Introducing Contemporary Music Performance Practice to University Students

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Abstract: *Incorporating modern classical music performance into higher education schools in specific Universities represents another approach of enhancing the artistic perspective of the students and at the same time preparing them to meet the expectations of the present musical environment. University music programs usually have students with mixed abilities of instrumental skill and other abilities in the familiarity with repertoire of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. There are those with strong classical skills but not having been exposed to extended techniques and there are those with the more relaxed ambiance of experimentation but lack technical base to meet established contemporary performances. There are other students who have technical competence but do not know long methods or aleatoric forms. In addition to this, some students may be at ease with new sound realms but have no technical background to keep them occupied in more challenging compositional activities. This paper is aimed at discussing the pedagogical programmes that must and can narrow the gaps in expert knowledge and experience. Through a variety of repertoires, modular classes, guided listening sessions, workshop facilitated by peers, and composer-collaboration, the educationists can develop a difficult and comprehensive environment of learning. The suggested methodologies encourage technical proficiency and at the same time creative agency and an artistic inquisitiveness and critical thinking, all of which are the keys to modern performance practice. An adaptable student-oriented model that fits every individual musician to his/her level will help change contemporary music as an intimidating food to music into a friendly and much-needed instrument of each performer.*

Key-words: *Contemporary Music Education, performance practise Pedagogy, extended Techniques, Improvisation and Collaboration, mixed-ability Ensemble Learning*

1. Introduction

The world of the modern classical music, both the post-tonal musical movements of the twentieth century and the experimental visions of the twenty-first century, brings out significant difficulties to both performers and educators, thus,

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requiring an in-depth reconsideration of the traditional pedagogical examples. It is typified by new sounds lexicons, and lengthy procedures, improvisatory forms and shared activities that demand that musicians respond to sound as a process of exploration, not as a preprogrammed plan (Small 1998).

This change comes as a two-fold challenge in educational milieu. The students who join the program usually have different degrees of instrumental skills and the knowledge of the modern repertoire with different familiarity (Davis 2013). Also, the conservatory paradigm of the time, which is based on the generalized, tonality-oriented, score-driven mastery, left a blank in the imagination improvisation, listening, and experimentation of performance (Green 2008).

The present article tries to fill this gap by suggesting a set of pedagogical strategies that may be smoothly implanted into the philosophy of teaching music on university level. It gives specific focus to the development of different levels of instrumental proficiency and addresses the gap in the knowledge of modern musical idioms in students to encourage their responsiveness and flexibility of curriculum (Cook 2013).

2.   Contextual Background

Over a long period of time, creative compositions and improvisation of contemporary classical music was influenced by a progressive trend of experimental compositions, electronic and electroacoustic music, interdisciplinary cooperation (Emmerson 2000). It is interesting to note that the composer like John Cage, Helmmut Lachenmann, Pauline Oliveros, and George E. Lewis have expanded the sonic palette that performers can use and the dynamics between the composer, the performer and the audience at the same time (Cage 1961).

The traditional culture of the Western classical music was traditionally biased towards canonical repertoires and structural analysis based on historical terminology. However, the modern musical field requires the artist to develop the ability to be versatile in the art of individual styles, these may be a standard orchestral practice, ethical and mediated by technology, and improvisation (Schaeffer 2017). Even though higher education institutions have started to appreciate these parameters, there are further steps to be made towards a pedagogical reform (Blom 2018).

The contemporary performance practice education should be based on the development of new listening routines, the ability to work in groups, and the curiosity to approach this intrinsic ambiguity of ideas and notations, processes and

indications of a radically new path to music making (Oliveros 2005). As a result, there is a push to explore different terms and roles of being an educator, away from being the custodians of dead text and more so as those who can help facilitate an active and creative discovery (Barett 2016).

