, I feel more and more motivated to push myself to get better and better, because the process of getting better becomes so much more enjoyable when I am in a state of high uninhibited focus.

It is not enough to just take up your instrument and start playing it habitually, or without a plan for your practice. I used to feel the pressure of trying to practise a certain amount of
hours per day. This taught me that I needed to meet a quota of time or hours spent with the instrument to satisfy the prerequisite of practice that I needed to do to get better at playing the clarinet. I realise now that the question is not “how much” practise had I done, but “how well” did I practise? And instead of counting the minutes and hours that I practised with the belief that X hours of practise = how good I should be at playing the clarinet, I should have spent time developing a meaningful, and purposeful practise method that encouraged flow and motivation as well as a strong sense of emotional satisfaction towards learning the instrument.

There is a well-known saying “practise makes perfect” but it was performance psychologist Anders Ericsson and Robert Pool in their book, “Peak: secrets from the new science of expertise” (Ericsson and Pool 2016) that surmised that purposeful or ‘deliberate practise’ is what makes perfect. Ericsson considers deliberate practice as the ‘gold standard’ for anyone in any field who wishes to build new skills and abilities in any field (19).

According to Ericsson, who has spent more than three decades studying the psychology behind peak performance, what separates those who are good from those that are the best in their field, is not just the amount of practice they do but the type of practice they do. He believes that ‘deliberate practice’ is purposeful practice that knows where it is going and how it is going to get there (Ericsson and Pool 2016, 98). It is having a goal and mapping out how to achieve that goal.

Ericsson and Pool (2016) define deliberate practise into the following traits:

- Deliberate practice develops skills that other people have already figured out how to do and for which effective training techniques have been established.
- Deliberate practice take place outside one’s comfort zone and requires a student to try things that are just beyond their current abilities.
- Deliberate practice involves well-defined, specific goals and often involves improving some aspect of the target performance.
- Deliberate practice involves feedback and modification of efforts in response to that feedback.
- Deliberate practice both produces and depends on effective mental representations. Mental representations make it possible to monitor how one is doing, showing the right way to do something and allowing one to notice when doing something wrong and correct it accordingly.
- Deliberate practice nearly always involves building or modifying previously acquired skills by focusing on particular aspects of those skills and working to improve them specifically. (99)
From the above traits as defined by Ericsson and Pool, it is possible to analyse how deliberate practice can increase flow state experiences and help develop the necessary skills; mentally, emotionally and physically to achieve peak performance and flow. Using documented experience from my own practice methods and techniques, this chapter will look at how applying the traits of deliberate practice to a musician’s practice routine ultimately builds an emotionally intelligent approach to musical development.

For aspiring musicians, it is essential to study under a teacher that inspires you, that understands you, and someone who understands how to best develop the skills that are uniquely yours. They will push you, reaffirm and challenge your ideas with the sole purpose of helping you shape your identity as a musician. The ideal teacher will also provide you with the necessary feedback that will allow you to set your step-by-step goals in the practise room.

I believe it’s important to split your practice into 80 percent of time spent on the things that challenge you and 20 percent on something you know and enjoy playing. If you only ever practise the things you can’t play you may lose interest or motivation as it puts you into a negative mindset. However, if you put some time into your practice routine to play something you know very well or at least within your comfort zone, you will also notice that you can play it better and better each time, and it will feed your motivation and enjoyment for playing your instrument.

The most important aspect is to plan the practice and set goals in your daily practice which you can use as tangible evidence of ongoing development. These goals don’t have to be big; they can be as simple as wanting to play a passage of music at the scored metronome marking and coming up with practice techniques that will help you achieve that goal.

Take the 3rd movement clarinet excerpt of Shostakovich’s 9th Symphony shown on the following page for example.

![fig.3 opening of 3rd movement, Shostakovich symphony no.9, Clarinet 1 part. (“2018 Clarinet Excerpts” 2018)](image)
This excerpt is found in most orchestral auditions. It is a short but technically challenging excerpt due to its high tempo marking with very fast semiquaver runs and short staccato articulation throughout the quavers. It is a frequently asked excerpt because it tests a candidate's ability to play fast, even scale-like runs, coupled with crisp articulation, all the while playing solo above the rest of the orchestra. The most common challenge is being able to execute technique and articulation at the required speed, usually around crochet = 124, although different recordings vary from 108 to 138 bpm.

