

Music Practice Decoded
The psychology of getting brilliant in music

By Agnieszka Bialek
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Introduction

In order to become an expert musician, effective practice is absolutely essential. The knowledge about good practice and the ability to instill in others habits necessary for improving their musical skills are also what instrumental and vocal teachers need in order to successfully help their students in the striving for improvement and mastery in this domain. Yet, what is usually understood as practice by classical musicians – a solitary activity, during which one spends a few hours every day in a practice room, refining technique, learning new repertoire and trying out various interpretive options – even if done effectively, gives no guarantee for optimal results. Why? It simply ignores the psychological aspects of how people get better.

Up until now, sport seems to have been the field where the knowledge concerning psychological aspects of effective training was applied on equal terms with what is known about physical training. Mental training and a few other methods which recognize the value of psychological training, for example the Inner Game, were first used by sportspeople and later adapted by musicians because of numerous similarities between these domains. Although it does not mean that music and sport are identical, it does open musicians' eyes to the fact that spending hours in a practice room is only a one-sided, limited approach towards achieving their goals.

Music is an art form. It is based on mastering certain motions, but these motions are only a means that enables one to create something more – interpretations which express emotions and tell stories hidden between the notes. Whereas there are some sport disciplines which combine physical mastery with art, such as figure skating or artistic gymnastics, most of them aim at victory over one's opponents by being faster or stronger. Such goals are significantly clearer and less complex than what musicians learn to manage on a daily basis. This alone is an indication that working solely on one's physical skills in the domain of music cannot be sufficient.

This book focuses on the psychological aspects of effective music practice, as these – usually not perceived as elements of musical training – turn out to be crucial to one's successful development in any domain. What one believes about oneself, one's abilities and talents, or about one's own achievements exerts influence on one's efforts to get better at anything. The thoughts and emotions, the inner dialogue and the ability to stay concentrated are also relevant for the outcomes of one's 'training'. How one experiences practice, how enjoyable and involving it is, is a further element that can and should be shaped accordingly to one's needs, as it can affect one's actions in an advantageous or harmful way. Since such psychological factors function similarly across different domains, it can be inferred that they can be learned about and beneficially used by all musicians – regardless of what their instrument is. Voice can be perceived as an instrument used by singers and for this reason there is no differentiation between an instrumentalist and a vocalist in this book. Whenever 'playing', 'instrumental lesson', etc. are mentioned, singing and vocal practice are automatically meant as well.

Another terminological issue is the use of the word 'performance' in this book. More often than not it does not refer to the activity of playing a concert. It means rather 'how well a person does an activity'. Only when synonymous words or phrases, such as 'concert' or 'public performance', are used in a certain fragment does the word 'performance' appear in a similar meaning as well. This should contribute to greater clarity of the text.

Music Practice Decoded synthesizes literature from a few interrelated disciplines – general psychology, music psychology, and sport psychology. Other useful sources of information were: books written by musicians on music practice, as well as publications from the field of coaching, self-coaching, and popular psychology.

Chapter 1 discusses various kinds of music practice, such as deliberate, physical, and mental practice. It also gives evidence for the need of a wider view on musical training, based on research conducted by sport and music psychologists.

Chapter 2 focuses on motivation and its role for musicians and music students. Described here are two phases of motivation – ignition and drive – as well as seven fundamental elements, which clarify how one can become and stay motivated. Furtherly, differences between internal and external, and between autonomous and controlled motivation are explained. Practical methods of improving one's own and one's students' motivation close this chapter.

The subject of Chapter 3 is the quality of the experience of practice. The phenomenon of the flow state and its occurrence in music practice are discussed, as well as ways of achieving it on purpose. There are also explanations for why the quality of the practice experience is worth one's attention.

Chapter 4 is the longest, as it discusses the complex matter of how one's way of thinking affects one's music practice. It focuses on three fields: beliefs, thoughts, and optimism. The reader finds here information on what beliefs are, on their origin and different kinds, which refer to one's notions of success and failure, to one's own abilities or to oneself as a person. A specific sort of belief called 'mindset' is also described in this chapter. Practical advice on how to change one's beliefs for more advantageous ones is also included. When it comes to thinking, discussed are relations between thoughts, emotions, states of mind, language – also appearing as an 'inner voice' called 'self-talk' – and music practice. Posture and breathing, and how they affect the mentioned matters, are also described here. As for optimism, it closes this chapter, because it can be seen as a combination of the two other fields – 'beliefs' and 'thoughts'. Characteristics of optimists and pessimists are described here, why optimism is of the utmost importance for musicians, how to become more optimistic and finally how to use positivity in one's practice.

Chapter 5 discusses awareness and attention and how they are the key elements of a change towards more effective practice, which is founded on conscious and specific inclusion of the psychological elements described earlier: motivation, flow, beliefs, thoughts, and optimism. It gives information on how to become more aware and attentive, as well as how one can benefit from these improved abilities as a teacher.

1. Music practice is more than it seems

1.1. Various kinds of music practice

Deliberate practice

Acquiring and mastering the complex skill of playing an instrument is a long, challenging process. In order to become a professional musician one needs many hours of practice, and research has suggested that this number amounts to roughly ten thousand.

In 1993, Anders Ericsson and his colleagues presented data from several studies of people who had achieved mastery in various fields, including music. Ten thousand hours seemed the necessary amount of training time so as to reach the level of expert performance in any skill. Defined was not only the mere quantity of practice, but also its quality – in other words not just the number of hours spent on playing the instrument, but rather what is called 'deliberate practice'.

Sometimes also referred to as 'deep practice', it is goal-oriented, effortful, and structured. It seems to be the kind of practice most common among advanced classical music students, although it should be noted that many excellent non-classical musicians seem to refrain from practicing this way.

