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**Finding creative ways to
manage anxiety: Can
improvisation within a
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INTRODUCTION

This research project is undertaken in Vanessa Kourtesi private vocal studio which is founded in Rotterdam, the Netherlands. I am a vocalist, performer, composer and vocal coach, coaching students in a private setting. Additionally, I lead group vocal workshops focused on world music and performance, in my studio in the Netherlands and internationally, in Belgium and France. As a coach, my main interest is in managing feelings of anxiety and fear during performance. This research project is developed in a private and one to one context in my vocal studio.

As a professional performer and former vocal student in conservatories in Europe I have experienced the need for greater educational focus and support towards issues of musical performance anxiety and perfectionism. The singer's profession sits in a competitive environment with exceptionally high standards, perfectionism and MPA are common characteristics of professionals in the musical field (Cupido, 2018). Considering that musical practice is embodied to one's image about themselves in a way that a failure in music might be translated as failure in life (D. Kenny, 2011), MPA and perfectionism should in my opinion be in the top list of music education inspiring vocal teachers to investigate new ways for prevention and confrontation of these issues rather than insisting on traditional methods of teaching.

Perfectionism and MPA may or may not cause severe symptoms in a musician's career and performance (Driskill, 2012), depending on the form of anxiety or perfectionism that is experienced by the individual (Kenny, 2011). The constant seeking of a mistake-free, high level performance and the pressure put on the individual in this context may cause unpleasant and anxious feelings to the singer (Flett and Hewitt, 2019). Therefore, the goal of this research is to investigate how reorienting the focus of the lesson and performance, exploring creativity and placing it in the center of interest can affect the vocalist's confidence. Through curiosity, freedom and within a non-judgmental environment the singer can achieve both improvement and satisfaction with their practice (Moss, 2021). In a one to one context, this research project is exploring if the vocalist's confidence can be supported with improvisation and creativity games.

Drawing from my personal experience, I have confronted high levels of musical performance anxiety, which escalated when I entered the conservatory. The relentless pursuit of accuracy in the score left little room for my personal taste and interpretation to flourish, resulting in an obsession with achieving a "perfect" performance. Ironically, my musical performance anxiety affected negatively my actual performance and intonation, and I gradually started to lose my enjoyment. As a vocal teacher, I have observed similar symptoms among my students, particularly within institutional environments. Singers often lack the same opportunities as instrumentalists to explore and participate equally in an ensemble and often receive criticism and evaluation negatively (Cupido, 2018, Sandgren, 2002). I recognize the need to change ingrained practices in the educational process, raise awareness

towards anxiety and incorporate the complexity of the vocal instrument, which involves mental and physical coordination, language, and interpretation, into our teaching methods. This research project aims to dive deeper into the need of different educational approaches and bridge the gaps that exist in vocal teaching.

Through this research project I am seeking to understand if improvisation in a playful and creative context during the singing lesson can enhance the singer's confidence and reduce the symptoms of MPA. I therefore aim to enhance my own creativity, designing exercises that are based on improvisation, language and story-telling, combining melody and text. MPA is related to the perception of incompetence during a musical performance in a public context and it is irrelevant to the hours of practice or the actual level of the musician (Salmon, 1990). Through these exercises that will be held in a safe and playful environment, I aim to examine whether the singer's confidence is enhanced and whether they are in a position to gain tools to better manage their unpleasant feelings during performance.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Perfectionism and Musical Performance Anxiety

Musical Performance anxiety according to the researcher D. Kenny (2009) is the experience of a consistent perception of an event related to musical performance as anxious. It can relate to underlying physical and/or psychological factors and/or previous experiences connected to anxiety. It affects musicians across the lifespan and is at least partially irrelevant to the years of one's practice, talent or achievements. MPA can influence the quality of a performance and according to its severity may affect a musician's career.

The exposure in the critical evaluation of others is a crucial factor in the definition of performance anxiety, highlighted by the perception that this evaluation can be negative and harmful for the self. It is crucial to understand how MPA works and affects a performer, as professional performers can be negatively influenced by it, as it can lead to limit or end their career. As performance anxiety is a result of the reaction of a perceived harmful situation, we understand that it can be a learned habit and therefore a teacher can help the student change the perception of the situation itself (Graham Frederic Welch, 2008,). In case of an emergency, or a perceived emergency such as a performance situation, the central nervous system is interfering by demanding control of the situation and confrontation of the danger, sending signals to the autonomic nervous system. As a result, we observe physiological symptoms as well that are correlated to performance anxiety (Mark C. Ely, 1991).

Literature does not provide a clear definition of perfectionism (Flett, 2001). Although, a perfectionist could be described as someone who is setting extremely high standards and simultaneously is excessively criticizing themselves over their performance (Egan, 2004). Perfectionism is related to the constant-and often unrealistic- haunt of perfection and the seek of a particular level of performance, followed by an excessive pressure on the self (Cupido, 2018).

The complex life of a performer, especially a vocalist, entails maintaining a high level and juggling various tasks while coordinating language, muscle memory, and emotions (Monti, Susic, 2008). This high level of skill has a vague and subjective meaning, as success can be interpreted differently by each individual. The competitive nature of the music industry often traps performers in a pursuit of perfection, striving for flawless performances. However, the notions of "perfection" and "success" are subjective and fleeting (Hewitt, 2019). The discrepancy between the ideal and actual performance can lead to negativity, dissatisfaction, and anxiety among individuals (Károlyi, 1999; Mor, Day, Flett, and Hewitt, 1995). Moreover, these lofty standards are challenging to attain, causing individuals to shy away from putting in effort to avoid the unpleasant feeling of failure (Hewitt, 2019).

Avoidance is a defining characteristic of perfectionism, reflecting its complexity: perfectionists may avoid exerting effort in their pursuit of success to evade the possibility of failure, creating a vicious cycle. As the learning process becomes an internal conflict, perfectionists experience fear when their internal resources are insufficient to meet their desires and unattainable goals (Hewitt). This mental process triggers negative emotions such as shame and further reinforces the tendency to avoid (Stoeber, J., & Eismann, U. 2007). Additionally, it is important to consider that teaching methods that involve performance assessment and examinations often discourage students' engagement and increase anxiety and insecurity levels (Ladano, 2016; Karlsen, 2011). Vocalists have the extra concern of a healthy and technically correct vocal sound, which restricts the acceptance of a mistake. (Cupido, 2018).

Avoidance is also a characteristic symptom of performance anxiety. Music performance anxiety varies from person to person, according to their individual developmental history and the psychosocial conditions of their musicianship (Kenny, 2016). That means that the reflection of MPA is very personal. According to research, perfectionism is related to high distress and performance anxiety in musicians and particularly socially prescribed perfectionism shows high correlations with debilitating anxiety (Stoeber, J., & Eismann, U. 2007,). The individuality in the level of severity and the characteristics of anxiety is also connected to possible traumatic events in childhood and the type of attachment, as high anxiety levels are associated with traumatic childhood experiences (Monti, David, Kidd, Carroll, Castano, 2016,).

The way a musician expresses their anxiety and how it influences their practice, is related to trait anxiety, the previous performance experience one has or has not but also their perceived quality. The factor of exposure and the feeling of constant evaluation are associated with the fear of failure and lack of confidence which also is related to anxiety (Welch, 2008). As a conclusion, we could assess that these feelings of inadequacy and fear of a negative evaluation are also connected to the highly demanding and competitive music business. As well, the nature of the musical profession leads to the association of one's instrument to themselves, and therefore the possibility of failure in the performance leads to the idea of failure as a personality (Sandra P. Harris, 1986, A psychologist's view on Musical Performance Anxiety). Another social factor that is connected to performance anxiety is the genre, as research shows that women are more sensitive to anxiety and to MPA than men (Welch, Winter). Nevertheless, it is important as educators to distinguish the level of severity of MPA, and to understand whether a treatment from a therapy professional is needed, as MPA is often followed by other anxiety disorders and sometimes depression.

