ADOPTING ONLINE LEARNING APPROACHES IN PROFESSIONAL MUSIC TRAINING—THE TUT EXPERIENCE

Hua Hui Tseng
Tainan University of Technology (Taiwan)

Abstract

Having been asked to respond to a question from the Ministry of Education, Taiwan, about whether educational technologies used during the COVID-19 pandemic can serve as a knowledge base and be incorporated as learning tools based on their impacts on music education curricula, what follows are some observations and reflections from the Tainan University of Technology (TUT), Taiwan, about its educators' experiences of teaching live lessons one-to-one and in groups online. The idea put forward is that technology applications reflect an emergent sensibility in music lessons, and this represents an opportunity for music educators to reconfigure and strengthen their pedagogical approaches. By recognizing the accessibility of new and varied forms of musicianship and acknowledging the ways in which course curricula continue to grow in their range of practices and necessary literacies, pedagogies can be developed in concert with digital technologies to support broader and more cohesive, inclusive, diverse, meaningful, and useful experiences for music students.

*Keywords: Curriculum, musician, online learning approaches.*

1. Introduction

Over the past decade, education, including music courses, have seen a consistent growth in the use of digital technologies, but in 2020, given the pandemic context generated by COVID-19, much of the world was forced to adopt online virtual working methods with immediate effect. As a result, important changes emerged in the way specific subjects in music education were taught, affecting not only the particularities of learning and teaching individual courses, but also group learning and the theoretical components of courses (Rucsanda et al., 2021).

A key challenge exposing music's limitation for shifting to online learning is its traditionally focused face-to-face teacher-apprenticeship teaching models. The background to adopting online music courses provide fascinating insights into the higher education scene where technology and the internet supplement face-to-face learning with respect to understanding engagement in practical hands-on activities such as learning how to play a musical instrument, singing, performing solo or in groups, and improvising and composing music.

The aim of this research is to explore the relationship between program notes and musicians /audiences (see Figure 1) and show how teaching students to write and understand program notes can be accommodated in a post-COVID-19 teaching milieu that includes online learning. To achieve this aim, the case of the TUT was examined. The main reason for focusing on the TUT is that the study of TUT's Music Department and its curriculum has been ongoing since 2009. TUT offers a seven-year program from high school directly to a bachelor's degree in vocational education and qualifying as a music artist first requires mastery of the general concert audience, an assumption that has ensured TUT as a leader in professional music training as artists shift from being amateur to professional musicians.

Figure 1. Relationships between teaching, learning, and curriculum.
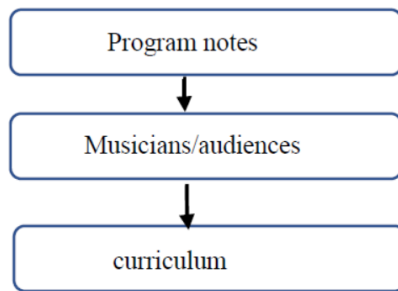
2. Background

Like other educational programs, professional music training programs are challenged by major changes in the sociocultural and educational landscape and addressing pedagogical changes to ensure continued excellence in music teaching is both complex and stratified (Johnson, 2020). In response to Taiwan's societal challenges, such as current issues about music education policy, the Ministry of Education in Taiwan amended the Arts Education Act (AEA) in 1997 that outlined the curriculum for study in the performing arts. The AEA of 1997 was related directly to Taiwan's art education reform (Lau & Li, 2013). This new milestone provided a solid foundation in music education in Taiwan for all students (Ministry of Education, Taiwan, 1997). The TUT, Taiwan, Music Department's seven-year program from high school directly to a bachelor's degree in vocational education has served as an example for incorporating educational innovations and interventions based on Teachout's (1997) three categories of skills/knowledge components, namely, teaching skills, personal skills, and music skills and behaviors as core competencies. In the context of the COVID-19 and the associated lockdowns, further adaptations were necessary to achieve these formal educational goals.

3. Literature review

Research into teaching music online is not new (Keast, 2009); for example, Koutsoupidou (2013) noted that after the first online classes were launched in 1994 (Levy, 2003), rapid online courses in many disciplines at all levels of education proliferated. Much of the research about online learning is limited, however; it is focused mainly on the drawbacks of online distance learning. One drawback noted is that research is not focused on the actual teaching material and learning process and outcomes; the research is mainly related to psychological conditions involved in an online course both for the student and the instructor. For example, Nortvig and Balle (2018) noted that the transition to remote teaching led "to a loss of classroom awareness and social presence from both the instructor and student perspectives" (p. 53). Much of the research is therefore focused on how students' involvement in online social networks negatively affects their development of personal relationships with fellow students and tutors, and recommendations are focused on how to diminish those negative feelings and effects (Koutsoupidou, 2013).