We can break down the process of learning this excerpt into the different traits of deliberate practise as outlined by Ericsson:

1. Deliberate Practise develops skills that other people have already figured out how to do and for which effective training techniques have been established.

All through my studies, my teachers have been principal clarinettists of their respective orchestras. They have all played the Shostakovich 9th Symphony in context on stage in a performance and they all have figured out how to develop their skills needed to play this excerpt. Amongst their knowledge and wisdom taught to me and their other students on how to prepare this excerpt, there are also hundreds of recordings you can listen to as well to hear these skills at play. All my teachers have had different approaches to learning this excerpt. One teacher suggested a particular practice technique whereby you play the quavers in tempo but then deliberately slow the semi-quavers down to at least a third of the speed. This is because the tendency with this excerpt is to rush through the semi-quavers and often lose control. By deliberately slowing the pace down you teach yourself control and it acts as a repetitive reminder to your fingers not to rush.

Another teacher suggested working on the crispness of the staccato at the very start of the excerpt. It’s the first thing you play in the solo and it is also the start of the movement. He said if he were on an audition panel he would be looking out for the candidates that demonstrated the spikiness in the staccato as it is a musical intention of the composer in the context of the symphonies' thematic material. To achieve a crispy, spiky staccato my teacher suggested I start by playing only the quavers in the excerpt, leaving out all the fast runs. The first few times I should play the quavers long and full valued like tenuto. This establishes good quality of sound and support and allows me to make sure I am producing the intended tone quality over these notes. Next, I should start playing the quavers shorter, giving a bit more space between them. Finally, I keep working at the quavers, eventually shortening them so they are staccato enough, but maintain the core of the sound within
each note, with good support and efficient tongue movement and placement on and off the reed to achieve the short crisp staccato. My teachers also taught me little secrets that whilst seemed to go against the instruction in the music, actually served to help play the excerpt more accurately and true to the composer’s wishes. For example in bar 7 there is a diminuendo marked after the altissimo g-flat at the peak of the bar. Most of my teachers, learning from their own experience, suggested to me not to play the diminuendo as marked after the top g-flat. The written nature of the bar coupled with the tonal projection quality of the instrument as it descends into the lower register means that a natural diminuendo will likely occur even without physically doing one. This also affects the following bar where the semi-quaver run flurries down into the ‘throat note’ register of the clarinet which is the least projective register in the instrument. If one plays too great a diminuendo in bar 7 then the sound in the following bars as the clarinet descends into the throat note register will not project enough. Therefore, it was taught to me, to not change anything at all dynamically and let the natural projective qualities of the instrument create the diminuendo effect to the listener.

2. Deliberate practice takes place outside one’s comfort zone and requires a student to try things that are just beyond their current abilities.

One of the best ways I found to push my own boundaries in the Shostakovich excerpt was to play the two steps forward, one step backward game. I would start the excerpt at a comfortable metronome marking well within my comfort zone. This could be around crochet = 80. I would then play the excerpt all the way through paying close attention to all the details my teachers taught me to be aware of (not rushes the fast runs, quality of tone and articulation, phrasing and musical shape of the solo). If I could do this comfortably I would push the metronome marking 20 beats faster ie. 100 bpm. The incremental interval is big enough to notice and the fingers, tongue and all other aspects of my playing would have to adjust very quickly to this new tempo. Quite often it was very difficult to execute this new tempo perfectly on the first try. I would play at this tempo a couple of times, each time making mental notes of the areas that needed particular focus on the next attempt. After this I would drop the metronome marking by 10 bpm down to crochet = 90. This is right in the middle of 80 – 100 bpm and although it is still 10 bpm faster than my original speed of 80, it was under tempo enough below crochet=100 that the excerpt felt less stressful and more within my reach. After playing this through successfully a few times I would then push the metronome to crochet equals 110 and attempt to play it again. I would continue this process a few times at least until the initially challenging speed of 100bpm which was just beyond my comfort zone began to feel much
more comfortable. Of course, there is an absolute limit to the speed at which I can play this excerpt and the speed at which is required, but by challenging myself early on in the practice process, I was able to consistently push myself in small increments to the upper limits of my abilities.