Performance anxiety can manifest itself through a lack of practice and procrastination, causing individuals to remain unaware of their anxiety (Maisel, Ladano, 2016), affecting individuals in a variety of activities. Recognizing the need to

explore the association between perfectionism and performance anxiety in performers, Mor, Day, Flett, and Hewitt (1995) conducted a small-scale study that demonstrated a connection between socially and personally prescribed perfectionism, low self-control, and performance anxiety. Musical performance anxiety can be a consequence of or intertwined with perfectionism, although it is supported that perfectionism is higher among people who suffer from MPA. It can have a detrimental impact on a performer's career, potentially even leading to its cessation in severe cases (Kenny, Winter, Driskill).

Hopefully, although MPA and perfectionism are strongly connected to psychological factors, they also relate to music education. This gives space to the educational system to approach music with freedom and creativity in order to eliminate perfectionism, anxiety and the overall fear of making mistakes (Susic, 2008).

Music Education and MPA

Research has been conducted on confronting and treating, as well as preventing, perfectionism or anxiety in music students within an educational context (Ponce de León, 2021; Ladano, 2016). However, it is essential to consider the goals of the lessons being conducted and the cultural environment, particularly in conservatories, that is fostered in music and vocal education. How should we, as teachers, conduct lessons? Do we ensure that the process is enjoyable, creative, and safe for our students? (Kanack,).

Conservatory studies demand a high level of adaptability in various tasks, including the accurate performance and study of music. A common conflict that arises among conservatory students is the tension between musical accuracy in a written composition and musicality, which encompasses the musician's personality, emotions, and spontaneity during performances (Ponce de Leon, 2021). In addition to the general risks associated with a career and education in music, the demanding curriculum of conservatories often restricts students' autonomy, leading to frustration and hindering creativity (Ponce de León, 2021; Honkonen Jyrki, 2021). Furthermore, the institutional environment in these conservatories often lacks the tools to effectively manage the consequences of high-pressure situations in an educational setting (Ladano, 2016). It is crucial to reconsider the traditional curriculum of music education and explore new adaptations that can be applied to vocal education. Strategies that focus solely on specific outcomes and perfect performances need to be revisited (Karlsen, 2011). Students and musicians often resort to external methods, such as psychotherapy or medication, to manage their anxiety, which has proven effective in many cases (Kenny, Winter).

The role of improvisation

This research project will focus on the aspect of treatment and prevention of MPA. Studies related to music therapy and improvisation for anxiety demonstrate that musicians have a different connection with music compared to non-musicians. Therapeutic environments that emphasize music improvisation have yielded positive results in managing musical performance anxiety (Ponce de Leon, 2021; Ladano,

2016; Berger). Improvisation can be defined as spontaneous, free, and creative musical expression (Susic, 2008, Hill, 2009). The act of improvising promotes self-awareness of preferences, strengths, and limitations, as well as autonomy and adaptability in various roles while interacting with other musicians (Ladano, 2016, Corbett). Ultimately, it creates a support system for dealing with insecurity and ambiguity in the realm of creativity (Honkonen, Jyrk).

Studies on free improvisation and anxiety have revealed that practicing free improvisation can reduce feelings of anxiety (Allen, 2010, Youngshin, 2008). Jared Burrows defines free improvisation as “a music in which there are no preconceived systems for melody, harmony, or rhythm. In this kind of music making, musicians simply begin playing when they choose and stop when they are finished”. Free improvisation can be addressed also as creative music, improvised music of free music: It is instantly created without the use of scores or form. It represents a musical movement with no hierarchy or administration and it does not-yet-exist as an academic skill (Corbett, 2016). Rather than focusing on mastering a specific musical goal, free improvisation is a musical experience in itself (Kanellopoulos, Wright, 2010). Free improvisation does not demand excellence in any particular musical style nor does it emphasize correct notes or specific developmental progress within the improvisation. When practiced within a healthy environment that promotes equality, lacks hierarchy, and nurtures imagination, musicians can grow and discover their own musicality and ideas (Ladano, 2016).

Drawing from my personal experience, I have confronted high levels of musical performance anxiety, which escalated when I entered the conservatory. The relentless pursuit of accuracy in the score left little room for my personal taste and interpretation to flourish, resulting in an obsession with achieving a “perfect” performance. Ironically, my musical performance anxiety undermined my actual performance, intonation, and overall enjoyment. As a vocal teacher, I have observed similar symptoms among my students, particularly within institutional environments. Singers often lack the same opportunities as instrumentalists to explore and participate equally in an ensemble and often receive criticism and evaluation negatively (Cupido, 2018, Sandgren, 2002). I recognize the need to change ingrained practices in the educational process, raise awareness towards anxiety and incorporate the complexity of the vocal instrument, which involves mental and physical coordination, language, and interpretation, into our teaching methods. This research project aims to dive deeper into the need of different educational approaches and bridge the gaps that exist in vocal teaching.

METHODOLOGY

This qualitative work-based project aims to examine the perceived experiences of anxiety among professional singers who have either graduated or are about to graduate from conservatories. The study investigates their experiences within the institution and the level of support they received for anxiety, perfectionism, or lack of confidence. To understand their individual perceptions of singing performance and institutional support, interviews were held with the participants to inquire about their experiences and feelings. Each singer provided a unique perspective on these issues, reflecting the complexity and uniqueness of their musical journey. This research project falls within the constructivist paradigm, where multiple realities coexist rather than one absolute truth (Creswell, 2013). Qualitative research, being

context-specific, enhances our understanding of the social world and contributes to the improvement of teaching and learning (Anderson, 2010), providing opportunities to enhance practice through the study of personal experiences. A hermeneutic approach is used to interpret text, aiming to understand the lived experiences of individuals and reconsider their various aspects (Crowther, Ironside, Spence, Smythe, 2016). The use and meanings ascribed to language are interpreted in a process of "reconstructing experience and knowledge" (Laverty, 2003). Additionally, action research is employed in this project, which seeks to examine collective changes needed at an educational level for anxiety treatment and prevention (Hine, 2013).

Triangulation, used to improve the reliability of findings (Gray, 2009), is achieved through a literature review, semi-structured interviews, and participant observations during the three one-to-one sessions conducted with each participant. Over the course of three weekly sessions with each vocalist, different exercises based on improvisation were applied, aiming to understand their responses related to confidence. The convenience sample consisted of four adult professional vocalists, aged between 22 and 40 who are students or graduates of an English-speaking conservatory that is based in the Netherlands. The participants are not native English speakers. All participants reported experiencing anxiety during their musical journey. Ethical considerations were carefully planned and implemented for the benefit of the participants (Descombe, 2014): Before participating, they received oral information about the study, its purpose, intended methods, and were given the opportunity to ask questions before providing consent. Anonymity was ensured, and their responses to the interviews and sessions remained confidential, preventing identification (Bell, 2005). Participants were also informed of their ability to withdraw from the research at any point without facing negative consequences (Bell, 2005).

Practitioner research provided an opportunity to work as a researcher in my field, empowering me and fostering my professional development and autonomy (Coestly, 2009). It offered new concepts and methods for working, allowing me to go beyond traditional academic paths and integrate professional practice with university-level knowledge (Candy, 2006). As a former conservatory student myself and a professional vocalist, I had personal acquaintance with the participants, with whom I shared friendly or colleague relationships. This relationship falls close to the state of an "insider researcher", where the researcher has an intimate relationship with the research subjects, is a member of the group under study or their biography shares some common characteristics with the group under study (Mercer, Breen, 2007). I am aware that this personal relationship may have influenced the interviews and data collection, as I might have been preoccupied with certain responses. Participants may have also fallen into this preoccupation Khaliza Saidin Aizan Yaacob, 2016). To mitigate this, I made a conscious effort to raise awareness and maintain neutrality throughout the procedure. The small-scale research project required constant reflection, several studying and examination of the data in order to avoid bias and understand the data in depth. However, this intimate relationship with the participants proved fruitful, as it provided easy access to information and a deeper understanding of their social and background situations. Utilizing reflexivity allowed for some objectivity during the analysis and interpretation of the data, while acknowledging that an insider researcher maintains a personal engagement with the group being studied (Breen, 2007).