Until the outbreak of the pandemic on 21 January 2020 in Taiwan, Taiwan universities' music courses took place face to face. However, studies show that music can be taught online in ways that further a student's musical understanding (Keast, 2009) as well as performance skills (Kruse et al., 2013), teaching internships (Pike, 2017), and music appreciation (Eakes, 2009).

In the following section, Schumann's Piano Piece Papillons, Op. 2 is used as an example to evaluate the merits of using video conference software, like Zoom video conferences, with students' performing during conferences to add to and foster increased interaction.

4. Schumann's Piano Piece Papillons, Op. 2 program notes for a classical western concert

As an aspect of the Research Methods and Thesis Writing class at graduate student level, student performers are expected to write program notes about their performance for a general concert audience, that is, an audience of non-musicians who are interested in music and fairly knowledgeable. The goal of teaching program notes is to increase the audience's understanding and enjoyment of the music performed (Blom et al., 2020).

As a knowledgeable musician, I still enjoy reading program notes and continue to learn through them because no one can know everything about a musician with a vast musical repertoire. It is assumed that program notes are naturally associated with knowing how to listen and think about the music performed at the strategic level and initiate the relationship between performers and their audiences. Students who are

presenting recitals are therefore encouraged to write notes for themselves and their audiences, and graduate students are often asked to relate interesting facts about the composer they are studying. Knowing the historical context of a piece makes for better interpretations and a better listening experience.

Prior to COVID-19, the teacher might have taken time in class to explain Schumann's Piano piece Papillons, Op. 2 as students rehearse the piece. For example, the teacher might have alerted students to what was going on in inventive and descriptive titles that come from Schumann's piano music at the time that he composed this piece and discuss how it is similar or different to anything that audiences had heard before. Much like a college music lecture-recitals, the teacher might have discussed with the students and raised awareness about how Schumann uses titles for his movements to reflect the tempo or speed at which he wants the music to be played. The teacher might also have focused on literature and reflected on including program notes to notify the audience of what was written before the piece. For example, it is the scene of the masked ball at the end of Richter's novel *Flegeljahre* (1804, as cited in Perahia, 2014) that provides the dramatic "setting" for the cycle, a scene in which two brothers, in love with the same woman, vie to win her heart amid the gaiety and varied musical offerings of a social evening with a dance orchestra. Program notes therefore inform the audience and facilitate a better listening experience by including what is interesting and relevant about the composer.

The purpose of learning this musical piece therefore reaches beyond just playing good music well. It incorporates an intentional introduction to new musical discourses as well as tools for students to add to their cognitive understanding of how music works (see Table 1) by helping both the student (and audience) understand that music is located within time and a culture.

During the Covid-19 pandemic, this class shifted to online classes. So, how did my teaching of writing program notes change due to the online educational context? In brief, I transitioned into connecting with my program notes' classroom community using Zoom video conferences and learned to create an engaging learning experience. The advantages of teaching the writing of program notes online is that a teacher has the means to access and foster interaction, for example, both the teacher and the student writing his or her program notes can produce, edit, and enrich videos of performances to create a better learning experience online. The disadvantages of teaching program notes online is that students have the ability to hide, but this risk can be met by administering online quizzes to ensure every student is engaged during the conference call.

The new online learning experience therefore changed the state of teaching and learning from "mono" and "teacher-centered" to "interactive" and "student-centered," thus making it necessary to create a hybrid model where the information technology and online activities became an integral component of the education process (Li, 2022). Zoom video conferences provided online classroom settings for music education and ways for musicians to collaborate virtually. I used those technologies to teach musical appreciation through the use of program notes. Tech brands such as Zoom, which ensured their product's relevance in the lockdown situation, therefore became one of the leading video call platforms that significantly enhanced the learning experiences of students. While the content conveyed during an online class remained much the same as the content conveyed in face-to-face classes, online music learning allowed teachers to assess how well students understood the different learning contexts (individual, group and theoretical) of the learning activities they were performing.

In addition, with the internet, it was so much easier for students to obtain information about a composer as compared to what was the case in the past, and it was exciting to see students think about music in new ways and begin to comprehend different musical styles as a result of their increased access to various musical genres. Many student musicians also discovered that online platforms such as Bandlab, Charanga, and Soundtrap (owned by Spotify USA) and their online cloud-based Digital Audio Workstations (DAWs) could enhance their reach to interested audiences.

