

SUGGESTIONS ARISE FROM CHAMBER MUSIC LEARNING DURING COVID-19: A CASE STUDY FROM THE SCHOOL OF MUSIC. PRINCESS GALYANI VADHANA INSITUTE OF MUSIC

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Abstract

Received: 2nd July 2024

Revised: 28th July 2024

Accepted: 29th July 2024

Published: 31th July 2024

Citation:

Dilokkunanant, Komsun and Sethapong Janyarayachon. "Suggestions Arise from Chamber Music Learning during COVID-19: A case study from the School of Music, Princess Galyani Vadhana Institute of Music." *PULSE: Journal for Music and Interdisciplinary Practices*, No.5 Vol.1 (2024): 76-88. <https://so18.tci-thaijo.org/index.php/pulsejournal/article/view/568/348>

The COVID-19 pandemic significantly impacted the teaching and learning of chamber music, necessitating a shift to online formats. This study is a reflection on the experiences from the School of Music at Princess Galyani Vadhana Institute of Music, exploring the challenges and opportunities presented by this transition. Key issues identified include the lack of clear learning outcomes, inconsistencies in assessment criteria, and limited prior experience in chamber music among students.

To address these challenges, a competency and skills framework was developed, focusing on individual preparation, interpersonal skills, and collective decision-making. This framework includes activities such as historical research, score study, practice techniques, communication, and collaborative decision-making, aimed at enhancing students' technical skills, analytical abilities,

and interpersonal competencies. A case study involving Carl Reinecke's Trio for Piano, Clarinet, and Horn illustrates the practical application of this framework, fostering deeper understanding and improved ensemble performance.

Despite the constraints of online teaching, the shift has spurred creative solutions that enhance the continuity and quality of music education. By systematically organizing the necessary attributes and skills for chamber music, educators can ensure sustainable development of students' competencies. These findings offer valuable insights for adapting chamber music education to both online and traditional formats, contributing to the future development of practical music education in Thailand

Keyword: Chamber music, Music Online Course, Chamber

Introduction

In musical performance, chamber music typically refers to a group of musicians playing together, starting from a duo (duet), trio, quartet, and so on, with one player per part¹. Historically, the emergence of chamber music can be traced back to recreational activities and performances intended for entertainment and enjoyment, aiming to bring happiness to the audience. Thus, in musical performance, "fun" is a crucial element, reflecting the concept of chamber music as "the music of friends" or friendship music.

In the contemporary educational context, chamber music has emerged as a potential career path. The focus often lies on the outcome of the performance,

1 "Chamber Music," Oxford Music Online, Oxford University Press, January 20, 2001, <https://doi.org/10.1093/gmo/9781561592630.article.05379>.

which is typically enhanced through music coaching. However, the COVID-19 pandemic has necessitated a shift to online learning, including the teaching and learning of chamber music. This article, written from the author's perspective based on his experience coaching chamber music during the pandemic, examines the limitations of online formats. It questions the effectiveness of current teaching and learning processes in chamber music and whether they adequately equip students with necessary skills. The author suggests revisiting various aspects of musical performance education and the role of musicians in transitioning to online teaching. This challenge leads to the development of teaching models adapted to these new circumstances. The article also prompts consideration of what aspects should be addressed in typical situations and how to prepare sustainably for both traditional and future online teaching scenarios.

TEACHING AND LEARNING CHAMBER MUSIC IN THAILAND

Music performance courses are key components of music programs, serving as a foundation for students' future professional endeavors. These courses focus on practicing and honing their craft, making them crucial within the Bachelor of Music curriculum. Music performance acts as both the starting point for various music-related subjects and an integration of all areas of music knowledge to enhance performance and creativity.