Procedure and Methods:

The sessions - observation

Three sessions took place with each of the four participants on a weekly basis. For each session, different exercises and activities were designed (see appendix). Inspired by improvising, story-telling and performance techniques, the sessions intended to stimulate a playful, free (Ladano, 2016, Barba, 2023, Rhiannon, 2013) and open approach to singing. They investigate how and if the singers would enhance their confidence towards their creativity and how this would possibly affect their musical performance anxiety. The size of the sample does not allow a generalized theory as a result, but it would inspire further research and experimentation related to this matter.

The exercises followed a deductive rationale, beginning from a general and open idea and leading to a more specific guidance. Starting with a simple and more general guideline, the sessions were gradually developed into more systematic and specific directions. The sessions intend to get the participants acquainted with a variety of tools that could enhance their imagination and creativity, leading them to improvise using different starting points (Barba, 2023). This would happen in an environment where everything is accepted, with no right or wrong outcomes and within the font of discovery and playfulness (Ladano, 2016, Hill, 2009).

Session 1 - "Maestro"

This part of the process intends to introduce the concept of distraction: Using distraction as a tool that may help reduce anxiety (Heidi Moss, Kenny, 2009), I attempted to reorient the focus of the participants from singing effectively to improvising without a clear goal (Corbett, 2016, Ladano, 2016). The meaning of vocal improvisation was to familiarize the participants with a procedure that does not necessarily focus on a generally accepted "beautiful" or "meaningful" way of singing (Susic, 2018, Ladano, 2016). I attempted to encourage the participants to discover sounds, words and melodies with as little thinking as possible, trying to minimize their planning through improvisation-speaking or singing. The session was deliberately conducted this way in order to create a playful background with no clear goal towards the exercises. The spirit of the exercise is aligned with the concept that the process of a lesson does not necessarily mean to be exhausting but to constantly create changes in the process, discovering new artistic ways to communicate (Barba, 2023). I will describe the process of the exercise in the following lines.

In the first session, an exercise called "Maestro" was employed. This exercise was inspired by a workshop on free vocal improvisation that I attended in the summer of 2022 at the Music Village of Pelion, Greece, conducted by vocalist and improviser Savina Yiannatou. I developed the idea of Yanatou's exercise and adjusted it to the purpose of the sessions. The exercise's initial orientation was technical: Yanatou was guiding the student vocalist with her hands, using hand gestures. She used 2 different gestures to initiate that the student should improvise a story (gesture 1) and to continue improvising the same story but this time while singing (gesture 2). The aim of her exercise was to maintain a vocal quality that relates to speaking timbre even when singing. The adjustment I used in this session served a role related to

performance and improvisation. Before each session, I explained the exercises that were going to be led so the participants become familiar with them.

Part 1-Getting familiar with freedom and playfulness

I took on the role of the "Maestro," conducting and providing directions to the participant using hand gestures. When my hands were at a medium height, it indicated that the participant should improvise a story and narrate it in a speaking range. When my hands were placed above my head, it indicated that the participant should continue narrating the same story but with improvised melodies, thereby singing it. Some participants had no previous experience with storytelling or improvisation or felt uncomfortable improvising in a musical context. To address this, I invited the participants who felt uncomfortable to take the maestro role and conduct me. Reversing roles has had positive results as we know from previous research projects related to improvisation and MPA (Youngshin, 2008).

Part 2- Getting familiar with freedom while exploring different ranges of the voice

The second part of the session included additional hand signals representing different vocal ranges (low, medium, high), encouraging the participant to sing their story using these designated ranges. In this part I aimed to encourage the participant to explore different ranges of their voice.

Part 3- The effects of the procedure into an existing song

In the third part of the first session, two hand signals were employed: a medium height position of my hands, representing verbal storytelling, and a high height position of my hands, representing singing a part of an existing song. These signals were given in an unexpected manner to stimulate immediate reactions from the participant. In this part I aimed to observe how the participant would feel during performing an existing song of their repertoire after experiencing the session.

Session 2 - "Maestro of the Four Words":

The purpose of this session was to reduce the improvisational choices of the participants and observe their reaction and behavior in this context. This choice was based on motor skill learning and neurology, as the brain works more efficiently when focusing on less directions, a method that is also encouraged in voice pedagogy (Heidi Moss, 2021). I also wanted to observe how the participants would lead their improvisation and whether they would enjoy it more if their tasks were limited. After being introduced to the first session's very broad palette of choices the participants now are encouraged to improvise using more specific directions but maintaining freedom. This would give them the opportunity to develop their melodies and instantly adjust to my signs to go higher or lower while improvising.

The second session also consisted of three parts. The first two parts were the same with the first session.

In the third part, the participant was asked to say the first four words that came to mind after a sign that came with my hand gesture. The participant had to improvise using only these four words they just said, following the movement of my hand in

tonal range (low, medium, high). Following the movement of my hands the participant was invited to improvise melodically in high, medium or low range. I decided on the spot which range height the participant would follow.

Session 3 - "Once Upon a Time":

The third session included three parts that were meaningful to each other and had an interconnection to every step of the session.

Part 1- developing comfort and security

The main focus of the first part was based on storytelling, where participants were asked to share their favorite childhood outfit and the recipe for their favorite food. I also shared my own memories to create a safe and warm environment, following the lead of story-sharing workshops to help participants feel at ease with public speaking (De Bord, 2003). Following this, we created a story together using prompts that had to be included at the beginning of each sentence.

This part was used as a warm-up and was meant to stimulate the participant's imagination. As we were both sharing stories from our past that were connected to a pleasant memory (favorite food, favorite outfit) I intended to create a pleasant, safe and warm atmosphere and enhance the personal connection. The co-creation of the story intended to build a collective space where we work together and cooperate to make something that derives from both sides. The story would develop in any possible direction, highlighting that there is no right or wrong solution but all possibilities are accepted.

Part 2-developing communication and focus

In the second part, as in session 2, I asked participants to provide four words that came to their mind. These words were written on separate pieces of paper and placed on the table.

We then took turns, with the participant asking me to narrate a memory or a story. Before I began speaking, I invited the participant to observe any tonal or rhythmic changes in my voice and to highlight and repeat any elements they identified as musical in my speaking. Afterwards, it was their turn to narrate their own memory, and my turn to isolate a phrase from their sentence that I identified as musical. By this, I intended to invite the participant to observe the musicality of the language and slowly to take inspiration from that in order to improvise. I considered it important to identify musical and singing elements in speaking, commenting on the broad palette that a vocalist can use in their art (Obert, 2023). In addition, repetition of a phrase supports attention, communication and dialogue between the music makers(Corbett).

Part 3- Encouraging interaction and imagination

In the third part of the session, I continually repeated the isolated phrase and invited the participant to choose one of the written words from the table. The participant would then improvise over the isolated phrase using only the chosen word. This procedure would continue until the improvisation concluded, with the decision of

whether or not to use the other words being made at the moment. This session intended to comment on the importance of independence during music making and the necessity of improvisation during musical studies, as supporting artistic choices can enhance the artist's confidence (Ladano, 2016).

Structured observation as a participant:

Observation, as a tool of qualitative data collection, can reveal characteristics of groups or individuals that may not be discernible through other means (Descombe, 2014). However, it also carries the risk of bias and misinterpretation of significant behaviors (Bell, 2005). To minimize data misinterpretation, I made constant efforts to maintain objectivity throughout the observation process. The structured observation of the aforementioned sessions followed a schedule, adhering to the objectives of the research project. I recorded notes during the sessions, focusing on any significant reactions or behaviors displayed by the participants.