3. **Deliberate practice involves well-defined, specific goals and often involves improving some aspect of the target performance.**

This is one of the most important aspects of deliberate practice, and it also relates directly to Golemans’ emotional intelligence domain of motivating oneself and directing emotions in service of a goal is essential for focus, mastery and creativity (footnote?). There are a couple of ways we can help ourselves define specific goals that will feed our motivations.

Start with a much broader long-term goal first, such as, ‘winning an audition’ or becoming a ‘successful performer as a soloist and chamber musician’, it can be whatever your goal is as an aspiring musician. Then begin to break it down into smaller goals such as ‘pass the first round of this audition’ or ‘play at least 3 solo recitals before the summer’. Continue to break this down until they are small bite sized, yet well-defined goals, as simple as a goal that focuses on a very specific aspect of your playing in each practice session. By creating these small well-defined goals, we pave a road that tangibly drives us towards achieving our long term aspirations.

For myself, my motivation for playing the Shostakovich excerpt was clear; play this excerpt the best I can to give myself the best chance of progressing through the rounds and ultimately winning an audition. To play this excerpt well is to measure myself against the expected standard required to win an audition. With this in mind, I am able to construct an appropriate practice regime that involves many smaller goals that collectively drive me towards the goal of mastering this excerpt.

One of the easiest ways to define or discover such smaller goals comes from keeping a practice diary. A practice diary is one of the most useful tools in a musician's development kit. With the practice diary one is able to set a structure and provide self-feedback, through objective critical thinking and analysis.

Rather than playing through the same pattern of scales, etudes and excerpts each day, one can achieve much more by structuring and planning out each practice session.
As you can see, I split my time into smaller fragments each with their own purposes and areas. I also use a timer to alert me when it is time to move onto the next area of focus in my session. I do this not only so I make sure I cover all the areas I wish to, but also to make sure I don’t switch to autopilot and begin absent minded practice. Most people are much more productive in short bursts. Knowing I have only 10 minutes to work on an excerpt for example, means I will put maximum focus and effort into that excerpt.

Combining short bursts of timed focus with a clearly defined goal results in more effective practice than to mull over the same thing repetitively until fatigue sets in (Kageyama n.d, 26).

4. Deliberate practice involves feedback and modification of efforts in response to that feedback

Using feedback from previous practice sessions makes it possible to structure what needs to be given attention to in following practice sessions. One is therefore able to isolate areas of improvement that are judged to be needed and put focus toward improving upon those areas. Below is another excerpt from my practice diary demonstrating how I comment and approach my own self-feedback.
Self-feedback is a key aspect in developing skills. Feedback can come from one's own observations made whilst practicing, but perhaps the most beneficial form of self-feedback comes from recording oneself and listening back. Essentially, you become your own teacher which is crucial especially when a teacher or mentor is not always at hand. The most important thing to keep in mind about your self-feedback is the tone of the feedback. This might seem trivial but the way you give feedback to yourself, is drawn from your self-talk. Most of us fall guilty of being our own worst critic as we have a tendency to be biasedly harsh on ourselves. Where emotional intelligence plays a vital role in this is through empathy and compassion to ourselves. We must remember to nurture and guide ourselves as we would a child or a close friend. If we wouldn’t be so critically harsh to a friend looking for helpful feedback, then why should we be to ourselves? To this end, I use a technique in my practice from Kageyama’s “Effective Practice” workbook (Kageyama, n.d), which aims to build self-confidence through developing a balanced and positive perspective towards my practice. It involves writing three specific things from your practice or recorded session in your dairy. They are as follows:

I. **Writing down one specific thing that went well.** This can be anything from a whole passage to something incredibly specific such as a good legato connection between two wide intervals, or a well-controlled change in dynamic.