Teaching and learning in music performance are based on fundamental educational theory components by Steiner: teachers, learners, content, and the teaching context—all of which significantly impact each other.² Additionally, these courses allow teachers creative freedom to design learning experiences aligned with course objectives, aiming for the highest level of learning, often characterized as “creating.”³

Analyzing teaching methods in music performance courses reveals four main areas: teaching method, practice, assessment, and performance. Teaching methods typically involve workshops or coaching. According to Collins Dictionary, a workshop is “a period of discussion or practical work on a particular subject in which a group of people share their knowledge or experience.” Coaching, on the other hand, fosters a consultative and participative approach, creating a partnership between teachers and students. It emphasizes ongoing feedback, recognition, clarity, and support, increasing the probability of student success. Both methods focus on addressing issues during sessions rather than solely on structured outcomes.

This approach is consistent across international and Thai music institutions, although

2 Elizabeth Steiner, *Methodology of Theory Building* (Sydney: Educology Research Associates, 1988).

3 ณรุทธ์ สุเวชจิตต์, *ดนตรีศึกษา: หลักการและสาระสำคัญ* (พิมพ์ครั้งที่ 9; กรุงเทพมหานคร: จุฬาลงกรณ์มหาวิทยาลัย, 2555).

variations exist in course proportions, assessment methods, and teaching activities based on each institution's curriculum design. Notably, coaching and workshops share similarities.

The COVID-19 pandemic compelled Thailand to adopt online teaching methods, prompting a reevaluation of course limitations and the development of new practices where in-person coaching for music performance was impossible. Universities adapted their teaching approaches to include online formats for both lecture-based and performance courses. Even chamber music, with its unique challenges, had to adjust by utilizing small group lectures and creating educational media to meet learning objectives. This shift led to new challenges, such as the lack of clear learning outcomes and skill sets in chamber music education, resulting in no standard patterns or criteria for assessment and evaluation. Not only can this lead to confusion and inconsistency among teachers and students regarding expectations and achievements in chamber music courses, but it also presents a challenge for teachers to organize their teaching into a more lecture-based format. Moreover, it may affect the motivation and satisfaction of students who may not see the relevance and value of chamber music learning for their personal and professional development.

While the learning outcomes discussed in this article could be achieved earlier through early childhood music education—fostering rhythm and movement, ensemble playing, and the ability to be creative and expressive, which Rudolf Steiner believed would cultivate essential skills such as coordination, creativity, and social interaction⁴—this proves challenging within the general education system at the pre-university level in Thailand.

Additionally, the lack of experience in chamber music (or performing without a conductor) from secondary school settings poses another challenge. Students may lack confidence and autonomy, relying too much on the teacher's guidance rather than their own judgment and initiative. This reliance can hinder the development of essential interpersonal skills for chamber music performance, such as listening, communication, collaboration, and negotiation.

In summary, the challenges in chamber music teaching and learning during COVID-19 are related to the lack of focus on the competencies and skills needed for chamber music performance, the lack of clear learning outcomes and assessment criteria,

4 Andrea Lyman, "Let There Be Music: The Music Curriculum in the Waldorf School, Grades 1-8 (Reprinted from RENEWAL Magazine)," Waldorf Music Association, accessed July 28, 2024, <https://waldorfmusic.org/let-there-be-music-the-music-curriculum-in-the-waldorf-school-grades-1-8/>

and the lack of prior experience and preparation among students. These issues may affect the quality and effectiveness of chamber music education as well as the motivation and satisfaction of students. In this article, we will suggest some possible solutions based on competencies and observations during a chamber music course at the School of Music, Princess Galyani Vadhana Institute of Music during the COVID-19 lockdown.

REFLECTING ON CHAMBER MUSIC TEACHING

Chamber music teaching often involves the teacher acting as a facilitator, guiding students to apply their musical knowledge to chamber music performance. This includes concepts from solo performance, proper tone production, articulation, phrasing, and presenting different musical styles according to historical contexts. The teacher's role is crucial in enhancing students' leadership skills through music concepts.