3.   The Problems of Teaching Contemporary Music
3.1. Instrumental level of skills that lack homogeneity

The music classrooms at the university cover the entire range of the student population, in terms of the instrument technic development. The context in which this dissimilarity has been given a spotlight is often highlighted through contemporary repertoire due to its unorthodox requirements. Some pieces need the skills to master complicated rhythmic cells whereas some need skills in multiphonics or microtones or ability to perform body movements. The selection and adaptation of repertoire to the range of skills is one of the pedagogical strategies. The works by the composers like the Pauline Oliveros' "Sonic Meditations" (Oliveros 1974) or the Terry Riley's "In C" (Riley 1964), allow non-professional and professional musicians to make their contributions to it, thus avoiding any homogeneous form of approach to the input of each performer to the composition. The modular or graphic scores are most helpful because they offer interpretive freedom and they in turn enable the performers to avoid the technical constraint and take an anticipative participative role in listening (Piper 2008, 211-225).

3.2 Inequality in exposure to Modern Idioms

Classical music of today usually termed contemporary classical music is often considered foreign and unreachable to the students. To people who favour tonal music atonality, aleatoricism and soundscapes produced electronically can prove to be discomforting. Some students come in with the little exposure as they are taught in secondary systems that uphold canonical forms. Teachers are expected to fill these faults with humility. The accumulation of a sonic vocabulary takes place with the help of organized listening exercises ranging across the continuum between John Cage and Kaija Saariaho (Cage 1961, 34-42). Promoting a reality with a series of thoughtful discussions about listening, provokes students to be able to express their answers without fear of negative feedback over their verbosity. Though, with time, the students will change their resistance and confusion to curiosity and interest (Oliveros 2005).

3.3. Technical and conceptual problems

At present, the subversion of interpretative hierarchies has become an eminent issue within the contemporary academic sphere. Scores are now rendered in graphic, verbal or open form, there are preparatory instrumental modifications, theatrical gestures and the live electronic intervention all of which are part of performance practice (Goehr 2007).

Students used to be conditioned to abide by faith to the score are most likely to feel alienated when they are being asked to co-create or improvise. This type of dislocation would be alleviated by applying pedagogical strategies that focus on the process instead of the product (Blom 2018).

Performance workshops and compositional exercises in various 20th and 21st century styles help to cultivate the agency and flexibility and consist of collaborating projects and laboratories having as main element the improvisation (Schick 2010, 54-59; Lewis 2008). Mechanical command is taught to the students, but what they learn is to also pay attention to the aesthetics of sound and fluidity and thus, they become more musically flexible and competent in their interpretations (Lachenmann 1969).

4.   Pedagogical Approaches, Strategies and Practice
4.1. The Modulars of learning and scaffolding

Scaffolding is an instructional method applied in cases where learners are being exposed to a new learning environment. They can repeat the same task in different degrees of difficulty in tiered assignments (Green 2008). Graphic notation can be read loosely by new students, and by the more advanced students, directly on to strict rules of rhythm, and into longer techniques (Piper 2008, 211-225).

The lab of techniques provides and encourages the sharing of active and up to date information which comprise fresh considerations of overpressure bowing, the instrument singing, as well as multiphonic (Lachenmann 1969). They elaborate the available procedures, and they make one give his/her new things without the fear of failure (Schick 2010, 54-59).

4.2. Contextual exposure

Lessons in listening can be useful in learning about the contemporary music. Teachers can take students through practical listening as opposed to beginning with set categories (Oliveros 2005). Some of these questions would include: What

are the sounds that stand out to you? What are your feelings on this? These listening questions enable the students to know and become less fearful of new styles (Wright 2010, 71-87).

History does count but we need to discuss it and ask questions concerning the way we can make use of it. As an example, a study of the exchange of ideas between Cage's and Oliveros' experimental process, or the application of spectralism in Saariaho, to the stohastic methods of Xenakis can make students understand the place of pieces between artists and concepts (Cage 1961, 34-42).

4.3. Repertoire selection

The selection of the appropriate pieces to work on is highly critical, since our students have diverse backgrounds. Open and flexible pieces such as the In C by Terry Riley or Deep Listening by Pauline Oliveros are appropriate since they can suit many types of learners and many levels of instrumental skills (Riley 2005).

Modern composers can also be asked to compose new pieces and make alterations to them by teachers in accordance with a desired teaching objective (Blom 2018). This allows the teachers to adjust the difficulty of the music and the way it is arranged in collaboration with the composer (Papageorgiou 2015).