The interviews

I conducted two semi-structured interviews with each participant, one before the start of the sessions and one after their completion. These interviews aimed to gather valuable insights and allowed the participants to expand upon their ideas and experiences (Gill, Stewart, Treasure, Chadwick, 2008). The first round of questions focused on sensitive topics, relating to their experiences with performance anxiety and perfectionism, the level of support they received during their university studies, their specific needs regarding support, and their habits and attitudes towards improvisation and musical play during singing. As discussed before, confidentiality and anonymity was reassured in order to protect the participants' benefits (Descombe, 2014). The second round of questions, conducted after the sessions, focused on their overall experience of the sessions and their reflections on the improvisation exercises.

PRESENTATION OF FINDINGS

In this chapter I am going to present the findings that came up through thematic analysis. After thoroughly reading the transcribed data, I recognised several patterns in the responses. The sections below include the main themes that arose from each interview. The analysis that follows contains an interweaving of the answers of each interview, observations and literature review in order to gain better clarity and an holistic approach to the process.

Interview responses

interview 1

The in person semi-structured interviews were recorded, and the verbal exchanges transcribed (appendix). In interview 1 all participants were asked to respond to

questions about their perceived anxiety experience, their experience as students in the conservatory and their experience during performing and practicing.

After several readings of the transcribed text, to become familiar with the content, I highlighted comments made that related to psychological and physical experiences of perceived anxiety, support of the institutional environment of musical studies, enjoyment, improvisation and playfulness during singing, potential connection between playfulness and confidence enhancement. Inductive analysis took place so that subjects and themes could be identified.

Through thematic analysis I identified the following themes for the section “perceived anxiety experiences”:

THEMES	PERCEIVED ANXIETY EXPERIENCES
1	fear of judgment and fear of negative evaluation
2	physical symptoms interfere with performance
3	occasional avoidance of tasks

The table below shows the themes identified for the section “support and information about MPA in the institutional environment of the conservatory”:

THEMES	CONSERVATORY AND SUPPORT FROM TEACHERS
1	inadequate support and information about MPA
2	need of performance oriented classes
3	potentially traumatic hierarchical system which triggers anxiety

The table below shows the themes identified for the section “singing and practicing experience-enjoyment, playfulness and improvisation in singing and practicing”:

THEMES	SINGING AND PRACTICING- EXPERIENCE OF IMPROVISATION
1	enjoyed practice when is done with intention
2	experience of not conscious improvising and singing which is more “fun”
5	no fear of judgment when practicing alone

Interview 2

The in person semi-structured interviews were recorded, and the verbal exchanges transcribed (appendix) as in interview 1. In the second interview the participants were asked about their overall experiences about the sessions. After several readings of the transcribed text, to become familiar with the content, I highlighted comments made that related to their impressions on the sessions, institutional way of learning and their needs and propositions in the subject of creativity in music education. Inductive analysis took place through coding of the data so that subjects and themes could be identified.

The table below shows the themes identified for the section “overall experience of the sessions”

THEMES	OVERALL EXPERIENCE OF THE SESSIONS
1	positive impression in interaction and communication when improvising
2	more comfortable when commands were less and specific
4	positive impression in exploring improvisation from a non analytical perspective
5	potential feelings of anxiety while improvising in the session

The table below shows the themes identified for the section “institutional way of learning”

THEMES	<u>INSTITUTIONAL WAY OF LEARNING</u>
1	goal-oriented system
2	limited space for creativity and playfulness
3	specific expectations that trigger anxiety and tension
4	diversity in the background of teachers and students

The table below shows the themes identified for the section “suggestions on creativity in music education”

THEMES	SUGGESTIONS ON CREATIVITY IN MUSIC EDUCATION
1	need of a more creative way of learning
2	need of peer interaction

3	evaluate the process rather than the outcome
4	education on psychological side of teaching

ANALYSIS

PERCEIVED ANXIETY EXPERIENCES

In this section I will analyze the themes connected to the perceived anxiety experiences that came up by the participants during the interviews 1 and 2. These include the fear of judgment and negative evaluation, physiological symptoms of anxiety and the ways of dealing with MPA.

Fear of judgment and negative evaluation

The fear of an external negative criticism is very present throughout the interviews: A general fear of making mistakes and of being exposed to judgment is affecting the participants's energy and willingness to sing. As participant 2 stated *"Oh, my God. What if I sing something and they won't like it? They don't see that I improved? Will they want to play with me again? Am I good enough?"* The feeling of relaxation and amusement while singing is more prevalent when the environment is safe and friendly, probably because the perceived threat of judgment is undermined. In fact, important source emotional support among music students in their learning environments comes from their friends and peers (Dews and Williams, 1989, Jääskeläinen, López-Iñiguez, Lehtikoinen, 2022). The fear of negative evaluation is a key characteristic of MPA that is connected to a fear of exposure, fear of failure and lack of confidence (Welch, 2008).

The unpleasant fear of judgment, may lead a musician to avoid practicing or performing as a way to escape a stressful situation. Musicians with high levels of fear and anxiety may adopt an avoidance behavior and fall in a cycle that will only lead them to avoid more (Harris, 1986). This is confirming the participants's responses who are occasionally avoiding tasks such as challenging songs or perceived as difficult technical exercises when they experience symptoms of anxiety. MPA is one of the psychological variables that most affect the quality of musical performances in front of an audience (Welch, 2008). *"I feel nervous. Yeah, I feel like something is coming up. Okay. And I am looking forward when it's done. Because it's relieving when it's done, because it's so much pressure. And it makes me doubt if I'm actually a performer",* says Participant 2. The emotional and physiological discomfort, depending on the severity of the symptoms may interfere and even limit or end one's career. This can be found in the transcribed text where Participant 4 reports the following lines: *"The exposure also created anxiety for me. The uncontrolled exposure when I started studying, being recognized by people I didn't know. I don't feel comfortable with it; I didn't ask for it. I tried to isolate myself from it".*

As another participant reported, vocalists can be considered as a special category among musicians as their musical instrument is their body: As a participant also mentioned, a vocalist's instrument is strongly connected to their identity, they cannot change it as a guitarist would do. This pressure derives also from the perception that the value of one's voice is equal to the value of the self (Monti and al., 2016) and potential musical failure is correlated to a personal one. In addition, the act of the

performance is vital in musicians and vocalists, exposure is a component of the profession. Feelings of discomfort related to it, may easily fall into concerns about belonging to the profession (Susic, 2018).

Physical symptoms of anxiety

Participants reported a few physical symptoms deriving from their anxiety: trembling and shaking hands, increase of heart rate, breath control, increase of temperature in the ears, Increased perspiration. The physical symptoms interfered with control over voice and vocal technique affecting the quality of the performance. In some cases it led to avoidance of certain activities such as singing high notes because of the fear of lack of tonal accuracy that derives from loss of breath control. " Participant 3 stated: *"My leg and hand tremble, I can't stay stable, I sweat, especially when I hear the word "exams."* Previous research about the association of stress to vocal accuracy has shown that musicians are more likely to feel anxious in conditions in which they are being evaluated (Maestri, Morsomme, 2014). The heart rate and the intensity of cognitive and somatic symptoms were significantly higher in the stressful condition than in the non stressful situation indicating that the singing voice can lack accuracy in stressful conditions such as examinations. Another example was that it was impossible to concentrate on the vocal performance because of the somatic symptoms such as trembling.

This can be shortly explained by the fact that the central nervous system responds to a perceived danger -in our case a performance situation. The physiological symptoms correlated to performance anxiety are the system's effort to confront the perceived danger (Mark C. Ely, 1991). The feelings and the physiological symptoms are not directly caused by the feared event but by the thought of this event. The harm is caused by the thought that an event is harmful (Ellis).