Putting in 10,000 hours to reach any bigger goal requires a lot more than just hard work. Without patience, perseverance, motivation, as well as cognitive skills deliberate practice could not exist. What is more, Ericsson stresses that deliberate practice is not always enjoyable, which means one has to learn to cope with frustration and challenges that are likely to appear every now and again.

Therefore it becomes clear that effective practice is not only a matter of hours put in refining technique in a focused, organized way. Time spent on deep practice is only one of the important factors on the way to professional musicianship and it is not a warrant of success.

Since Ericsson first published results of the research on deliberate practice, the phenomenon of the 10,000-hour rule has inspired numerous books whose aim was to convince readers they can become experts in nearly whatever they want if they start working hard. Having for the motto “Practice, practice, practice,” they either present deliberate practice as the sole means necessary to achieve mastery in anything or overemphasize its role in becoming an expert, showing other elements as supplements without greater meaning for ultimate outcome if one does not invest the mentioned amount of time in proper training.

However, research shows that there can be considerable differences in the time spent on deliberate practice between individuals who perform at the same level. David Hambrick and his colleagues have tested the 10,000-hour rule in music and chess – the two most studied domains in expertise research. They found that “[o]n average across studies, deliberate practice explained about 30% of the reliable variance in music performance, leaving about 70% unexplained (...),”¹ which means that other factors, for example the individual's intelligence, personality, or the age at which one started learning a complex skill are likely to contribute considerably to the level of skill attained. Further research in this area is still required. What is clear though, is the fact that deliberate practice does not suffice to explain why somebody becomes an expert and somebody else does not. Talent may be overrated, but so is deliberate practice.

Physical and mental practice

Playing exercises for technique, practicing scales and arpeggios, and learning increasingly complex pieces – in short, physical practice – is what classical musicians usually concentrate on to get better. However, this is not the only way to improve one's skills. One does not have to always actually do

something to refine an activity – experiments have proved that performance, regardless of domain, can improve as a result of both physical and mental practice.

There appear to be three essential elements apparent in successful performance: technical competence, physical health and mental health. Physical practice concentrates on the first two, if one considers what musicians do outside practice room in order to stay fit and healthy as part of their practice. However, once an individual reaches a certain level of skill, it is one's mental skills, or rather the influence of one's mental health, that start making the difference.

The impact of mental health on performance has been researched by sports psychologists since the 1950s. The discipline of sport psychology focuses on exploring the psychological processes that influence the interaction of mind and body. A better understanding of these processes helps to develop performers who are mentally resilient and thus achieve their full potential. Mental factors are claimed to be responsible for 50 to 95 per cent of success, whereas 'the difference that makes the difference' is even 99 per cent psychological.

From sport psychology has evolved mental skills training, which is a method of building mental toughness and resilience that lead to optimal and stable levels of performance.

A mentally resilient person is highly motivated, resolute and determined to succeed, and self-directed towards success. He or she is able to control his or her emotions, to control and be fully responsible for his or her actions, as well as to control and maintain the necessary level of energy. Being completely positive yet realistic about him- or herself, such an individual views pressure as a challenge and stays calm, relaxed and concentrated even in stressful situations. Also characteristic of a mentally tough person are self-confidence and incapability of being compromised.

By developing strategies in three areas – breathing, relaxation and visualization – one can minimize any mental interference, such as negative thinking or feelings of being overwhelmed, reprogram one's body and mind and perform one's tasks at a consistently high level. “Achieving consistent performance is not about working harder, practicing for longer or exposing yourself to an increasing number of concerts, auditions or competitions; rather it is about developing the mental toughness which will enable you to be a more resilient performer.”²

Mental practice can be a helpful tool, especially considering that Western musicians are often introverted, anxious, and sensitive, which is partly a result of the usual kind of practice they choose – solitary and physical.

Breathing, relaxation, and visualization can be used in many different ways to achieve positive results, but the technique of mental rehearsal is probably the most important one for a performing musician. By using various senses – the visual for seeing, the aural for hearing, the kinaesthetic for feeling and touch – one can create or recreate vividly in one's own imagination an experience similar to an actual physical event. This consists in watching oneself on a mental movie screen doing something that has a specific outcome, for instance, preparing for a concert, or learning new repertoire. Mental rehearsal works, because the same neural pathways are used when both performing an action and only imagining it.

To learn and develop mental skills, one needs to practice them regularly and view them as a long-term commitment. A personalized mental skills regime integrated into physical practice routine is the most likely to bring optimal improvements.

1.2. Wider view on practice

How one defines practice is of great importance. Sometimes it is seen as a process of learning the right kind of motions, achieved by repeating an activity with purposeful awareness and with the

intention of accomplishing a specific goal. It can also be understood as searching for optimal solutions that help one to master motions necessary to play music. Whereas these two definitions focus on the technical aspect of practice, Yehudi Menuhin describes it as “a refined art that partakes of intuition, of inspiration, patience, elegance, clarity, balance, and, above all, the search for ever greater joy in movement and expression.”³ So, what is practice?

