How Students Incorporate the Ubiquitous Access

Of Online Video Resources in Practice Sessions

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Abstract

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Becoming an instrumental musician may be thought of as a process of both instruction and self-learning. The student’s responsibility, in the vast majority of the time a student is without a teacher, is to implement teachings into their playing. In music, this is mainly implemented in the practice room. Much of the job of a teacher then is to teach a student how to teach themselves (Tuckwell, 2002). The choices made by the student (with and without the guidance from a teacher) contribute to the student’s development. The hours students spend in the practice room, digesting information from their teacher, forming their own understanding, and developing a refined musical ideas is how students grow in their musical endeavors.

The relationship between student and teacher has been thoroughly researched (Baker, 1981; Bruscia, 1989; Draves, 2008; Miksza & Tan, 2015; Paterson, 2007; Schenkman, 1983; Serra-Dawa, 2014) and history’s most prolific teachers have been the interest of books, studies, and legends. In the world of brass playing, decades after one has established themselves as a professional, performers will still be referred to as belonging to a specific school of playing, or a student of a famous pedagogue (Bloss, 2014; Pritchard, 1992; Wick, 1996). This pedagogical lineage has been the topic of interest to many scholars across the musical world, and the influence of a teacher is without a doubt paramount to our discipline. But not overlooked is how the student learns their craft.

In musical development, listening to oneself critically is important in improving one’s playing (Barry, 2007; Hewitt, 2001; Puopolo, 1971; Schmidt, 2005, 2007; Woody, 1999, 2002). Students develop their listening skills by taking aural skill courses, listening to recordings, attending to concerts, and performing in ensembles, all in the hopes of developing a “good ear.” Having a “good ear” may refer to both the ability to hear chord types and harmonies, but also the ability to critically articulate the musical and technical aspects of a performance. Teachers and books will recommend recordings to students (Hill, 2001; Morris & Goldstein, 1995; Morris & Perantoni, 2006; Tuckwell, 2002; Wick, 1996) with the expectation that master recordings will help students develop good listening skills. The expectations extend to ensemble playing where conductors demand knowledge of the works performed before rehearsals begin. Many teachers recommend familiarizing oneself with multiple recordings so as to not be caught off-guard by various performance practices. Access to videos varying from amateur to professional are available instantly inside the practice room. It would be unheard of for music students in the last five years to not at least listen to a performance on YouTube, Facebook, Berlin Concert Hall, let alone their performances broadcast on a school’s live-stream for family and friends. What is less explored is how students are using these resources in the practice room, and how might they be effecting practicing.

**Literature Review**

Current research suggests that students copy not only what they can hear, but also their perception of what they believe they hear (Barry, 2007; Hewitt, 2001; Puopolo, 1971; Woody, 1999, 2002). The studies collectively suggest that through critical listening, performers can be aided in most aspects of instrumental development. Woody (1999, 2002) examined how the ability to identify musical features within a melody enhanced the ability to copy the melody on their instrument. Woody (1999) asked piano students to identify and playback a recorded piano melody with musical features both idiomatic and non-idiomatic to normal musical phrasing. Students were able to copy the musical aspects that they identified, as well as the idiomatic aspects they did not identify, but had less success copying the non-idiomatic aspects which were not identified. The latter Woody (2002) study then continued on to test how student’s pre-existing biases might affect the way the music was perceived. Puopolo (1971) looked at how students who engaged in self-listening (by recording and listening to one’s own playing) progressed faster than a control group that did not engage in self-listening. Puopolo examined how the self-listening group could use self-listening in conjunction with a model to compare the two performances and learn faster than a control group. In a similar study, Hewitt (2001) had a group of junior high school instrumentalists recorded themselves as a practice technique. Participants who listened to themselves during self-evaluation improved faster in the areas of tone, melodic accuracy, rhythmic accuracy, interpretation, and overall performance, but not intonation, technique/articulation, or tempo.

Much interest has been paid to why and how successful musicians practice. Research identifies that students are strongly motivated by satisfying internal needs (Schmidt, 2005, 2007), challenges (Miksza, 2006) achieving personal goals, and mastering tasks for the sake of self-improvement (Miksza, 2006; Schmidt, 2005, 2007). Miksza (2006) was concerned with self-regulation and motivation in junior high school band students. The study asked volunteer participants questions relating to concentration, intrinsic motivation, self-regulation, internal/external practice attribution and practice, and practice habits. Even at an early age, students perceived practicing as important and worthwhile. Schmidt (2005, 2007) studied slightly more experienced instrumental band students grade 7-12 who had played for at least two years. Schmidt was primarily interested in the extent of the correlation between motivation orientations, self-concept in instrumental music, and attitude to band. Additionally Schmidt looked at motivation variables of performance and effort, practice time, music experience, and demographic variables. At the university level, Pike (2014) explored the practice habits of early undergraduate students; a critical stage for developing good rehearsal skills (p. 12). In a case study of four second-year piano performance majors, Pike explored the practice techniques of these students by observing practice sessions at various points throughout the semester. Research was focused on practice objectives and goal orientation, motivation, practice strategies, performance success as relating to practice, and time management. Overall, “top performing students” (Pike, 2014, p. 19) and students who progressed faster (Miksza, 2006; Schmidt, 2005, 2007) appeared to have a better understanding of their own playing.