How do they deal with MPA

The participants were asked whether they manage their feelings of anxiety and how: They used positive self- talk to remind themselves they have prepared adequately. Self-statements are an initial step in changing feelings of anxiety because of the direct link between thoughts and feelings (Harris, 1986). For example, Participant 3 kept thinking that *"I always have anxiety, but when I've studied, I tell myself I've done what I had to. It works as reassurance; I've prepared"*. Rephrasing the negative thinking and expression about the self and transformation into something positive can gradually increase confidence and create a more solid psychology in all stages of the performance, giving a bigger chance for improvement (Anne Petrovich, 2003). Participants responded that they try to remind themselves that performance is something enjoyable to them and attempt not to be identified by anxiety maintaining objectivity and distance to it: *"Yes to accept it that it's there. But also not to identify myself with it, it's not my personality or it's there because of some things, it can appear, but you have to be a bit objective with it"* (Participant 1). Although MPA is not necessarily related with the level of preparation and practicing (Kenny, 2009), participants responded that preparation is beneficial towards their anxiety and confidence. Most of them maintain a routine to their practice which appears to be structured and goal oriented in order to achieve certain results.

SUPPORT FROM TEACHERS-INSTITUTIONAL WAY OF LEARNING

In this section I will analyze the themes that arose during the interviews 1 and 2 that are connected with the support from the teachers and the institutional way of learning.

Goal-oriented system

Not enough support and information related to MPA is provided inside the conservatory according to the participants's responses. General classes about mindfulness and workshops on Alexander technique are provided, as well as seminars related to well being. There was a clear need for further information and education towards MPA for both students and teachers. MPA management often falls in the personal choice of each teacher to discuss it or not. Depending on the subjectivity of personal relationships between teacher and students, there is no adequate information and treatment of MPA. Participants reported that there is little discussion about it among students, creating a taboo around it.

Described by the participants as a "goal oriented system", the environment of the conservatory expects to evaluate a product that derives from several years of studying in the institution. The attention given in the final product gives no space to the quality of the process and the progress a musician has made during the years. *"I don't agree with how conservatory is so focused on like, only the final product and the final moment. It's actually also the whole process and also learning how to learn"*, says Participant 2. This may align with the thought that generally neoliberal education views students as human capital and economic investment for the market and consumer power (Jääskeläinen et al., 2020). In addition, a traditional way of learning is supported, where the teacher represents the source of knowledge and maintains authority in the classroom (Wright, Kanellopoulos). Traditional approaches on music education reproduce a model with a rigid plan that supports grading methods and examination, using grades to motivate students and track their progress (Susic, 2018).

Participants reported pressure and stress that was connected to the educational process after they started their music studies, even though before their enrollment they felt more relaxed and more happy to perform. As reported by Participant 4, *"I can say that this anxiety I mentioned appeared after school. Until then, I never had it; I wasn't afraid, and I wasn't nervous during rehearsals"* High levels of pressure, stress and discomfort has been reported in students of higher education especially in music majors where students may as well experience psychological problems that include performance anxiety, perfectionism and doubts about their career (Jääskeläinen, López-Íñiguez, Lehtikainen, 2022). This pressure was reported to be connected with the teacher's demands where the student vocalist had to improvise or sing in front of their peers. The pressure and high level of studies and the diverse information a vocalist has to equilibrate may impact their confidence. MPA may be present in various circumstances and the traditional educational environment may fall in this category (Kenny, 2008) as it may be accompanied by the fear of negative evaluation from the peers or the teachers. Although MPA is rooted in many psychological factors (Kenny, 2008), the responsibility of MPA management weighs music education as well (Susic, 2018, Ladano). Education should be aligned with the needs of the students (Susic, 2018), supporting them to flourish, accept their talent and their obstacles, and accept the existence of MPA itself as a reinforcement of creativity and musicianship.

Alternative music education methods that comment on the traditional model of music training in the conservatories has been introduced recently. Research conducted

about models in music education that place improvisation in the center of the system have shown positive results (Kanellopoulos, Honkonen, 2021). I will elaborate on that in the chapters below.

Potentially traumatic hierarchical system which triggers anxiety

“So every time I meet some new person that my teacher knows, he’s like, Oh, this is my student. And then, and then he would say things, something for them. It was really horrible” (Participant 2)

A few of the participant's testimonies drew my attention as I believe it could reflect the problems of a traditional model of music learning: *“I had that teacher before screaming in school. So that was not very positive. That was very negative reinforcement for me”*, Participant 2 reported. Traditional and hierarchical system of music education empowers the role of the teacher who maintains the role of an executive that holds knowledge (Hill, 2009). Even though this method has proved to eliminate the creative skills of music students (Ladano, Susic,) it is still promoted in various schools in the Western World (Hill, 2009). The culturally diverse environment of the music school the participants of this study relate to, includes the multiple backgrounds of teachers and students. The adopted teaching styles are connected to this cultural diversity (Chen, Lai, Chen, 2022), in a school environment where a situation described as below takes place, according to Participant 4: *“Teachers are over 50 years old grew up and were nurtured in such a system, and this is the difficulty, this is our issue, that people forget, it’s very painful because they perpetuate it, they forget how it was in their place and become the aggressors while they were victims and do the same to the next generation. All this in a Northern European environment, in the Netherlands, in Dutch culture”*.

Power that is positioned into the teacher's hands leaves them the authority to implement rewards or punishments, widening the gap between them and the student (Chen, Lai, Chen, 2022). This gap leads students to feel they do not have enough support and guidance as they need to accomplish certain demands with no space for personal expression (Hill, 2009, Kanellopoulos). In addition, it can potentially traumatize students who have experienced verbally violent behaviors because they did not perform adequately according to their teachers. These verbal signs confirm the fear of negative criticism and negative evaluation (explained above) that may follow a public performance. MPA is strongly connected to the fear of being ridiculed after the exposure to the public, as well as the fear of being negatively judged by the others doubting one's ability to succeed (Susic, 2018). These concerns are confirmed by a verbal and potentially violent behavior by the teachers who have the power to punish or reward specific students. A traumatized student who already experiences MPA may also avoid performing again in order to get distanced from a traumatic situation: *“When this system changes, I will go out and sing” (Participant 4)*

This system has also been reported to have difficulty to include the different financial backgrounds of the students who may need to work externally to support their studies. It has been reported to be impossible to equilibrate the workload for the conservatory with the workload that is external to the conservatory, leading students to stress, discomfort and potentially to a burn out. The challenge of balancing the pressure of both paid and unpaid work in order to succeed financially and academically/artistically might have negative results in the student's psychology and increase the levels of anxiety (Jääskeläinen and al., 2022).

CREATIVITY IN MUSIC EDUCATION-IS IMPROVISATION THE ANSWER?

In this section I will analyze the themes that arose during the interviews 1 and 2 that are related to creativity during the lessons and improvisation. I will also analyze the overall impressions of the participants during the sessions.

Impressions from the sessions

As stated before, participants had a clear need for further support and information towards MPA. After finishing the sessions, participants reported that they would also need classes that focus on performance development as well as classes that are oriented to creativity, improvisation and composition. An analysis about the goal-oriented curriculum that “kills creativity” has been exposed in the previous chapters. During the sessions I aimed to include 3 different exercises that were developed deductively, as analyzed before. The exercises did not offer a clear goal set to the participants in order to enhance the broad meaning of creativity.

The participants reported that they were happier and more free when the directions were more specific and clear. For example, in session number one, they felt they had a very broad palette of choices for their story-telling or melodic improvisation which was restricting for them. They were focusing very much on the meaning of the story and the construction of sentences that made sense so some of them experienced anxiety during this session. Here I would observe that goal-setting is again obvious even in a situation where there is no grading or evaluation from a teacher:

Participants though, would still feel this potential evaluation and would criticize themselves during the process, experiencing anxiety, thinking of the possibility of failure.

Participants were told with emphasis that every outcome from this session is accepted and that there is no clear goal or challenge for the exercises but the aim is to explore the possibilities of playfulness. That seemed to be unusual for the participants and I observed that they were trying to achieve results and distinguish a required goal *“I didn't know what was going to happen and I was a bit like, maybe a bit not that relaxed and but then I understood your approach and, today, especially I was very comfortable”*, Participant 1 reported. Laughter and positive reactions were also observed, creating a positive environment (Husniyah binti Che Soh and al. , 2020). .