It turns out that research on music practice has thus far focused exclusively on Western classical music, which is a rather limited field. Similarly limited therefore seems the common notion of what music training really is. There are no studies that specifically examine how jazz and punk rock musicians get better, how hip-hop artists, didgeridoo players or singer-songwriters practice. It seems necessary to expand the understanding of how musicians develop to all music genres and all possible kinds of music-making. “[L]imiting our exploration of practice to Western classical music is like assuming that all plants will grow in any climate.”⁴

Therefore it is clear that deliberate practice, even if complemented by mental skills training, still does not warrant playing to one's full potential. In fact, many non-classical musicians claim they do not practice at all. How is that possible, if they are actually excellent performers, experts in what they do? It appears that the word 'practice' is not only automatically associated with what is close to deliberate practice, but is also seen as a compulsory and unpleasant activity. For this reason it is advisable to either replace the word with another one – to put oneself in a more positive frame of mind – or consider practice in a significantly wider context. “Think of every musical experience as a kind of practice. If you do, you'll find a kind of all-encompassing focus that will help you get better. Practice is a way of life, not an activity you do for a certain amount of time every day,”⁵ writes Jonathan Harnum. If practice is a way of life, what makes it really effective, apart from clever physical and mental practice in suitable amount? It appears that there are some psychological aspects which are vital to how successful one is, and perceiving them as part of effective practice can make a huge difference to one's development.

1.3. Personal characteristics of developing excellence

In 1980s, the researchers Terry Orlick and John Partington noticed that there are some features and skills which expert performers have in common. The first list of what in psychological literature is referred to as 'personal characteristics of developing excellence' – abbreviated as PCDEs – contained: goal setting, realistic performance evaluation, imagery, commitment, quality practice, coping with pressure, and motivation.

Further studies followed, confirming that there are certain 'success factors' which distinguish successful performers from their less successful colleagues in various performance domains – for example, high level of commitment, long- and short-term goals, use of imagery, focus, and pre- and in-competition planning. In addition, research in the field of music has shown that the same psychological skills are crucial for elite performance and effective development of both classical and non-classical musicians.

A recent study on PCDEs carried out with 14-, 16- and 18-years-old participants has led to a more exact and detailed identification of the elements facilitating effective development of musicians. The elements has been divided into eight categories, which include all seven items from the Orlick's and Partington's list as well as a new one – social skills.

Motivation

The study distinguishes between external and internal form of motivation. Being pushed by others to achieve, and motivation to gain recognition and praise are subjects of external motivation, whereas confidence coming with improvements, love of playing, and perceiving music as part of

one's identity express internal motivation.

Commitment

Sacrifices needed to succeed – more exactly, sacrifices made for music – and discipline are two main characteristics of commitment. Here such skills as self-discipline and learning to say 'no' are crucial for a musician's successful development.

Setting goals

In this category, there is a distinction between following teacher-set goals and self-set goals. Practice and learning driven by teachers, and following externally set goals are complemented by: having clear targets, setting process goals for motivation, and other goals that guide practice.

Imagery

Imagery can be a source of confidence as well as a type of mental practice which consists of such elements as imagery used to learn new skills, imagery used to prepare for practice, and imagery used to rehearse music.

Realistic performance evaluation

Realistic performance evaluation is based on the ability to accurately self-evaluate performance, which furtherly requires self-criticism and realistic evaluation of what is achievable. This needs to be compounded with awareness of what is needed to succeed. Musicians who develop most effectively in their domain are not only aware of the amount of practice needed, skills needed to succeed and high standards demanded, but also understand what their next steps should be.

Quality practice

Requisite amounts of highly intensive practice bring about the best quality when paired with the skill of controlling distractions during practice. Since lack of focus impedes progress, a musician's ability to consciously direct focus on solely music and improvement while managing distracting interference is necessary to achieve optimal results.

Coping with pressure

In order to cope with pressure successfully the ability to balance commitments is essential. It means one can harmoniously manage many different musical obligations, as well as create balance between music and other areas of one's life – be it school, studies, or social life. In addition, it is important to cope with nerves and be capable of regulating them in stressful situations. Organizational skills – structured routines and schedules, time management, the ability to prioritize, anticipation of what lies ahead, and planning skills – are also part of 'pressure management'.

Social skills

Networking and the ability to get on with others are what the recently added category of PCDEs is based on. It turns out that communication skills, social skills, the ability to fit into different environments, networking skills, setting up performance opportunities and gaining trust in performance environments all contribute towards the musical growth of a musician.

This list makes clear that in the domain of music many non-musical activities – including those that the improving musician might not recognize as being important – are as intrinsic to development as what one plays during a practice session. Since optimal development is not reserved for merely the best performers, even if a person sees playing an instrument as a hobby, being aware of these psychological elements might contribute to more effective and, as a result, more enjoyable practice.

The literature on expertise and skill learning in various domains also presents some characteristics of effective practice, similar to those listed above. Such skills as concentration, setting clear goals, evaluating progress, using strategies flexibly, and looking for the big picture are, however, complex

and cannot be developed without unusual motivation. This is why motivation is the subject of the next chapter.

2. Practice and motivation

2.1. On motivation in music practice – for beginners and veterans

Motivation as the key to success

It seems that there is one key thing that enables people to do anything it takes to master a complex skill, and it is same for every possible field. Motivation – the vital element – is mentioned in literally every book concerning learning, achieving mastery, music practice, or mental training. Even those authors who claim that 10,000 hours of deliberate practice is all one needs to attain mastery agree that achieving expertise without motivation is impossible. “[C]locking up thousands of hours of purposeful practice ultimately determines how far we make it along the path to excellence: but it is only those who care about the destination, whose motivation (...) is 'internalized' who are ever going to get there.”⁶ After all, who would like to devote so much time for learning something that has no meaning, no deeper value to him or her?

From this the main functions of motivation can be discerned: it inspires the individual at the beginning of his or her way to mastery, and then drives the person to continue working on the chosen skill with persistence for a longer period of time; one of synonyms for 'motivation' is therefore 'drive'.

Ignition

The initial part of the motivational process is referred to as 'ignition'. At this stage an individual's identity becomes connected to a long-term vision of his or her future. When a person realizes who he or she wants to be, significant amounts of unconscious energy are triggered, and so begins the whole process.