5. Conclusion

Moving forward in a COVID-19 world has challenged the pedagogical approaches used by many face-to-face higher education music academics. However, in music training, technology, being a generic tool of both music and distance learning, can be valuable for teachers and raise their confidence by replacing and enhancing other forms of teaching that require a certain level of music skill and knowledge (Koutsoupidou, 2013). For example, prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, access to the internet provided students with knowledge about composers and genres, which supports the knowledge component. The shift to online learning then encouraged a more interactive and student-centered approach to learning. Students' learning was enhanced by learning how to use digital technologies to ensure their performances as accessible to wider audiences by virtue of making videos that showcased their musical performance skills. Instructors could also use video conference platforms like Zoom video conferences to teach students about

the merits of providing program notes to their audiences and use quizzes to ensure student engagement with the material and performance.

It is true that Zoom video conferences are limited with respect to providing the same quality of critique for performances as is face-to-face instruction, in the same way as watching a televised concert performance is an inferior experience as compared to watching a live performance. Moreover, online distance learning courses in music mean that those who are teaching music online require knowledge and skills in online design, assessment, and communication. At the same time, regardless of future lockdowns, teachers will be asked to make use of remote teaching methods in music education to ensure the sustainability and scalability of music education. The importance of adopting and adapting to online learning approaches for teaching music and musical appreciation should not be underestimated, therefore.

References

Blom, D., Bennett, D., & Stevenson, I. (2020). Developing a framework for the analysis of program notes written for contemporary Classical music concerts. *Directory of Open Access Journals, 11*, 1–13. https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2020.00376

Eakes, K. (2009). *A comparison of a sociocultural and a chronological approach to music appreciation in face-to-face and online instructional formats* [Unpublished doctoral dissertation]. Degree of Doctor of Philosophy, Auburn University.

Johnson, C. (2020, June 12). Moving towards adoption of online music pedagogy. *ASCILITE Technology Enhanced Learning Blog.* https://blog.ascilite.org/moving-towards-adoption-of-online-music-pedagogy/

Keast, D. A. (2009). A constructivist application for online learning in music. *Research & Issues in Music Education*, *7*(1), 8.

Koutsoupidou, T. (2013). *Online distance learning and music training: Benefits, drawbacks and challenges.* 7th International Conference for Open and Distance Education. https://doi.org/10.12681/icodl.536

Kruse, N. B., Harlos, S. C., Callahan, R. M., & Herring, M. L. (2013). Skype music lessons in the academy: Intersections of music education, applied music and technology. *Journal of Music, Technology & Education*, *6*(1), 43–60. https://doi.org/10.1386/jmte.6.1.43_1

Lau, H. F., & Li, C. (2013) (Eds.). *Curriculum innovations in changing societies: Chinese perspectives from Hong Kong, Taiwan and Mainland China.* United Kingdom: Sense.

Levy, S. (2003). Six factors to consider when planning online distance learning programs in higher education. *Online Journal of Distance Learning Administration, 6*(1), 1–16.

Li, D. (2022). The shift to online classes during the Covid-19 pandemic: benefits, challenges, and required improvements from the students' perspective. *The Electronic Journal of e-Learning, 20*(1), pp. 1-18. www.ejel.org

Ministry of Education, Taiwan. (1997). Arts Education Act. https://law.moj.gov.tw/ENG/LawClass/LawHistory.aspx?pcode=H0170037

Nortvig, A. M. A. K., & Balle, S. H. (2018). A literature review of the factors influencing e-learning and blended learning in relation to learning outcome, student satisfaction and engagement. *Electron. J. E-Learn. 16*, 46–55.

Perahia, M. (2014). *Robert Schumann: Papillons, Op. 2.* https://vanrecital.com/tag/papillons-op-2/

Pike, P. D. (2017). Improving music teaching and learning through online service: A case study of a synchronous online teaching internship. *International Journal of Music Education*, *35*(1), 107–117. https://doi.org/10.1177/0255761415613534

Rucsanda, M.D., Belabor, A., & Cazan, A. M. (2021). Students' attitudes toward online music education during the COVID19 lockdown. *Sec. Educational Psychology, 12.* https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2021.753785

Teachout, D. J. (1997). Preservice and experienced teachers' opinions of skills and behaviors important to successful music teaching. *Journal of Research in Music Education, 45*, 41–50. https://doi.org/1010.2307/3345464