4.4. Studying in groups and interaction with the pupils

Peer teaching makes students remain more active in the university classes (Wright 2010, 71-87). Indicatively, when a student has been taught on how to play whistle tones on the flute, he/she is able to demonstrate the same to the classmates who will also learn a lot (Schick 2010, 54-59). Improvisation by means of graphic scores or discovery prompts assists students in sharing and learning with one another (Piper 2008, 211-225).

This can transform the classroom to a common area where the teacher and all the students collaborate and exchange their knowledge and converts a top-down system into a team spirit (Green 2008).

5. The evaluation models of modern music education. Review of norms of evaluation

- Findings encompass documentation of group rehearsals, jotting down of reflections on the same and review of classmates by fellow classmates (Cook 2013).

- The judgment of free play and new ideas is measured by the speed of the response of the students, creativity of the sounds, and their compatibility.
- The projects in critical listening include students facilitating listening as well as taking notes on playlists and reviewing.
- They produce collaborative work, media performances, and live sounds – "music" performances at which the music is modified immediately.

Reflection journals consist of the students reflecting on their process of learning, writing about what they learn or find difficult. By creating their own small web site or online recital of music they can set up their own creative identity (Blom 2018).

6. Workshop of learning and co-operation Modern Greek creation labs

There is another aspect of music study in Greece that is special to the students who can meet the real Greek composers. Greek music has traversed through experimental forms of music in the postwar times to today mixed media and cross-disciplinary works proving to be a great place where one can learn performance (Sakallieros 2023). The students do not simply play the fixed pieces, but they can collaborate to invent the new ones (Papageorgiou 2015).

   The performance studio becomes an actual art laboratory where the new local composers may be assisted. Dimitris Papageorgiou, Michalis Lapidakis, Panayiotis Kokoras, Stylianos Dimou, Eleni Ralli, Ioannis Angelakis, Dimitris Maronidis and Zesses Seglias are some of those composers who demonstrate new methods of music writing, new styles of notation and instruments (Lapidakis 2001).

   The following are some of the key outputs of these workshops:

- Improved communication between musicians and composers: Students get to know how to communicate with composers on what they want to create and how to solve technical or artistic related issues together. That is why this makes musicians a creator rather than a follower of the score (Avramidou 2022).
- Sharing musical ideas: In rehearsing, the students acquire new sounds and tricks like long bowing, playing more than one note, wild sounds, and sound contexts creation. They are trained on how to create and use these skills and the reason why they are important both artistically and structurally.
- The student feedback makes the scores adjusted. Composing music is a collaborative process. The composition has become a dialogue between what musicians communicate and what the composers desire.

Common writing enhances identity in art. It is cooperating with Greek composers to make students use their culture in the modern music. It also turns them into the guardians of living Greek music tradition and increases the international recognition of the contemporary Greek music (Papageorgiou 2009).

This collaboration between composers and musicians is beneficial to all and proves that universities play the key role in ensuring the continuity of the contemporary creative work.

7. Group Music Learning at various levels of skills: Teaching, Sharing and Creativity

An example of helping students in learning new music is the creation of groups which are heterogeneous in terms of skill level and familiarity with the aesthetic, stylistic and technical parameters of the repertoire. These groups behave like an actual music environment and provide beneficial instruction like attending to work in a small locality (Green 2008).

7.1. Benefits of mixed-level music ensembles

When a group has students with different levels of knowledge, familiarity and technical instrument ability the learning takes place in two forms. Novices train through watching and imitating at a higher level of play and taking new techniques and concepts. High skilled players assist their fellow players, and this too improves their skills (Blom 2018).

These groups also enable the students to be versatile musicians. They are taught to handle the unexpected sound, switch roles during play as well as group decision making skills which are required in modern music (Wright 2010, 71-87).

7.2. Sharing music knowledge through community practice

I traditionally learnt music alone. I have no doubts though that community learning will be more than an excellent model for future teaching approaches. Such teams do not have only one teacher sharing knowledge. The students even become partners, assistants and designers. Every one comes with what he or she knows. Studying and teaching process takes place not only by a teacher but from the whole class community and in this way it can be demonstrated that learning process is more important than an outcome itself (Oliveros 2005).

This method is in line with the democratic spirit of the new experimental music, in which there is the distribution of power and the merging of roles (Lewis 2008). The creativity in this lesson is in the students studying new music, not a specific activity the teacher is doing, but the students' exploration of the unfamiliar sounds, styles and idioms and roles in the musicians' identity.