Time was also an important element during the sessions, as it was needed in order to enhance their imagination. Participants needed time to relax and to get in touch with their imagination both when creating stories and melodies. As sessions were deductively developed and the directions were gradually more specific and reduced, participants started to feel more comfortable with improvisation. This can be explained neurologically because the brain is more functional with less tasks (Heidi Moss, 2021). Melodic development was achieved in the second session, where participants were asked to improvise over four specific words. They all seemed to follow a specific structure to their improvisations. The third session seemed to be the most enjoyed as it included communication and interaction with me. They reported to think this interaction as positive, as the attention was not only on them but something was collectively created.

Suggestions for a different education

Alternative music education methods include the reinforcement of creativity as a central factor of MPA management. Criticizing traditional learning methods that require students to obey something that is generally approved, they encourage students to create their own music, improvise and make mistakes in order to build something new and innovative (Hill, 2009). Participants experienced the sessions as something that helped them explore their creative self with no judgment and realized their need to incorporate this kind of exercises and experiences in their practice routine. Participant 1 reported that they experienced “ *the simplicity that I don't have to think very complicated things. it's really liberating, like, it's something that everyone can basically do just to feel comfortable to feel like free to do it.*” As improvisation is something that is being taught with rules, they reported that they started thinking that improvisation is accessible to anyone and that there is no division between gifted and non gifted musicians. Improvisation and creativity in music education is supported by a variety of educational movements and theories, playing a critical role to the generally accepted theories (Wright, Kanellopoulos). Improvisation can assist in understanding the meaning of musical identity and is also a crucial element of discussion in teacher education and development (Kanellopoulos, 2010, Ladano, 2016). That is why improvisation is the most important major in various conservatories and why personal creativity is the center of music education (Hill, 2009, Honkonen, 2021).

As stated before, the sample of this study is small and it is impossible to produce a generalized result out of it. Although it is interesting to observe the qualities that a creative-oriented session/exercise has impacted on the participants. They did not indicate that the sessions reduced their anxiety, although, they all reacted positively to the sessions and they admitted they will possibly draw inspiration from the sessions in the future. In opinion the sessions could have more clarity and possibly less information so the participants could have more time to adjust to them. It would be also interesting to have more time between the last session and the last interview so I could observe possible effects of the session in a longer period. In any case, any one-sided traditional music education method can be problematic (Karlsen, 2011) and creative processes should be adopted to cultivate the student's musicianship.

Creative practices and improvisation as an answer to MPA

The participant's confidence was said to be enhanced during the sessions, as they felt that practicing on their creativity helped them cultivate it. They also reported that the procedure was liberating and relieving for them as they could improvise and be creative outside of the specific borders of their studies without the fear of singing a wrong note. As participant 3 said “*In the context of school, we did improvise, but because the teacher needed to hear us. It's very creative to improvise; it's easy and nice to start from a word, a phrase, without the pressure of being judged. You can be inspired by anything*”. Improvisation has been proven to reduce MPA, as it helps musicians to explore their limits and take risks and responsibilities (Ladano, Honkonen, 2021). Free improvisation creates a safe space that liberates the musician from the fear of making mistakes where they can explore musicality and focus on more creative and artistic aspects rather than playing correctly (Ladano, 2016, Ponce de Leon). That is probably why participants had positive reactions to the procedure, as the fear of negative evaluation had no reason to exist, since there was nothing to evaluate. Free improvisation is a tool of MPA management and has been used in various studies of MPA treatment (Youngshin, 2005, Montello, Ladano, 2016). The alternative use of their instrument can also be a tool to change their point of view and examine music from a different perspective (Ponce de Leon, 2020). Free improvisation also had positive results in music therapy sessions (Ponce de Leon, 2020). “ Learning to set the rules through interaction and not through reference to

some universal musical norm is what improvisation might offer to education and this is one way in which music education might be linked to emancipation” Kanellopoulos (2010) states. Improvisation has to offer a lot in music education, leaving behind the boundaries of rules and mistakes, bringing musicians together, highlighting the power of human interaction.

DISCUSSION

Limitations

The limitations of the study in terms of time and restricted sample did not allow it to provide a generalized result but further study can be conducted about creative and playful processes inside the music education system. I think that the results are positive, opening a new window for further investigation and a more open-minded system. Personally, I believe that the sessions could have been longer and possibly include less information in every meeting so the participants could adjust in a better way to the exercises and their purpose.

Conclusion

This study aimed to understand the experiences of the sample of participants towards MPA and related to their educational environment. The study aimed to examine whether creative and improvisational sessions with a playful insight could play a role towards reduction of MPA and empowerment of confidence. The sessions proved to be enlightening, showing the potential problems of a traditional music education system and leading to new creative ways towards musicianship. Creativity and improvisation seem to be powerful and helpful to the empowerment of a musician's creativity and also to their MPA as it enhances autonomy, exploration and eliminates the fear of making mistakes creating a safe space for interaction (Ladano, 2016). Previous studies and innovative methodologies about music education support the creative processes in music education and promote alternative models where improvisation is the center and the teacher is no longer an executive who holds knowledge (Hill, 2009). Creativity should be in the spotlight of education, supporting musicians to cultivate their own aesthetics and choices in a safe environment.

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APPENDIX

INTERVIEW A

PARTICIPANT 1

VK: So would you self identify as a person who experiences anxiety while singing? Do you feel that in specific circumstances you feel more anxious than others?

P1: I mean, it depends. A lot. situation, like, if I'm performing in a concert, or if I'm in a rehearsal, I mean, both ways I can feel anxious. But so if I see the two, I'm playing, for instance, if I'm playing with people that I know. And, like, let's say that they're my friends, I feel very comfortable. So it's, it helps a lot to find all the people around me. Which one blame? If I have to sing, like, in a place in a lesson or rehearsal, that I have no idea about the people? Of course, it makes me more anxious.

Do you identify different symptoms? Like physically? Do you notice anything happening physically to you when you feel anxious?

Yeah.

I mean, it's mostly that my muscles aren't getting like bit tight. Also, with the breathing, it's harder to control it. I mean, also my voice like it can shake or Yeah, the control is getting out.

Of course, like as seniors I think we're careful with that.

Okay. And, like, also, psychologically, do you notice anything specific, like repeating each time you're nervous?

Like, thoughts that I have?

Thought thoughts or like, like avoiding situations like, Have you ever for example, what have you ever experienced? Like, you don't want to do something? And did you do it eventually?

Yeah, there were times when I went for it. But also, it happened that I just refused. Really? I mean, not not a concert, but like exercises in our lesson or, like tasks? Or if I had a choice.

Yeah. And how did you feel after like saying no

Many times I said that, she'd I should have done it. I mean, I could have over overcome. Like, I felt that maybe I would have been able to beat the anxiety and but yeah, I suppose.

Yeah, but do you feel like it's more? It's more easy when you say okay, I'm, I'm anxious. Or when you say no, I have to beat this thing.

Sorry, which I feel more.

What is more helpful to you

me I think it's more helpful if I say yes. And I and whatever. I'm just trying to do it. Because many times, it's like, a positive feedback for myself. That's okay. I can do it. Like, anxiety is not me. It's just there and okay, and basically, no one cares. I mean, it's a process like, yeah, you can learn it or not learn it how to.

Yeah. How to be bigger? I don't know what I mean, the presence like, if you have the strength to be like, Okay, this is only the anxiety and I can I can just go.

Okay, so you would be doing it, like used to you think it's more like to, to accept it, as I understand

Yes to accept it that it's there. But also not to identify like myself with it, you know that it's just that it's not my personality or it's some because of some things, it can appear, to be a bit objective with it. I don't know if it makes sense.

Yeah, thank you. Okay, so do you have? Do you think you've had enough support? And information in the conservatory? Regarding performance anxiety? And if not, do you think it would be important to have?