II. **Writing down one specific thing that improved since your last practice session.** It doesn’t necessarily have to be perfect but it should be a recognition of improvement in something you have been working on. For example, perhaps you
can maintain control in tempo over a fast passage for a few more bars than in your previous session.

III. Writing down an instance of great effort. This is something that was challenging but you put as much effort into as possible. It’s a way to reflect and identify an area of weakness in your practice session that should be developed into an area of improvement for the following practice sessions. By also acknowledging the things that went well in my practice sessions I encourage myself to always scan for positives in each of my practice sessions which in turn builds a positive mindset, and moves me further away from overly harsh self-criticism which can emotionally damage confidence and self-belief.

![Image of Practice Diary excerpt]

fig. 3.3: excerpt of building self-confidence from Practice Diary.

5. Deliberate practice both produces and depends on effective mental representations. Mental representations make it possible to monitor how one is doing, showing the right way to do something and allowing one to notice when doing something wrong and correct it accordingly.

A mental representation is a mental structure that corresponds to an idea, concept, object or anything else that the brain is thinking about (Ericsson and Pool 2016, 92). We build mental representations of everything we do in life. They assist us in understanding and
making sense of information in our environment. An example of this could be how you see a violin. If you don’t know anything about the violin, you might not even be able to picture in your mind what a violin looks like in detail. You might know that it is made from wood, has strings and is played with a bow. But finer details and knowledge of the instrument such as how many strings, what each string is called, what the different parts of the instrument are and their functions might not be familiar to you. To you, the basic features of the violin carry no meaning for you. But for a violinist, all the fine details and knowledge of the instrument are collected in the mind and build a mental representation of the instrument that becomes a holistic understanding of what the instrument is.

In terms of building our skills on our instruments or learning new pieces; deliberate practice assists in developing deeper levels of mental representations towards what we are learning. In turn, one uses these developing mental representations to make deliberate practice more efficient and rewarding. The key benefit to building mental representations in deliberate practice is that it helps us absorb new information, understand it, analyse it, commit it to memory and execute decisions with it (Ericsson and Pool 2016, 101).

For myself, mental representations allow me to analyse how I am playing something and adjust what is necessary to improve on it. For example, having a good mental representation of a skill such as playing a set of scales from memory, allow me to recognise when I play a wrong note, and how to then go back over the scale and correctly play the right notes. When learning a new piece of music, mental representations of my instrument and the music allow me to hear what the piece sounds like in my head before playing it. The knowledge and somatic relationship with my instrument guides my visualisation of playing the piece without physically having to play it. I can visualise my fingers moving over the keys and tone holes, feel what each note feels like as I play it, the resistance or tonal quality and even the pressure I need to produce a certain sound depending on the register. This is a result of having built a strong mental representation of playing the clarinet, over many years. It is also achieved by spending time mentally practising without the instrument. This helps me become much more aware of when I am not playing something the way I want. It also deepens my understanding of the music so that I can work on more nuanced aspects such as expression, phrasing, tone colour and other fine details.

A strong mental representation of a piece of music can be used to build a mental map of the piece which allows the performer to play the piece in such a way that meets their artistic image. It also allows room for artistic spontaneity within the complexity of the piece, so that the performer's attention is not strained from having to focus so hard on reading the music and dealing with what is coming up next. A good way to feel the difference between a strong or lacking mental representation is by playing a piece you
know from memory versus sight reading a piece you have never seen before. You will very quickly notice and feel the difference between the two types of focus and concentration that is needed for each piece.

6. Deliberate practise nearly always involves building or modifying previously acquired skills by focusing on aspects of those skills and working to improve them specifically

As deliberate practise is built upon always pushing one's own limits to the edge of what is possible, it can therefore be said that the acquisition of skill is almost always an act of building upon already known skills. In the pursuit of building and modifying previously acquired skills, emotional intelligence plays a particularly important role. To efficiently find ways to incorporate a deliberate practice routine that allows for the building of skills, one must have developed an objective understanding towards one's current abilities and how to critically analyse and provide unbiased feedback to continue to develop those abilities. This requires a high aptitude of emotional intelligence because the degree to which we push ourselves in our skill acquisition and mastery of various aspects of a skill is based upon the degree in which our emotions get in the way, or enhance our thinking, motivation, and drive in pursuing the goals we set (Goleman 2009, 125). Positively charged motivation encourages enthusiasm and confidence towards tackling a challenge and is the driving factor towards what makes musicians commit wholeheartedly to intense practice routines.