Teachers are often sources of aural modeling (Barry, 2007). Barry examined the relationship between student-teacher interactions in the college instrumental music lesson and subsequent individual student practice sessions. This qualitative case study first identified the practice techniques advocated by 12 students and their teachers. By videotaping lessons and subsequent practice sessions, Barry looked at which techniques appeared in lessons and how those techniques were employed by the students later by themselves. Student practice habits appeared to be influenced to some degree by their teacher’s advice, but the most important influence may be the teacher’s teaching style. Modeling and imitation with a teacher seemed to have a greater influence on students’ practice than discussion of practice techniques alone.

While students appear to respond to aural modeling (especially from a teacher), a source of much discussion among musicians is the concept of originality (Tânia, Williamon, Zicari, & Eiholzer, 2005). Musicians fear the reputation of copying another musician and loosing ones “artistic originality” (p. 76). Tânia et al. explored in their first study in what ways three advanced violinists could copy a master recording of a Bach Partita. The search was to examine how and to what extent musicians could discard their own interpretive conceptions in an attempt to create a replica. After analysis a more broad study of advanced violinists (*N* = 30) was conducted in order to assess the overall quality of a performance of the same work and how closely it resembled the target master recordings.

No studies thus far have looked at how students are using video platforms like YouTube or Facebook as a resource for aural modeling, how students are engaging with them in their practice, or how students are choosing which recordings to listen to in their practicing. Even the use of audio recordings, which have been available in the practice room with minimal effort for a few decades, have been underexplored. Volioti and Williamon (2017) looked at how students and professionals use audio recordings as a resource when preparing for a performance. By examining advanced students and professionals, they sought to understand how and to what extent musicians use recordings in their practicing and learning, and the purported differences in use between of the two groups. By placing recordings as a resource for learning within a social-cultural context, the resource becomes an agent of mediation (i.e., teacher) in a context of social mediation. In a framework of self-regulation, Volioti and Williamon explore how recordings influence other self-regulatory processes, including time management and planning, goal setting, content, acquisition of cognitive tools and environmental control. They also explored how these traits might be utilized differently between pre-professional (graduate and post-graduate students) and professionals. Two hundred four participants completed a survey which asked questions about general listening habits, the extent and importance of using recordings when preparing a piece for performance, their preferences when choosing recordings and the type of influence exerted by recordings. They found that students listened to more recordings and placed more importance on the pedagogical aspects of recordings, whereas professionals utilized recordings more for facilitating the learning of a specific work and an array of interpretations.

**Framework**

Practicing holds a unique place in the university music setting. In the privacy of a small room, students are expected to explore and develop their musical abilities. Institutions have set up music students’ lives to heavily center around practicing, however the process is left to the discretion of the individual. This type of freely directed process with material that is generally chosen by a teacher or ensemble lies at a crossroads of formal and informal learning.

Formal music learning can be thought of as a system of “educational institutions from primary schools to conservatories, partly involving or entirely dedicated to the teaching and learning of music” (Green 2002, p. 4). Resnik (1987) describes learning more broadly as learning in-school (formal) versus learning out-of-school (informal). There can exist the overlap of informal and formal learning, described by Green as “extremes existing at the two ends of a single pole” (2002, p. 6). It is possible for students who are in a formal music education engage in informal practices, as well the opposite. This may be a student learning a pop song on their instrument, or the all-female horn quartet, *Genghis Barbie*, arranging pop songs for a fun album on itunes.

The use of video recordings may play a role in the process of formal and informal practices within a student’s practice sessions. In order to learn the pop song, it would be plausable that they could refer to the video on their phones, or gather inspiration watching someone play a solo piece with a squeaky toy chicken instead of a violin. Given the exploratory nature of the investigation and that little research exists on the specific use of video recording platforms as resources for formal learning, the discussion is data-driven rather than theory-driven, and this study will be interested in how the use of video recordings may inform existing theories of formal and informal music learning in music education.

**Purpose and Research Questions**

With an almost universal adoption of mobile devices by university students (Margaryan, Littlejohn, & Vojt, 2011), it is to be expected that these devices are making their way into the practice room and utilized at some level. The purpose of this study is to explore the thoughts about and use of video platforms (YouTube, Facebook, etc.) by undergraduate horn performance majors, relating to their own practicing. This case study addresses the following:

1. How do students think about performances available on YouTube, Facebook and other open video platforms? How do they compare to highly curated video platforms (Berlin Concert Hall)?
2. How do students use recordings in their own practice?
3. In what ways does the access to video recording platforms effect practice?