Seemingly simple, ignition is often rather mysterious, even for those who actually became motivated to learn a particular skill at some point of their lives. Short descriptions of this phenomenon, such as “sparks” or “sudden detonations of psychic energy that fire us off in new and unforeseen directions,”⁷ suggest that ignition happens rather quickly and an individual does not have much influence on how or when it happens, or what the new direction is.

However, something different than that is implied when the initial stage of motivation is considered more thoroughly – it appears that to a certain degree an individual does have an influence on his or her own ignition, as well as what might contribute to other people's motivation. Discovering one's own Element – “the meeting point between natural aptitude and personal passion”⁸ - is a moment when a person experiences ignition. By finding what one loves and can become good at with relative ease, one gets naturally motivated to passionately engage in the activity. What is more, one can find one's Element(s) by creating opportunities to experience various things and to meet people who already found their special field. “Aptitudes don't necessarily become obvious unless there are opportunities to use them,”⁹ writes Robinson. “A lot depends on the opportunities we have, on the opportunities we create, and how and if we take them.”¹⁰

This would mean that to a certain degree one does have an influence on ignition, not only for oneself, but also for other people. Advanced musicians might therefore help their students to find their Element(s) in the domain of music. It is still the young people's choice what they will do with the opportunities they have, but nevertheless, creating such opportunities for finding a thing the students might become truly passionate about seems to be one of the most important functions that a teacher can have. There is more information on practical use of this knowledge on ignition in the

last part of this chapter.

Drive – on staying motivated

Once the individual has experienced ignition and started working on something, motivation is still crucial for him or her to persevere on the long and challenging way to mastery and success.

Motivation appears to be a process rather than a never-changing phenomenon – it can fade away with time, or become stronger or weaker. It is like a pet who needs care in order to grow and develop normally. Jonathan Harnum quotes in his book the motivational speaker, Zig Ziglar: “People often say that motivation doesn't last. Well, neither does bathing – that's why we recommend it daily.”¹¹ Constant renewing, restoring, and refreshing one's motivation seems to be a must.

Motivation can be compared to an engine that drives an individual's musical growth. Without the ability to sustain motivation for many hours of practice, succeeding in music would be impossible. “For you to excel today and tomorrow, you need strategies that fuel both internal and external motivation,”¹² writes Gerhard Klickstein, making it clear that maintaining motivation needs the individual's active involvement. Although it might seem that motivation just 'is' or 'is not', and that it cannot be controlled, there is a lot of evidence for the opposite. The individual can exert influence on his or her motivation levels, and the following parts of this chapter show how this is possible.

2.2. Elements of motivation

Motivation has its roots in, is built upon and developed as the synthesis of numerous elements. It is a complex process and as a result of this only the most basic and important of those items are presented in Chapter 2. As motivation is so vital, this subject also appears with varying frequency in later chapters where it is strongly linked to a specific matter, such as flow or optimism.

The basic elements of motivation described here are: vision, meaning, goals, attitude, mindset, support, and autonomy.

Vision

What one needs for having motivation is a dream, a vision. A dream gives the individual direction. “Without a dream one is only drifting,”¹³ writes D. C. Gonzalez, who encourages the use of a mental technique called 'Imagineering' to create a powerful vision of what one is going to achieve, or who one is going to become. Whatever the individual's vision may be, he or she should return to it repeatedly in order to make it stronger and so build the confidence that this dream is achievable. “You need to see it [the vision] and feel it, vividly, in your mind's eye, and not just occasionally,”¹⁴ Gonzalez advises the reader. “Learn to often reinforce your vision of where you hope to be in a few years' time – and then work towards achieving it.”¹⁵

Among the '7 Habits of Highly Effective People' Stephen Covey lists the following one: 'Begin with the End in Mind'. Being busy while having no clear vision can sometimes feel like climbing a ladder which might turn out to be leaning against the wrong wall. All hard work can then appear pointless to the individual and discourage the person from further efforts. In order to avoid that one could, for example, develop and write down a 'personal mission statement' which focuses on what one wants to be and what they want to do, summarizing one's principles and values.

However, it is important to remember that goals, ambitions and priorities are not stable, but usually

change over the years. Therefore it is advisable for musicians to periodically re-examine their fundamental drive in order to evaluate whether their efforts are worthwhile. Also when working on removing obstacles to achieving success in their domain they should ask themselves the question 'Why are you in music?' to better understand the true reason for their actions.

To sum up, having a vision not only helps to maintain high levels of motivation, but also ensures that one invests energy into what one really needs to do in order to achieve the desired results.

Meaning

Meaning is a matter closely related to vision. One is more likely to devote thousands of hours of practice and considerable amounts of attention to the values which give one's life a meaning. They are usually about more than how individuals themselves benefit from developing a certain skill.

It is advisable for a musician to ask him- or herself the question 'How meaningful is your work?' and consider the larger purpose of music. Since today's culture focuses mostly on status, materialism and celebrity, musicians can easily feel marginalized. That is why clarifying the value and purpose of music in society is vital to anyone planning to devote his or her life to music.

Looking at the link between musical excellence and social engagement in more detail, it appears that an artist who is concerned only about his or her own talent, aptitude and passion can easily become trapped in a bubble created by this kind of self-referential mentality. In contrast, projects such as West-Eastern Divan Orchestra, created by the conductor Daniel Barenboim and academic Edward Said, show how an artist can engage in a community and look for shared social, cultural and artistic meaning within a wider context. The mentioned symphony orchestra unites young people from several countries of the Middle East, being a 'template for democracy' while at the same time providing a deeply inspiring musical environment. Although passion by itself will not produce quality, it is absolutely essential for igniting the spark in others. It can create the conditions for other people's creativity to develop and provide inspiration which will encourage others to participate in a creative process that matters to them. Sharing one's passion seems to be deeply rewarding and motivating, which makes the work of music teachers or mentors especially invaluable for both the teacher and the student.