With a motivated mindset, a musician becomes completely open and observant to aspects of skills that need to be developed. For most musicians, building upon previously acquired skills goes back to improving fundamental aspects of their playing. If one thinks of a piece of music like a recipe to a dish, the skills used to play the piece are the ingredients needed to make the dish. The quality of the dish will be affected by the quality of ingredients and how they are used. In this way, building a skill is not found by practising a piece, but by practising the skills that will be required to play the piece. This is done through practising exercises, etudes, and studies.

For instance, I regularly practise a series of exercises that I can easily use to keep track of my progress. One of these is an articulation exercise, an aspect of my playing which I am always looking to improve.
Below is an example of the articulation exercise I use to help improve the quality and speed of my articulation.

![Articulation Exercise](image)

*fig 3.3: articulation exercise*

The exercise requires me to play a scale repeated with different lengths and styles of articulation. The idea is to practise as many ways of articulating as possible so that it can be used in many different musical nuances. I track the speed at which I can comfortably play against the metronome and build speed incrementally. If there is an aspect of my articulation that needs working on, for example, if my staccato is not as good as my ability to articulate with tenuto, then I will reserve time in my practice to work only on staccato articulation exercises. After doing a series of exercises involving staccato articulation, I will then try and put it into the context of a piece or orchestral excerpt such as the Shostakovich symphony 9 excerpt to see if I’m able to achieve the desired result.

If there is a piece or excerpt that I am preparing and there is a section that I may be struggling with I will quite often look to identify the aspect of skill that is used, whether it be a fast-technical passage, or a slow lyrical passage that is difficult for breathing and maintaining a long legato line. Once I have determined which aspect of my playing it involves, I will then devote time in my practice to work specifically on that skill before trying it in the context of the piece again. Musicians employ multiple skills simultaneously when playing a piece of music. To improve their playing, it is important to isolate which skills specifically need improving, and once that is achieved, the overall quality of the piece will also improve. It is like finding a cog in a machine that needs to be lubricated, fixed or replaced so that the machine can function properly overall.
PART 4

EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE AND ENSEMBLE

The final part of this paper explores the role and importance of emotional intelligence when working in ensemble and group environments.

One of the most rewarding experiences in music making is playing with other musicians. There is no better feeling than coming together with your own parts and instruments and playing a piece of music as one. It is a meeting of artistic and emotional minds, and connections with each other that go beyond the normal ways of communication. For there to be a successful performance, each player must not only execute their own parts well but play well together with good team chemistry, reacting and adapting to each-others playing in the group. Performers must be finely tuned to their colleagues, always observing and analysing body language, maintaining good eye contact throughout, and recognising musical gestures that give key information for the musical direction of a performance. Successful collaboration also requires performers to get to know how their colleagues play. Just like you get to know the personality of a friend; musicians get to know the musical personalities of each other. These musical personalities contain such small nuances in each person’s playing that is uniquely their own, and learning these qualities come from spending time in rehearsal observing and listening to how someone else plays their instrument and approaches the music. No two performances are ever the same, and what makes a great performance is a level of musical spontaneity that comes from knowing your own and other’s parts inside out, along with knowing how others in an ensemble play. This in turn allows freedom and creativity to flow throughout the performance. Playing together in an ensemble or orchestra is the ultimate example of all aspects of emotional intelligence at play both from an individual view and from the view of collaborating successfully with others. A performer must be fully aware and responsible for their own preparation, performance and emotional management, but they must also be able to perceive, recognise and manage emotions in others whom they are playing with.