I think I mean, unfortunately, it's very important to, to have this kind of toys, or I mean, my main subject teacher, we had been discussing a lot about it. And but it's because he's very sensitive, and he was, like, open for that. But many cases, I think it's a bit not a taboo, but it's like, we don't care or no, like, it's just we are not really taking care of that. Okay. I think the lessons are I don't know. Like, for sure, teachers to be more sensitive in between or, like, more aware that, okay, I have a lesson with

a group of students. And there might be people who have this, you know, to be more sensitive to, to notice it or,

Do you think they the lessons include the performance situation? Because like in other musicians, we learn theory, we learn techniques, but sometimes, maybe we need more performance oriented lessons?

Not really.

Do you think it would it would be helpful?

Of course, of course, for sure. Because we are from very different backgrounds and levels, and we have very different different experiences. And there are people who might have been experiencing performing for years already, after entering the Conservatory, and there are people who have not experienced that much so of course, it's needed. Yeah.

And like, do you think like, the conservatory would be different if there was like, more awareness about anxiety issues? Or like what anxiety can have? Because people, for example, because of this, they found themselves really struggling and sometimes they're stopping even playing music. Do you think it would be different if?

Yeah, for sure.

And were there any lessons or workshops in the conservatory about awareness of anxiety?

Yes, there were some. Okay. But not so much. Yeah, I would do it differently for sure. If I if I read like, for example,

for example, I mean, what have me is that that I could discuss it with my main subject teacher. That's very good. Because even though we had this optimal performance program something all the time there were new teachers. How can you open up if I, like every month, there's someone new. And it was more like lectures about how your brain is working under stress, and it was not so personal. And I think it will make much more sense. Of course, it's nice to know, like, in your nervous system, what is happening, but to really, like, discuss our experiences, also with other students. Much better, I think. Okay.

Nice. And like, maybe a also do you think like, if more teachers were, do you think actually that the teachers you have during all of your lessons like conservatory before? They, you felt that they were more or less aware about anxiety? You said, for example, that your main subject teacher wasn't? They were very helpful. But do you think it's needed to be aware in education about this?

Yeah,

I think it's, it's necessary for sure to have these skills. Yeah.

Yeah, I totally agree, actually, about this. And which leads me to the other question, which is like, do you enjoy singing and practicing singing?

Yeah, I do. I do for sure.

And, and when you're alone, when you were performing? Okay, and how is usually your practicing routine? Do you have like, for example, a song and then you practice it? How is it?

It depends if I have to prepare something. Certain time I have done yeah, I'm trying to be like, very, like to plan what? How I'm going to prepare it. But for sure, I am warming up. And I mean, it depends on the song. If it's like, in my own language, of course, it's easier. If it's not and I have to, like listen to it a lot. But if I if I'm just, I mean, of course, like I'm doing just like a training to the how do you stay in shape? Yeah, in shape. And then sometimes I'm just learning whatever, I'm fine. When I have like, free time to learn new things and

nice. And like, when you practice Do you find yourself playing or improvising or using playful things during your routine?

Yeah. Yeah, for sure.

For example. For example, now I was I was playing my instrument. the Hungarian one. And usually I played with a bit but I was playing it with my fingers. And really just because it's very different, like different sounds that I'm doing. If I'm playing with the peak, and actually, it's, it's really nice to sing on top. Or even if it's a song or just improvise, like, it's hard,. I don't know the time. Improvising. And because it's new, I really like to just, yeah, play out with this. Speak and yeah, he's really excited. I don't know. Like, before I was not doing it, because this particular like traditionary so so yeah, for example, this but yeah, just I don't know, like, like cooking or baking and I just, you know, start to say like, random

and this is fun.

And when you do that, like cooking and singing and easily the like, do you notice that you do you can do things that you could not do when you are seriously practicing?

Yeah, of course, of course. Okay. And, like so.

So how Why do you think you sing and why you do other things?

Because I mean, first of all, I do like it and it just comes natural. Naturally it's a good question why?

Yeah. I

don't know if I can. Yeah, yeah.

Yeah. But I mean, it's nice because in in these conditions, like when you cook or you bake or know, you fold the clothes, you don't have like, a purpose of like, Okay, have a goal and they have to be good at this skill. You just doing doing it for fun? So maybe, like you do things, like, non traditional way.

I'm not thinking of stops. I'm just thinking of moving into this. So my brain is very relaxed. Of course, it's, it allows me I guess, to be playful.

Okay. Okay, and have you like, discovered new things while doing this?

Yes. I mean, especially with improvisation, I think this was not only this, but but for sure. It helped a lot to realize that Okay, actually, I'm capable of like creating nice melodies, or, you know, just by myself. Yeah, like if you if you discover new things about you when you just do it need for fun. And if like this helps you to do when you're more serious.

Sometimes when I like something I recorded if I just need my phone and then I can use it for if I compose something. Yeah, to have ideas. Okay.

Nice. Well, that's it. And thank you. Thank you very much. Let me close the recording.

PARTICIPANT 2

VK: Okay, we record. Okay. So, whenever if you feel like, you don't want to answer something or if you feel you don't want to elaborate on something, it's okay. You can always withdraw and say no. So would you self self identify as a person who experiences anxiety while seeing while singing?

P2: No, but while performing?

Yeah, while performing like singing could be also in your rehearsal or like stabbing, practicing or performing?

Yes, sometimes.

Okay. Like, do you? Would you say anything like about that? Do you feel like there's something specific situation where you experienced that?

Yeah, so I feel I feel more stressed out when I perform. Because I feel that there's more judging happening, especially if the audience or a lot of musicians, okay,

then just I feel like the pressure is higher to perform well, and that brings me some anxiety. But if I just, if I'm happy if I'm, for example, jamming with people, then I'm totally fine. Okay. Yeah. Okay, then I just feel like it's, we're just having fun. No one is judging you spend it's fine. Okay. But no, for example, we had last week, a jam with Jessica, or Jeff and I've done dinner. And they asked me to sing something for them. But it felt it didn't feel like a jam. Okay. So then, I also didn't feel so comfortable because people were standing looking at you and it wasn't like this organic jam.

So like, it's like you're coding anxiety with, with the audience and the judging?
Yeah, like, Okay.

And while you experienced this anxiety? Can you identify, like, somatic or psychological things happening to you? Like, for example, could you see like a physical, physiological change?

Yes. Usually, if I get nervous, my heart rate increases. Okay. And then I also feel that I'm shorter of breath. And therefore, my voice is less stable and more shaky. Yeah, and sometimes even my, my throat feels like it's a little bit closed. Yeah.

Yeah. And psychologically, do you see something specific?

Psychologically? Just the thoughts of like, Oh, my God. What if I sing something and they won't like it? They don't see that I improved. Will they want to play with me again? Okay. Am I good enough? Like these kind of things?

Maybe you avoid a situation where you think you will feel like that, for example, playing a concert or going to a rehearsal?

Yes, I would, for example, like when I was in India, my teacher often introduced me and then we wanted me to sing for people. And I often if I could avoid it, is it Oh, yeah. Right now I'm not in the mood or something like that. And I wouldn't, I wouldn't say I would kind of tried to tell my teacher beforehand, like I'm not feeling in the mood of singing, just to sing. Or also what I noticed that if I don't want warm up my voice in the morning. Like, for example today and more about my voice, then I don't feel comfortable singing in front of other people. Because then my voice is not good.

But in India, I did understand Did you eventually sink for these people or not?

Sometimes I had to

That was a ongoing thing.

Yeah. Yeah. So every time I meet some new person that my teacher knows, he's like, Oh, this is my student. And then, and then he would say things, something for them. It was really horrible. And also when we go to like, parties or events and we will get invited for dinner. I always was dreading because then hours I had to sing. It was I was like, monkey thing. So I didn't like I didn't like it. Okay, because then they also want me to see certain style of music that I don't know, like Bollywood. Okay, because they don't interested. You're not interested in classic. So I don't know how to say it

properly.

Sounds also very stressful. And then like, after that, you were like, in other situations, you were feeling like a to sing like, or it was like something?