7.3. Creative catalyst: Learning New music in students

The contemporary music students are free to respond to the graphic score with improvisation and soundscapes. Since they have not adhered to one style, they are able to trigger new performing ideas and make experienced players look at things in a new light (Schick 2010, 54-59).

Various perspectives make the group be renewed and become co-constructed and thus everyone contributes in creating knowledge and new formations of musical identities (Cardew 1967).

8.   Examples and Case Studies on classrooms

Case Study 1: Graphic scoring and inclusive Ensemble Practice

An experienced and a less experienced group of wind musicians, in the university class, used the graphic score of Cornelius Cardew's "Treatise" as their primary instructional tool. There are no notes in the score, thus students did not have to be concerned about locating the appropriate tone and rhythm. Rather they were presented with a chance to explore their own methods of sounding with the help of the picture symbols. The majority of students were confused or frustrated at the beginning since they were accustomed to playing according to notes and rhythms. Having experimented with some improvisation exercises and discussed the ways to get the symbols into sound, they discovered their ways. The more experienced players attempted multiphonics, variations in volume and less experienced players made wind sounds or rhythmic patterns. The outcome was even more expected. The group pulled together and worked in harmony in "Treatise" and the students were more relaxed gradually feeling comfortable with a process that is otherwise strange to them. This showed that graphic scores are friendly to use, assist people to be creative and unite individuals who have diverse talents.

Case Study 2: Extended Techniques Laboratory and String Players

In the chamber music course on 20th century idioms, using music by Helmut Lachenmann, string players were required to produce difficult sounds on the "Pression". There is also much percussion bow effects, bow pressure change, and odd sound production percussive methods in the cello part. This was difficult to both the experienced or new players. Prior to the performance of the piece, the students underwent a workshop of techniques. They were matched and attempted to lean backwards beneath the bridge to produce looseness sounds and percussive rhythms. They maintained their own memoir of what they did and discussed them, rather than being preoccupied with ideal sound. One violinist who was second year was shy and threatened that the string would break. At week end, he found out and realised through the peer and teacher lesson that the instrument is not a frail instrument and that it can produce many new sounds. As the lesson showed, secure, exploratory spaces also enabled students to reconsider their association with instruments and that they did not have to master technique before becoming creative.

The concept of gathering composers and collaborative projects is significant in terms of new learning ways and can connect students with broader artistic ideas, not only musical ideas.

Case study 3: Composer Residency with Collaborative Composition.

Students collaborated with composers and developed together new methods of sharing and shaping ideas and allowing them to come in contact with various artistic concepts.

A Greek composer, Zesses Seglias, took three weeks in a semester course of contemporary ensemble music and chose students from subject areas. The mixed-discipline groups created a new composition with the help of the spoken voice and lengthy instrumental performance, as well as live electronics. At the end of the residency there was a concert and numerous raw materials, and students were able to add rhythms, text and computer sounds. The composer did not impose any strict guidelines, rather, he assisted the students to refine and blend their ideas in such a way that they come out as an interesting work. A great number of students were not accustomed to making music individually. Various music students of the classroom revealed that they enjoyed modern music and stressed that they found out that they could produce, impact and challenge music and convey their feelings through this creation. This feeling was new to them. The residency revealed that

collaborating in music producing makes students own it, unites various fields and engages them.

9. Conclusion

Learning modern classical music in university is not a nice-to-have exercise, it is part and parcel of developing a 21st century musician who is creative and team-oriented as well as flexible. Students become more than mere technically proficient once a flexitive, inclusive teaching hints at exploration and reflection among the students. They are taught how to create meaning collectively, act without certainty and experiment with sound without barriers.

Contemporary music education is what allows the students to identify themselves not as mere performers, but also innovators, sound-seekers and sound-creators. Ambiguity, experimentation, and discussion welcome make musicians ready to play music, and to enlarge what musical art can be.

To serve the present cultural and artistic needs, these practices should be part of mandatory curriculum and not an extravagant activity in colleges. They are expected to strike the balance between hard work and imagination, tradition and novelty of ideas, as well as individual virtuosity and collective discovery.

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