**Methodolgy**

In order to explore the use of video platforms in the practice rooms of university undergraduates, case study can be used “to attempt to examine […] a contemporary phenomenon in its real-life context” (Robert K Yin, 1981). An instrumental case study, according to Stake, has “a research question, a puzzlement, a need for general understanding, and feel that we may get insight into the question by studying a particular case” (1995, p. 3). This research project will look at two undergraduate performance majors from a large Midwest university over the course of the fall semester (16 weeks). Throughout the semester, students will learn material assigned by their applied instructor, repertoire from chamber and large ensembles, and preparation for juries (semester performance examinations). During this time, students will receive their spring ensemble placement audition repertoire. The varied requirements of undergraduate performance majors, compared to younger students who may work on one piece for an extended period at a time, will provide ample opportunity to take an in-depth look at the circumstances in which a student may use video platforms in their practice sessions. Selection of the participants will be purposeful by selecting students who (1) have video-playing devices that are brought into the practice room, (2) are engaged in chamber and large ensembles, and (3) are enrolled in applied lessons. Sampling will also be opportunistic because of the researcher’s access to the university, acquaintance but not personal relationship with members of the horn studios and students who are willing to journal regularly.

The interest in the subject comes from my own experience using video recordings in my practice as a professional orchestral horn player. The vast amount of repertoire that a full-time orchestra plays on a monthly basis is too much to thoroughly study every score. In professional settings, little time is given to rehearsals, and there is an expectation that whomever may be conducting that day, musicians are expected to know the music and perform in whatever manner is given by the conductor. The most efficient way to learn varied styles for myself was to listen to YouTube recordings, and quite frequently, I played along. I often wondered about the quality of the performances I was listening to, as there is no quality control on YouTube. This research stems from the interest in instant access to video platforms in the practice room effects learning in general at a key developmental stage of performers, not only when learning repertoire.

Data collection in case study should integrate many forms of qualitative data in order to present an in-depth understanding of a case (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Data collected will be three interviews with each participant, weekly journals, and a focus group with both participants. An initial interview will take place at the beginning in order to understand how the participants view the idea of video platforms in their practice rooms. Weekly journaling will ask students to review the history of the videos they watched for the week and discuss the context in which videos were watched during practice sessions. A second round of interviews will take place shortly after spring ensemble placement audition repertoire is released. A final interview will be conducted at the end of the term. A focus-group will also be at the end of the project, so as to not bias the individuals of each other’s ideas, but to create an open dialogue.

Initially, each case will be looked at individually and coded according to themes that arise in each situation in order to develop naturalistic generalizations. Interview transcripts and journals will be coded into descriptive labels in order for understand larger thematic categories (Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña, 2013). An additional level of coding will be undertaken once larger themes arise which can be the basis for interpretation. Participants will play an important role by member checking, and it is “the most critical technique for establishing credibility” (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 314). A cross-case synthesis advanced by Yin (2014), will be created to display the data from a uniform framework. This will be the basis for transferability important in validation by Lincoln and Guba (1985).

**Interview Protocol**

Time of interview: 3:00PM

Date: 11/27/2018

Place: JSoM East Studio Building 1104

Interviewer: Scott Holben (primary researcher)

Interviewee: Ryan Goldsmith

Position of Interviewee: Freshman undergraduate performance major (horn)

This interview seeks to explore how the interviewee understands and utilizes video platforms in their practice sessions. The interviewee has already indicated that he/she has an electronic device (iPhone) on them when practicing, and they have in the last month watched YouTube and/or Facebook on the device for enjoyment and educational purposes. The objective is to explore how video platforms are thought of broadly in relation to practicing, including as a practice resource and/or personal enjoyment during the course of a practice session. A secondary focus will address when in the learning stage a student might turn to video recordings in the learning process and what perceived effects it may have on their practice.

In this interview the electronic device will be referred to as “phone”, as it is the device the interviewee brings with them to their practice sessions. YouTube will represent a myriad of video sharing platforms

Questions:

1.     Could you describe a typical practice session?

2.     In a typical practice session, in what ways do you interact with your phone?

a.     Where do you keep your phone when practicing?

b.     Which apps do you use when practicing?

c.     What general how is your phone used for entertainment or to aid practicing?

3.     In what ways do you use videos in your practice sessions?

4.     Why might people use YouTube when practicing?

5.     If you are learning a new piece, what role might YouTube play in that process?

6.     Could you describe a memorable time in the last semester in which you did use YouTube in your practicing?

7.     You have spring auditions soon, how familiar were you when you with the excerpts when you received them? Tell me how you have become more familiar with them and how you might continue working on them until the audition.

8.     Have/would you ever post a video clip of yourself playing from your practicing on social media (Instagram/Facebook/Youtube/Snapchat)? Could you expand on why or why not?

9.     Do you have any other thoughts on using YouTube in practicing in general, or other thoughts we might have overlooked?

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