Due to the challenges mentioned above, the author analyzed what students should learn and the skills they should acquire based on their chosen repertoires. This analysis led to the development of a teaching plan that benefits students through a lecture and discussion-based setting, divided into different topics including historical background studies, listening assignments, score analysis, interpretation and application, performance goals, individual and group video and audio recording submissions, and recording plans.

This reflective article describes the author's experience adapting chamber music teaching during the COVID-19 pandemic. The process adhered to general teaching ethics and data privacy principles (PDPA). While not intended as a formal research study, the findings may offer valuable insights for chamber music pedagogy. The following case study is from the author's experience coaching a group of students performing Carl Reinecke's Trio for Piano, Clarinet, and Horn, Op. 274, during the first semester of the 2021 academic year. The entire process involved discussions where the author acted as a facilitator, encouraging all students to share their ideas and suggestions for constructive and practical solutions to problems that arose. The author also moderated conversations and provided guidance, aiming to develop a healthy discussion leading to applicable solutions and collective decision-making.

The historical background study was a group activity that delved into the trio's background. This was followed by a listening assignment where students were individually tasked with picking their favorite recordings and providing their reasons during class. The students then collectively decided which recording would serve as the goal for their performance. Score analysis aimed to help students understand the overall structure of the piece, leading to an understanding of individual roles

and discussions on how the piece would be interpreted and performed. The next steps involved setting performance goals and a recording plan, where audio or video recordings were regularly submitted and discussed during class to enhance communication and problem-solving skills.

Through this process, the group of students showed a deep understanding of the Reinecke trio, including its background, score analysis, and how these elements informed their interpretation. Importantly, the students understood their roles and responsibilities within the group. Although it was challenging to put into practice, providing them with recording assignments—where different instruments were recorded in sequence, such as horn first, followed by clarinet and piano—taught them to both lead and follow. They performed the collectively decided interpretation.

This approach might sound like how a chamber music course should be structured. Interestingly, this is not always the case, as today's chamber music learning, again, often focuses on addressing issues during sessions rather than solely on structured outcomes.

SUGGESTIONS BASED ON THE COMPETENCY AND SKILLS FRAMEWORK FOR CHAMBER MUSIC PERFORMANCE

From the above case studies, the author has analyzed and proposes solutions to help students achieve the competencies and skills needed for chamber music performance. These solutions can be divided into three parts: 1) individual preparation, 2) interpersonal skills, and 3) collective decision-making. These three components collectively lead to essential skills required during performances, including execution, awareness, spontaneous reaction, and problem-solving. Each part will be explained in detail, along with examples of how to implement them in a chamber music course.

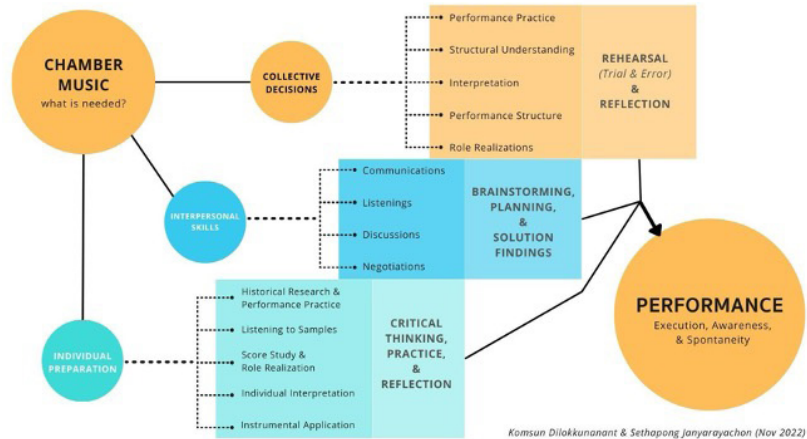


Figure 1 Chamber music competencies and expected learning outcomes

Individual Preparation

Individual preparation refers to the process of preparing oneself for chamber music performance by acquiring the necessary knowledge, skills, and attitudes. It involves historical research and performance practice, listening to samples, score study and individual role realization, individual practice, and instrumental application. These activities lead to critical thinking, practical application, and reflection skills.