There are many levels of emotional intelligence employed in working together in an ensemble, and the first level of this begins at the rehearsal stage of a project. If you work in an ensemble or orchestra that usually uses a conductor, then the complexities of a rehearsal are a little less challenging as the conductor is directing the rehearsal and usually everyone else follows the instruction and artistic direction of the conductor.
In an ensemble where there is no conductor, such is common in smaller chamber music ensembles, rehearsals can be more complex as there is no direction given by one specific person. Instead, each member of the ensemble has equal say and opportunity to shape and direct the music how they believe it should go. When all members of the ensemble are on the same page and believe in the same ideas, it is smooth and easy. However, quite often, not everyone will necessarily agree on every artistic idea or decision, and therefore the ensemble must discuss and come to an agreement on how to play the piece they are rehearsing. Each person holds their own musical identity, ideas and beliefs, and each person has their own ego. In a performing industry that is measured so heavily by quality, and competition to be the best, working together often involves working with or against one’s own and each other’s egos. According to Goleman (1998), if disagreements become emotionally loaded, the quality of decision making suffers. When the amygdala hijacks, conflicts and emotional static interfere with the group’s ability to plan, decide and learn together. In contrast, a debate free of bad feeling, carried with positive spirit, mutual inquiry and shared concern instead of self-interest will lead to the best decisions (309).

Successful collaboration and problem solving within a group dynamic will always involve emotional competencies such as self-awareness, empathy, and communication (309). Being able to balance all these variable aspects of working with others, requires a high level of emotional intelligence to navigate the collaborative map. Collaborative skills require each person to have as much attention to musical decision making as they do to their relationships with each person in the group. To keep discussion flowing and decision making cohesive within the rehearsal environment it is important to promote a cooperative climate that allows everyone to feel comfortable to voice their ideas and opinions. Nurturing the successful mechanisms of the group mind demands emotional intelligence. Individual intellect and talent alone will not make people great team members (Goleman 1998, 285). A key metric to working well with others is being able to empathetically communicate with each other. Understanding what another person’s idea is and why they want to play something a certain way, always involves trying to put yourself in their shoes and see it from their perspective. Having good knowledge of the full score and their part alongside your own can also help understand their perspective. Comparing their view to yours, it is possible to then find common ground between two different ideas.

When working well with others it is important to always keep an open mind to try something differently, and in doing trying new ideas and evaluating what worked best. It is very similar to an individual’s deliberate practice routine that involves trying new things to see what works and what doesn’t. Attaining other perspectives and trying new ideas also
feeds creativity and inspiration, and you never know when a new idea could change or challenge your own ideas in a positive and motivating way.

It’s also important to remember that you are all there working together for the same reason which is to work towards building a great performance. From this starting point, it is much easier to try different perspectives in rehearsal to see if there is something that works.

But what happens when there is a fundamental disagreement in creative decision making within the group? One way to approach this could be to try the two or more opposing views to see which one works best and which one the group as a whole prefers. It helps to remember that if you want to play something your way but others in the ensemble wish to play it differently, unless the ensemble agree then it won’t matter which way you choose to play, cohesion will be lost and the common goal of performing well as an ensemble cannot be attained. If each person in an ensemble approaches working together as firstly, bringing their own best playing qualities to the group and secondly, helping others in the group bring out their best playing qualities, this will have a profoundly positive effect on the success of the ensemble to perform at their highest level.

To demonstrate a successful application of emotional intelligence in ensemble music making, I will use the example of a recently recorded performance of Brahms’ famous Clarinet Trio, performed by myself and two of my friends and colleagues, Jakob Westh (piano) and Tobias Lautrup (Cello). (Please see attached media: link Brahms Clarinet Trio).

What makes this a successful application of EQ in ensemble music making is not only measuring the quality of the performance, but also the collaborative process and the group dynamics that made it so enjoyable and satisfying to work together. All three performers including myself were very happy with the outcome of the performance and we all felt a level of achievement, pride and enjoyment from working together. Above anything, working together was inspiring and motivating, and performing well was the reward.

I asked cellist Tobias Lautrup (TL) a set of questions to gain more insight of his opinion of the Brahms Clarinet Trio, and his creative process behind preparing and working on the piece:
What do you enjoy most about playing chamber music with others?