Mentors play a vital role in helping others to find their Element(s). By recognizing interests of an individual, they help him or her to find those components of the specific discipline that resonate with the individual's aptitude and passion. By reminding individuals of the skills they already possess, and of what can be achieved if they continue to work, mentors can encourage them to persevere and believe in their success. By offering the individual advice and techniques, by sharing their knowledge and experience, and by helping to learn and recover from mistakes, mentors facilitate the process of development. They also push the individual past the perceived limits and so ensure that he or she stretches constantly. Whereas recognition, encouragement, facilitating and stretching are four main functions that mentors have, it is possible that a mentor serves only one or some of these roles, not necessarily all of them. This way advanced musicians can contribute meaningfully to development of their students, even if they focus on only one of these elements.

Moreover, working towards mastery turns out to be most successful when done “in the service of some greater objective,”¹⁶ influencing in an especially beneficial way the individual's motivation, productivity and satisfaction. Choosing a cause larger than oneself is a powerful motivational factor. As the positive psychology researcher Martin Seligman writes, an essential element of meaning is attachment to something larger, and the larger the entity to which the individual can attach him- or herself, the more meaning in the person's life. This is strongly linked to the mentioned questions: 'Why are you in music?' and 'How meaningful is your work?'. Finding the core reason for being a musician might help to realize that one's work is truly meaningful – not only in the context of the music school or specific local community that the individual reaches on a daily basis, but in a wider context as well.

Goals

When an individual has a clear long-term vision for their own musical future, it is time for them to start planning the steps on the way to fulfilling their dream. “Goals represent (...) dreams along a timeline,”¹⁷ they are “desires with a deadline.”¹⁸ Visions, or ultimate goals, as Harnum calls them, often need many years if not a lifetime to be achieved. They are too broad to be truly helpful in planning the individual's everyday efforts, which should bring him or her closer to the dream. For this reason one needs to find long-term, mid-term, and short-term goals. The closer a goal gets to the present moment, the more concrete it becomes, and the easier it is for the individual to know exactly what one has to do to make it happen.

Following the classification given by Harnum, long-term goals are 2 to 5 years away, mid-term goals – a few months or a year, and short-term goals lie in the near future, defined as a week away. Only short-term goals can make it clear, what one's everyday actions should be, as they are relatively easy to imagine and plan properly. However, they still can and should be split into smaller goals, which are even easier to deal with and give structure to music practice during even a single session.

Apart from being classified according to time limits, goals can also be extrinsic or intrinsic, taking roots in two widely recognized sorts of motivation that are described more thoroughly in Chapter 2.3.

Intrinsic goals tend to be perceived as the more important ones for motivation, and not without a reason. In a study carried out 2007 with 129 music, dance and acting conservatory students, Natalie Lacaille, Richard Koestner and Patrick Gaudreau examined the influence of various goals on the participants' end-of-year public performances. Performing for the mere sake of following an activity that one enjoys, or in order to communicate with others, or express emotions which one finds in a piece of music led to a more successful performance, whereas traditional achievement goals turned out to be linked to increased anxiety during performance, poorer results, higher levels of intention to quit the discipline and lower life satisfaction. Under the term 'achievement goals' the researchers understand two main types of goals: those focusing on normative competence, linked to so-called 'performance orientation', and those focusing on absolute competence, linked to 'mastery orientation'. Performance goals can be further subdivided into those aimed at attaining success, also called 'performance-approach goals', and those whose aim is to avoid failure – 'performance-avoidance goals'.

Earlier studies in the field of education revealed that both mastery and performance-approach goals were helpful to students in exam situations, while only performance-avoidance goals had a clearly detrimental effect on students' results. At first it was assumed that the relation between goals and performance was similar in other domains, but a 2005 study examined the relation of mastery, performance and intrinsic goals to both peak and catastrophic experiences in music and sport, showing considerable differences. The 2007 study which focused on performing artists confirmed results of the previous study, with findings standing somewhat in contrast to those in the educational and athletic domains. It gives a clear evidence that intrinsic goals associated with aesthetic expression and enjoyment are beneficial for learning and performing in the domain of music. “It seems that goals such as 'Show others how good one is', 'Do well relative to others' and 'Impress people attending the event' put extra pressure on the artists who are already facing high expectations,”¹⁹ explain Lacaille and colleagues. “Goals such as 'live a memorable moment', 'communicate the essence of the work with the public', 'feel absorbed in the experience' appear to be those that foster the most adaptive responses to the public performance context.”²⁰

Interestingly, mastery goals did not affect the performance in the study, although they were those most highly endorsed by performing artists. The researchers speculate that mastery goals are vital during deliberate practice and rehearsals.

How is all this related to music practice, though? If one sees performance as a final product of practice – not just physical or deliberate practice, but practice in the wider context, inclusive of mental practice and all possible activities that may influence one's developments in this domain – it is self-evidential that intrinsic goals should be present already during the learning process. One cannot focus only on fingerings, technique and playing in the right tempo during practice, and then expect that on stage his or her main goal will be to enjoy the music or express its meaning. Whatever people practice, they become better at it – that is why the desired habits, also mental ones, should be trained on a regular basis. In case of intrinsic goals it seems that they need to be given more attention in artistic performance domains than thus far. This would automatically lead to a decrease of achievement goals and the 'side effects' they have on performing artists.