- **Historical research and performance practice:** This activity involves researching the historical context and performance practice of the repertoire, such as the composer's biography, style, intention, instrumentation, notation, tempo, dynamics, articulation, ornamentation, etc. This helps students understand the meaning and purpose of the music and perform it authentically and appropriately.
- **Listening to samples:** This activity involves listening to different recordings or performances of the repertoire by professional or amateur musicians. This helps students develop their listening skills and compare and contrast different interpretations and approaches to the music. Students are encouraged to use trusted online platforms such as Naxos Music Library or Spotify as the main

resource. However, other platforms like YouTube or SoundCloud can also be used.

- **Score study and individual role realization:** This activity involves studying the score of the repertoire and identifying one's individual role and contribution to the ensemble. This helps students develop their analytical skills and understand their musical function and responsibility within the group.
- **Individual practice:** This activity involves practicing one's part individually with a metronome or a backing track. This helps students develop their technical skills and improve their accuracy, expression, and ensemble playing.
- **Instrumental application:** This activity involves applying one's knowledge, skills, and attitudes to one's instrument to perform one's part effectively and efficiently. This helps students develop their practical skills and demonstrate their musical competence and confidence.

By engaging in these activities, students can enhance their competency and skills for chamber music performance and prepare themselves for the next part of the framework, which is interpersonal skills.

Interpersonal Skills

Interpersonal skills refer to the process of interacting with others respectfully and constructively to achieve a common musical goal. It involves communication, listening, discussion, and negotiation. These activities lead to brainstorming, planning, and solution-finding skills.

- **Communication:** This activity involves expressing one's ideas, opinions, feelings, and preferences clearly and respectfully to others. This helps students develop their verbal and non-verbal communication skills and establish rapport and trust with their peers.
- **Listening:** This activity involves listening attentively and actively to others' ideas, opinions, feelings, and preferences. This helps students develop their

listening skills and show empathy and understanding to their peers.

- **Discussion:** This activity involves exchanging and sharing ideas, opinions, feelings, and preferences with others in a collaborative and constructive way. This helps students develop their critical and creative thinking skills and explore different perspectives and possibilities in chamber music.
- **Negotiation:** This activity involves reaching a mutual agreement or compromise with others on various aspects of chamber music performance, such as interpretation, expression, dynamics, articulation, tempo, etc. This helps students develop their negotiation and decision-making skills and balance their individual and collective interests and needs in chamber music.

By engaging in these activities, students can enhance their competency and skills for chamber music performance and prepare themselves for the next part of the framework, which is collective decision-making.

Collective Decision Making

Collective decision-making refers to the process of making and implementing musical decisions as a group based on individual preparation and interpersonal skills. It involves performance practice, structural understanding, interpretation, performance structure, and role realization. These activities lead to rehearsal, reflection, execution, awareness, spontaneous reaction, and problem-solving skills.

- **Performance practice:** This activity involves a group decision on applying historical research and performance practice to the repertoire to perform it authentically and appropriately.
- **Structural understanding:** This activity involves analyzing and understanding the structure and form of the repertoire to perform it coherently and logically.
- **Interpretation:** This activity involves expressing agreed musical ideas and feelings through the repertoire to perform it personally and expressively.
- **Performance structure:** This activity involves a collective decision on planning

and organizing the performance of the repertoire in terms of tempo, dynamics, articulation, phrasing, etc. to perform it consistently and effectively.

- **Role realization:** This activity involves performing each realized individual role within that supports an overall performance of the ensemble in terms of balance, blend, intonation, synchronization, etc. to perform it harmoniously and unified.

By engaging in these activities, students can enhance their competency and skills for chamber music performance and prepare themselves for the final part of the framework, which is execution, awareness, spontaneous reaction, and problem-solving.