*TL: The common state of mind you can achieve. And the execution of a piece, where you can be inspired or feel inspired. That exact moment where you create something special, a moment of beauty, sorrow or a third feeling - and you maybe even can tell the audience feels it too - that's definitely something that keeps me going.*

Why do you love the Brahms trio?

*TL: First of all because it's composed by Brahms. One of the greatest, if not the greatest romantic composer of all time. But trio is probably my favorite set-up for chamber music. Two equal voices and the piano creating the setting or interfering. That said, clarinet and cello is a great combination. Even Brahms would agree on that.*

What are aspects of the trio that make it so enjoyable to play?

*TL: Probably the difficulty. None of the parts are really easy to play, but if all three succeed, you get it ten times back, because it's such a masterpiece!*

What are aspects of the trio that make it challenging?

*TL: Probably to make it sound super easy and elegant.*

How do you approach working with other musicians, especially in a situation where you might have different or opposing ideas?

*TL: Always with an open mind. I'm not the kind of musician that knows exactly what I want before we start playing. It's never really planned. So I'm always ready to step out of my comfort zone, more or less, if it's intentional. Three things matter, though. Sound quality, intonation and responsiveness. Then everything is possible. (Tobias Lautrup, email to Author, 14 March 2022)*

What is evident in the answers from Tobias, is a clear demonstration of his desire to connect with his colleagues and the audience. Tobias signals the expression of emotion in music as a key motivator for his passion towards music and music making. He shows his
motivation is derived not only from himself, and his abilities as a musician, but to also draw inspiration from the musicians he collaborates with. Tobias brings a set of prerequisites (sound quality, intonation, responsiveness) which he sees as fundamental expectations on which a collaborative process can be built. In keeping open minded to creative ideas, he allows himself to be flexible and adaptive to new ideas and different ways to convey emotional qualities in the music to the audience.

If one of us in the group has a particular idea of phrasing in a section of the music, we can feel very comfortable voicing an idea knowing the other two in the trio will listen and genuinely consider it with interest and curiosity. Consider the fact as well that the three of us also come from completely different backgrounds. Jakob, now in his sixties, has already enjoyed an incredibly diverse musical career dedicated to chamber music, he has played the Brahms Trio many times with many different musicians. Tobias and I are younger in our thirties and, whilst we have both also gained a wealth of experience during our careers so far, there is a wisdom and maturity that Jakob offers which is very special when working with him. It is the different experiences, wisdom and imagination from each of us that can create such unique performances and interpretations of pieces such as the Brahms Clarinet Trio that have been played thousands of times over hundreds of years. More importantly, the willingness to understand why a colleague or ensemble member suggests playing something a particular way is what develops deeper collaborative skills and group connection, which in turn reflects the high level of emotional intelligence required to work together so successfully.
CONCLUSION

This paper sets out to discover how emotional intelligence can be applied to multiple areas of music making from the individual to the ensemble. In a field such as Music, whereby subjectively based decision making and emotional values are of huge importance and necessity to one's professional success, emotional intelligence plays a vital role in how musicians work and how they achieve the success they strive for. Through my own experiences with performance anxiety, practise, performance preparation and working with others in an ensemble setting I have not only learnt that emotional intelligence plays an important role in all these areas, I have also learnt how to apply emotional intelligence to these aspects of music making. The exploration and application of these aspects has therefore result in the sounding part of this paper. I hope the listener can observe that the recording demonstrates correct applications of emotional intelligence through the whole preparatory process from; individual practise, working with others in an ensemble, and finally managing performance anxiety to ultimately produce the best possible performance outcome. Looking back upon this process learning and understanding how to apply emotional intelligence to my own working habits, I have discovered and acquired many new tools which I will use as I further develop my skills as a professional musician. I believe emotional intelligence will continue to guide my artistic decision making and further enable me to develop as a professional musician in a complex, competitive and demanding industry. It is important for all musicians to find the correct tools and methods to allow them to be the best musicians they can be.
REFERENCES


- Salovey, Peter, and John Mayer. 1990. “Emotional Intelligence.” *Imagination, Cognition and Personality* 9, no. 3 (March): 185-211. 10.2190/DUGG-P24E-52WK-6CDG.