Also in the theory of flow intrinsic goals are said to play a vital role in achieving this state of undivided attention. Engaging in such an activity requires that one is ready to abandon thinking about deadlines or extrinsic goals for the time of being engaged in the pursued activity. “[I]t is when we act freely, for the sake of the action itself rather than for ulterior motives, that we learn to become more than what we are. When we choose a goal and invest ourselves in it to the limits of our concentration, whatever we do will be enjoyable,”²¹ explains Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi. What is worth mentioning is that such intrinsic goals work best when they are also realistic and challenging. The reader can learn more about flow in relation to music practice in Chapter 3.

As the described earlier study suggests, pursuing intrinsic goals in the first place is not necessarily usual for performing artists. This is reflected also in psychological and pedagogical literature, where only some authors emphasize the need of balancing external and internal motivation and setting goals for both of them for optimal development. Klickstein, for instance, lists 'clarifying goals' as a method of fueling internal motivation, but when writing about ways of improving external motivation, he mentions setting deadlines, booking performances or collaborating – each of the items usually already included in musicians' goals. One can see it either as an inconsequence in the writer's argumentation, or as a proof for complexity of goals, which all appear to be strongly interconnected and therefore difficult to classify.

There is one more way of dividing goals which should appear here. Whereas goals in general are milestones on the way to reaching a vision, it is of the utmost importance to acknowledge that not all of them are equally beneficial. Edward Deci, Richard Ryan and Christopher Niemiec examined the influence of profit goals, representing extrinsic aspirations, and purpose goals, standing for intrinsic aspirations, on post-college graduates. Those participants who focused on profit goals, such as accumulating wealth or winning acclaim, and felt they were achieving them, showed increases in anxiety, depression, and other negative indicators as compared to the time when they were students. In contrast, those who pursued successfully – in their own opinion – purpose goals reported lower levels of anxiety and depression. In addition to that, they observed higher levels of satisfaction and subjective well-being than earlier. This research suggests clearly that having and achieving goals does not warrant positive results. Only right goals can benefit one's efforts.

Knowing already that setting goals successfully is a vital but rather complex matter, the reader finds more practical information on this subject in the last part of this chapter.

Attitude

How people perceive themselves and their circumstances does not remain without consequences for how motivated and, as a result, how successful they are. This personal perspective on all possible matters is known as attitude.

Attitude can be affected by one's character, spirit, sense of self-worth, expectations that other people have of the individual, and many other factors. It also depends largely on what a person expects from him- or herself.

“[A] good attitude can make all the difference,”²² because it is essential to controlling one's mental climate – by creating an expectation of success, a good attitude helps an individual to achieve that control. It also empowers the person to take the necessary actions and concentrate on what must be done. In addition, a good attitude activates optimism and positive energy which always lead to considerably more positive outcomes than negative energy could ever bring about. It is not only about seeing and interpreting reality in a positive way though.

Ken Robinson lists attitudes of high achievers and puts next to optimism: perseverance, self-belief, ambition, and frustration.

The ability to persevere despite obstacles and setbacks is an admirable quality, which can be developed by finding ways to order consciousness and, as a consequence, take control of feelings and thoughts. This shows that attitude has significantly more to do with one's interpretations of what happens than the objective reality. The father of the Alexander Technique, Frederick Mathias Alexander, can be seen as an example of a person whose approach to self-development was based on perseverance, patience and self-acceptance. This approach also helps musicians to develop numerous skills that they need to become inspired, creative performers. Perseverance – along with resiliency and artistic sensitivity – is a necessary ingredient of musical excellence.

Self-belief often begins at the point where an individual consciously interrupts their own negative thought stream and begins to think positively instead. Self-belief is said to improve concentration, lower levels of tension and to further help an individual to perform better. “You must always begin by believing that you have what it takes. When the pressure is on, the more you believe in yourself, the better your performance will be,”²³ writes Gonzalez. Stephen Covey ascribes to self-belief an even greater role: together with willingness to create a life according to one's highest aspirations it is crucial for the individual's end results. “[People] look past the fundamental truth that it is not our external resources that determine our success or failure,”²⁴ he comments, confirming that how a person perceives what happens to them and how he or she chooses to respond to their situation, is more powerful than the reality one has to cope with. Self-belief is described in more detail in Chapter 4.

Ambition and frustration are rather sparsely described in the literature which this book is based on, and are presented there in contrasting ways. Frustration especially, which is mentioned by Robinson among achievement-supporting attitudes, is often criticized by other authors, who concentrate on how to avoid it. Some of them, being proponents of 'process orientation' – an approach which focuses not on the end product of one's efforts but on the way to achieving it – see frustration as a sign of impatience and perfectionism rooted in 'product orientation'. Moments of frustration result then from holding imaginary ideals of how quickly one should master any new endeavor that he or she undertakes. “With a process orientation, when you run into a technical problem in practice, you don't sulk in frustration; instead, you proceed with gusto to unpack the impasse,”²⁵ explains Klickstein. In contrast, Coyle, who focuses on deliberate practice, sees struggle and frustration as indicators of successful progress while learning something. He argues that the brain works similarly to muscles; building new neural connections is as “painful” as building muscle tissue. Deliberate practice – the key to success in his opinion – is characterized by reaching beyond one's current abilities, and this is naturally accompanied by feelings of struggle and frustration.

It is likely that this seeming chaos is a matter of issues of terminology. For instance, determination, or persistence, both closely linked to one another as well as to the earlier discussed terms, are described with greater clarity. Covey compares a determined person to an ant, advising the reader: “Refuse to be stopped. Keep going, make proactive choices, and learn as you go. People who patiently persist finally see their dreams come true.”²⁶ In practical terms this means one should remove obstacles when they appear in order to be able to get back to work. An individual is persistent when he or she uses intelligence, optimism, imagination, curiosity, good habits, etc., and then applies relentless effort. The shortest explanation of how to be persistent could therefore be: “Find a way and continue.”²⁷

Mindset

Whatever one does repeatedly, becomes a habit, and it is not different with thoughts. A person's usual way of thinking and acting is in reality a result of a framework built from their own recurring thoughts and the behavioral responses that they trigger. This framework consists of one's beliefs, also called mindsets.