Execution, Awareness, and Spontaneous Reaction and Problem Solving

Execution, awareness, and spontaneous reaction and problem-solving refer to the process of performing the repertoire as a group in a live or recorded setting based on individual preparation, interpersonal skills, and collective decision-making. It involves rehearsal, reflection, execution, awareness, and spontaneous reaction and problem-solving. These activities lead to musical performance and evaluation skills.

- **Execution:** This activity involves performing the repertoire as a group in a live or recorded setting with the performance structure and role realization to demonstrate the musical competence and confidence of the group. This helps students develop their musical execution and presentation skills and showcase their musical achievement and expression in chamber music.
- **Awareness:** This activity involves being aware of oneself and others during the performance of the repertoire in terms of musical cues, signals, gestures, etc. to perform it responsively and adaptively. This helps students develop their musical awareness and sensitivity skills and adjust their playing according to the situation and context in chamber music.
- **Spontaneous reaction and problem-solving:** This activity involves reacting spontaneously and solving problems creatively during the performance of the

repertoire in case of unexpected events, such as mistakes, errors, glitches, etc.
to perform it resiliently and flexibly.

By engaging in these activities, students can enhance their competency and skills for chamber music performance and achieve the final goal of the framework, which is musical performance and evaluation.

Conclusion

The suspension of in-person teaching and activities at educational institutions and the shift to online teaching due to the COVID-19 pandemic have significantly affected music education, especially for chamber music and other practice-based courses that require space for individual or group practice. The study found that this shift highlighted several challenges in chamber music education, such as the lack of clear learning outcomes, over-reliance on teacher guidance, and insufficient development of essential interpersonal skills. However, despite these challenges, the constraints have often spurred creative solutions that enable continuity. This is evident from reflections on online teaching during the lockdown, which led to discovering effective teaching strategies for maximizing student outcomes.

In response, a competency and skills framework was developed, focusing on individual preparation, interpersonal skills, and collective decision-making. Individual preparation includes activities like historical research, score study, and individual practice, enhancing technical skills and critical thinking. Interpersonal skills involve communication, listening, and negotiation, fostering collaboration among ensemble members. Collective decision-making encompasses performance practice and role realization, integrating individual contributions into a cohesive ensemble performance. This structured approach ensures students develop the necessary skills for both individual excellence and effective group dynamics.

Moreover, these guidelines can be adapted for regular teaching, providing a solid foundation for beginners in chamber music and serving as a criterion for evaluating student performance. While early music education, as advocated by Steiner, is beneficial, this approach offers a structured path for those without such a foundation and ensures a systematic and effective development of chamber music skills. The timeframe of each outcome can be varied based on the existing knowledge of each group. Therefore, the flexibility of timeframe and the teacher's facilitating skill are integral to their development and success. Additionally, the synthesized knowledge can be adapted to create standard learning outcomes for individual or ensemble performance courses.

A practical application of this framework is illustrated through a case study of Carl Reinecke's Trio for Piano, Clarinet, and Horn, Op. 274, conducted during the first semester of the 2021 academic year. The teaching process involved group discussions, historical background studies, listening assignments, score analysis, and performance planning. This collaborative approach enabled students to gain a deeper understanding of the trio, enhance their technical and interpretive skills, and develop essential interpersonal competencies. Despite the constraints of online learning, this method proved effective in fostering students' musical growth and ensemble performance.

Future research could further explore the long-term effects of online learning on music education, specifically on student performance and skill development in chamber music. Additionally, exploring methods to increase student autonomy and confidence in online learning settings, focusing on reducing dependency on teacher guidance, and studying best practices for developing interpersonal skills such as communication, collaboration, and negotiation in an online learning context are suggested. By addressing these areas, future research can provide deeper insights into improving chamber music education and adapting teaching methods to better suit the evolving educational landscape.

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