An individual's beliefs about issues such as intelligence, talent, or mastery turn out to affect fundamentally the person's motivation, behavior, chosen goals and what he or she accomplishes. For example, people with a so called 'blue-collar mindset' keep working on their projects every day, with great perseverance, no matter if they feel like doing the work or not. Such a mindset is beneficial, because it supports productivity, and productivity fuels motivation. The satisfaction which one feels after mastering a new piece, for instance, encourages him or her to invest energy and effort into further work, which again gives some noticeable results and so creates the feeling of satisfaction. This is how a person can maintain drive by abiding to a schedule or a plan.

Another mindset that clearly helps to maintain motivation is the growth mindset. It is based on the belief that one can change and develop through “application and experience.”²⁸ How intelligent or talented a person initially is, what his or her temperament is, and what their own interests or aptitudes are – collectively this does not define the individual's future achievements. They result rather from work on chosen skills. If somebody believes this, he or she is prone to stay motivated and keep practicing with perseverance and passion.

Sometimes just becoming aware of something leads to a positive change. Realizing one's own beliefs and the fact that they can be chosen wisely so as to support the person's development can make a considerable difference. Even more than that, “[s]imply learning about the growth mindset seems to mobilize people for meeting challenges and persevering.”²⁹ As understanding the concept of the growth mindset and its opposite – the fixed mindset – may play an important role in musicians' development, they are described in more detail in Chapter 3.

Support

Parents, teachers, friends, and any groups an individual belongs to can either support or impede one's motivation to start and keep working on a complex skill. How strong these influences are depends on factors such as the individual's age, personality, and the cultural context.

When it comes to parental support, it plays a key role in children's academic achievement and educational aspirations, also being vital for their well-being and motivation. However, teenagers' motivation seems to be affected by the support in their families as well. The difference lies in the ways parents encourage and help their children. There are three kinds of support: behavioral, cognitive/intellectual, and personal.

Whenever parents monitor and participate in the practice of their children, attend instrumental lessons or adopt the role of home teacher, they support the children behaviorally. What they do and how committed to assisting, encouraging and supporting the child they are, determines the success of learning in the early stages considerably more than any specialist knowledge they might have.

For teenage musicians, though, cognitive or intellectual support as well as personal support become increasingly important. The ages of 12 to 18, called sometimes 'the mid-life crisis of young musicians', are the moment when a transition takes place. Firstly, making the decision on whether to acquire or abandon the interest in music is of paramount importance at that time. Secondly, pupils become independent of their parents in relation to instrumental learning. Such a transition is likely to be most successful when a teenager had established a strong and positive relationship with his or her instrumental teacher, takes responsibility for learning without external motivation provided by parents, and yet still remains receptive to their interest. If parents provide the opportunities and

materials that will assist the development of their child's musical intelligence – like arranging instrumental lessons, providing a quality instrument, attending professional concerts with their children, listening to music and discussing it at home – they support the child cognitively/intellectually. Such actions on the part of parents have also been shown to increase teachers' professional satisfaction and benefit the pupil-teacher relationship.

Parental personal support includes encouragement, praise,³⁰ interest and enthusiasm for their children's learning. The key factor here is achieving a balance between care and support for the child's autonomy. Early adolescent children's autonomy, satisfaction, persistence and intrinsic motivation related to their schoolwork have been found to be impaired when parents monitored, enforced or helped with homework in a controlling fashion. This is one of the reasons why autonomy is also described in this chapter.

When it comes to teachers, the whole process of teaching can be perceived as supporting students in all possible kinds and forms. This book, describing effective practice as based on psychological theories and approaches which have been proved to benefit personal and musical development, can be therefore seen as a handbook for instrumental teachers on how to support their students.

An individual often chooses friends and other social groups in order to expand his or her sense of identity, which can therefore result in an intense pressure to conform to the standards and expectations of these people. Groups encourage uniformity of thought and behavior. On the other hand, they validate the common interests of their members and can be immensely supportive. Finding a 'tribe', a group of people who share one's passion and a desire to develop in a certain domain, can be essential to becoming motivated and staying so. Whether as collaborators or competitors, tribe members have a common commitment to the same thing. They can inspire and help one another on the way to mastery in a certain domain, no matter if they share the same vision or have utterly different ones.

However, it turns out that support, advantageous as it is, is not necessary for an individual to maintain motivation. A person can be motivated to pursue music learning to an advanced level without direct supportive intervention on the part of others – even at an early age. Moreover, in various domains there have been found highly effective people whose histories were marked by frustration, deprivation and traumatic experiences. These facts lead further to the last fundamental element of motivation presented in this section.

Autonomy

People seem to learn best when they have actively selected the subject and can control the learning process to a certain extent. The reason for this is the fact that autonomy is a basic human need.⁸⁶ However, one should be careful not to confuse it with independence, because autonomy implies acting with choice – not acting alone or without any help; it is therefore possible to be both autonomous and interdependent. Whereas control, the opposite of autonomy, leads to compliance – effective as a strategy for physical survival but detrimental to one's sense of personal fulfillment, autonomy begets engagement – a quality essential to achieving mastery.

One is most motivated when he or she has autonomy over so called 'four T's': task, time, technique, and team. Deciding on what one does him- or herself, when, how, and with whom he or she collaborates comes down to taking responsibility for one's actions. For example, a student's intentional engagement in practice activities reflects their taking responsibility for their own musical development, which is necessary at a certain stage. For this reason instrumental teachers should give students choices instead of orders and so help them to build a growing reference system where the known can be used as “a jumping-off point for the unknown.”³¹ This way students learn from the beginning that solving problems and improving their skills and performance abilities requires an active engagement on their part. Rather than being passive recipients in a one-sided process, they become the predominant factor in their own musical development – they act in an

autonomous and a naturally motivated way, assisted by teachers.

Autonomy closes the list of the fundamental elements of motivation, following items such as vision, meaning, goals, attitude, mindset, and support. Observing the separate elements of motivation, the essential components, helps one to better understand the whole motivational process. As a result, it is also easier to take steps which ensure that one's motivation keeps thriving and so makes the whole learning process more effective and successful. However, the seven fundamental components of motivation are only the beginning of what one should know about this key element of achievement.

2.3. Internal – external VS autonomous – controlled motivation

Another way of making motivation easier to grasp and finally control accordingly to one's needs is learning about its two types, commonly named: internal / intrinsic and external / extrinsic, as well as a more recent classification, which divides motivation into autonomous and controlled.

Internal and external motivation

The first of the mentioned classifications is based on the notion that motivation can come from different sources. Whenever such sources lie within an individual, his or her motivation is internal; whenever they are a result of circumstances, events, or other people that encourage the person to act in a certain way, they are of the external type.

Balancing internal and external motivation in the domain of music

Internal motivation can be described as the drive to do something because one finds it interesting, challenging, absorbing, or enjoyable. Its roots can also be found in the urge for personal expression as well as achievement. While this kind of motivation is essential especially for high levels of creativity, in the context of mastering an instrument it seems to work best in the long run when in balance with external motivation. “As you tend to your motivation, be mindful to harmonize the two sides,”³² writes Klickstein. Taking too many external obligations may lead to overwork and scarcity of time, which possibly cause together a decrease in internal motivation, while forgetting about external goals may result in a musician's hunger for a creative outlet.

While working on mastering an instrument, one can fuel the internal motivation by clarifying goals, kindling devotion, inspiring him- or herself, mastering basic skills, and being productive.

Goals are described more thoroughly in Chapter 2.2 and 2.4. When it comes to devotion, affirmations can help to keep it at high levels. Positive sentences about the self, 'self-statements', cancel negativity and revive one's enthusiasm. They are also the first step to the beneficial habit of always using positive self-talk. Doing things that inspire a musician should be part of his or her daily routine, no matter if it is listening to recordings, improvising, or attending concerts or festivals. Also caring about one's own overall fitness turns out to be important for creating optimal conditions for feeling inspired. “If your health seeps away, inspiration won't be far behind,”³³ warns Klickstein. As for mastering basic skills, they help an individual to learn and develop successfully and, as a consequence, stay motivated. Choosing suitable material to learn, practicing deeply, and solving problems are fundamental skills which ensure that new musical challenges are within one's reach while also guaranteeing that the work done is uplifting. Internal motivation is also fueled by productivity. Sticking to a plan or a practice schedule can be beneficial especially in situations when one does not feel the burning need to practice. The satisfaction of mastering a new piece or a

difficult passage releases energy that propels a musician forward and so keeps his or her productivity rolling.

For external motivation actions such as booking performances, setting deadlines, collaborating and doing additional music projects without financial reward, have all proved helpful.

Performances are 'unrivalled motivators' because they work like catalysts, giving direction to a musician's creativity and making one's practice become targeted towards a specific purpose. A performance should be both exciting and, even more importantly, within one's capacity so that it has a positive effect; otherwise anxiety will be triggered instead of motivation. Deadlines of all kinds invigorate a person's practice with goals. What is more, when collaborating with others, musicians motivate each other, as preparing one's parts, rehearsing regularly, and molding a team culture require commitment. Being generous as a musician and organizing additional projects without expecting financial reward is another way of fueling external motivation. One's art becomes more relevant in the broader culture if shared with others. Community engagement is followed by personal fulfillment and ongoing motivation, so it might be a good idea to plan concerts in a nursing home or a children's hospital.

The mentioned strategies can encourage one to use effectively both internal and external sources of motivation and help to maintain proper balance. The importance of this harmony between the two kinds of motivation becomes even clearer, when one sees it in the context of the newer classification presented in the next section of this chapter.

Autonomous and controlled motivation

In the 1980s Edward L. Deci and Richard M. Ryan started using a different terminology than the traditional one in reference to motivation. Their change from describing motivation as internal-external towards autonomous-controlled may seem small, but it is a considerable one. Although in a way the new classification is based on the same principle of internal and external sources, it presents them as seen from the viewpoint of a person whose behavior results from these triggers, as opposed to the view of an objective outsider.

What characterizes autonomous motivation is a full sense of volition and choice. In contrast, "controlled motivation involves behaving with the experience of pressure and demand toward specific outcomes."³⁴ Such pressure comes from outside, it is external to the self. This means that both internal and external motivation can be autonomous, as long as actions or behavior rooted in this motivation are chosen autonomously.

Therefore not the mere fact where one's motivation comes from but rather how an individual interprets its sources is crucial for differentiating between the two 'new' kinds. It is not about doing something just because one enjoys the activity versus achieving something specific through one's own actions. It is about what one wants versus what one is made to do without being willing to do it in the first place.

Autonomous motivation has been proved to promote higher productivity, greater levels of psychological well-being, and a lessened risk of burnout. It also helps to understand concepts, to have better grades and be more persistent at school as well as in sporting activities. The importance of autonomy for an individual's motivation is described more thoroughly in Chapter 2.2.