I think because I got exposed to just like, every time I introduced myself as a singer, they want me to sing. Especially now when someone just says sing, I'm like, No, I

don't. I assume if I want to. I don't. I gotta have to feel it. Because otherwise it's not genuine. But then if your performance, then if you don't feel it, what do you do?

when you have a performance? Is there a specific, like, ritual that you follow? Before the performance that it makes you feel good? Or bad? Like, have you noticed different things that you do that makes you feel good? Or worse?

Like, yeah. I wouldn't say that I have any ritual. I just usually like to warm up my voice. That's what I do in the mornings. And then, and then I try to have a relaxing day. Like, don't plan too many things for the date itself.

Yeah, and then what I usually do is to get into the zone, I like to dress up to feel like okay, I'm now taking in a role. And I'm presenting something. So I'm doing a little bit of theater. And it's like, where some shiny shoes.

Do you have a different behavior previous days, Do you see yourself going in the performance zone?

I wouldn't go no, I'm not ever going in a performance zone. But I, I feel nervous. Yeah, I feel like something is coming up. Okay. And I am looking forward when it's done.

like this is relieving when it's done, because it's so much pressure. And it makes me doubt if I'm actually a performer.

But I guess this is something very connected to what we do, like the performance and the exposure. do you feel that you had enough information while studying in the conservatory or in like, your lessons before the conservatory about performance? And performance anxiety?

Well, maybe I didn't take the information that was available. If I'm honest. because they used to be the performance class. And I did attended, but I didn't. And I feel like if I if I was more consequently, following your classes, maybe I could have drawn more information and tips about anxiety and performance. I didn't go for more for one of the reasons because I was the only one performing my style. And they would give me comments about, about the topic of the content, and they have no idea of what it's how it's supposed to be sound. So I didn't feel like I was good enough. Sometimes the vocal technique teacher gave me some advice, which I would think would help with anxiety, like taking taking yourself outside of the role of the performer, for example, to make it

less personal to say, you are now a storyteller. And that takes away the pressure of if they don't like it, it's not that they don't like you as a person, but maybe they don't like a story. Like this. Okay.

Do you think there was enough information provided about performance, anxiety and self during the school and support about that model? Did you feel that there was something that was communicated through the lessons?

Usually not? I wouldn't say that there was, except for this performance class. There was not really any, at any point, and you focus on anxiety and performance and learn how to go with it. Maybe there was a subject that they added, which is minor in mindfulness. But I didn't feel like the teacher didn't attempt to connect it with music was just general, having a calm mind and relaxed state of body and mind. This was possibly a good effect on your overall, but it didn't really like she didn't really link it like you are. Taking care of your mind and body this way help you? Okay, so I don't, there was not any particular focus except for a performance class, but it wasn't really. Okay.

Do you think like, there should be more information, more education about this matter of performance, anxiety and the difficulties that come?

Yeah, I think it's definitely a topic that should be addressed at some point while you're studying music, because it's, it almost seems like it's not very talked about. And a lot of times, a lot of people, excuse me, they feel maybe stage fright or anything, but it's not very, it's not very common to talk about. And even already just addressing it and seeing how relatable it is that you have it, and it's normal, and you can work with it. Because at some point, everyone had it. And everyone started with it. And then finding a way, okay, but now you don't have it anymore. What did you do? Or, for example, one thing I noticed, last year that I was in India, I performed a lot. I started seeing outside, practicing outside. And that really is the most vulnerable state when you're practicing, and then you're outside. And people may say something, but at some point, you really build a bigger skin. And you're just like, This is how I am right now. And this is a moment and and you just take it and then becomes more and more normal. So frequency of doing something will help you for example, and having this as a topic. I think it's very valuable.

And also as vocalists because yeah, as you said before, like your like your friend, your voice being not a stable, like you couldn't have control as I understood, which is like all the somatic symptoms we have when we're stressed. Of course it can affect how we sing. Yeah. So it's like a circle. So if we talk about it more, I guess it's more.

Yeah, I believe. I mean, if you're nervous or if you have stage fright or anxiety, it will translate to your instrument as well. To play then you get sweaty hands, your fingers are shaking. So I think that's a problem at both musicians, vocalists and

instrumentalists. But bigger difference of a vocalist and instrumentalist is that your voice is your instrument. So it's very personal. If someone doesn't like the guitar, yeah, you can say the sound of the guitar. So please take another guitar. If someone doesn't make your voice, you cannot just change your voice inside. Yeah.

Nice.

do you enjoy singing and practicing singing? So do you?

Yeah, sometimes. Sometimes I do sometimes.

And do you can you say, can you understand? Why you enjoy? Like, do you find connecting connected the dots between the enjoyable moments? Yeah,

usually when I, if I if I practice with intention that I enjoyed. Like, I will focus either on a certain technique or meaning or an image that I enjoyed. If I just do it, because I know I have to practice every day to opportunity. And I wake up early, and I just sit down and just do it to do it, then I don't enjoy it. Okay,

no.

Nice. And do you ever incorporate like, playing techniques when while you're practicing?

Playing techniques?

for example, as you said, Now, you you said that when I when I'm just do it because I have to? I don't enjoy. Yeah, I think that's what you said. But when you practice with intention, you enjoy it more. Yeah, like this intention can be an image for example. Yeah. And do you like when you have you ever, like when practicing Incorporated? Like, I don't know, improvisation? Image or?

Yes. So usually, what I, if I have time, and I tried to do it this way, I first format my voice. And I tried to display the rock. So already there, I'm not only seeing the scale up and down, but I'm actually improvising and coloring the notes in the rock. And then if I see that I'm still not in the mood of singing and I may also sing the song that belongs to relax, to just get into the Okay, yeah, to the mood and then I will practice some techniques. And then if I have time at the end, I will take a song. And then in in the song, I will create some times which is improvisational technique, rhythmical improvisation technique. Because I try to the goal is to strengthen my, my pitch in the notes. So for example, that I can sing a solfege very fast and improvise in it. And that's, that's something you have to do anyways,

that sounds very discipline the way

Yeah, that's, that's like, for me, I do practice if I do it this way. But then, in reality, I don't do this every day. But yeah.

Okay. Do this is that makes you happy?

This Yeah. Okay.

Because it's very accomplishing when you so you're basically using within a certain cycle of beats. And, and it's like a game, it's like a puzzle. So you have for example, eight beats that you have to improvise. And then you have to land again on the on the chorus. So, so and you can improvise anything. I mean, it has to be within the rules of the raga but it can be anything. It can be also just be one or two notes, but just like a little syncopated. And that's something like you know, it doesn't have to be big. Okay, but just something fun. And then when you see you can improvise just with two or three notes and fear of improvising with eight notes or seven notes we get less and less and then you will find some things and

well that sounds fun. Yeah, actually like a game.

Yeah, exactly.

And do you think like when you do do it when you have fun? Do you find yourself anytime like just wanted to have fun or not thinking about the goal of doing it correctly?

Yeah. That's that's always a struggle of I mean, if I'm just doing it on my own practicing, if I make a mistake, I'm fine with it, because it's only me hearing it. But I have more. I'm more restricted if I if I'm sitting in front of another person or my teacher, and he's like, you know, this is not my business, you're seeing the wrong note. They just, but yeah, it's

so like, I understand that mistakes are not encouraged. Like, if you do a mistake, they you will learn. Someone will tell

ya, but actually, my my teacher is it's good. I had that teacher before screaming in school

Yeah, I didn't know about that. Okay.

So that was not very positive. That was very negative reinforcement for me. And what my teacher is not like that at all. But you can see his disappointment, and that's also not nice. Okay.

Yeah, I understand. So like, also, I guess, when you go out, you're, when you're alone? Practicing you also think about that?

Yes. Not too much. Okay.

But like, I wanted to understand if like, there are some moments for example, I don't know, like when we are washing the dishes, or that we sing. Yeah. And do you there, it's just sing for you, for you. Like you don't have any goal. Have you noticed that? You can do more things when you just do foolish things? foolish things? You can do more than you thought?

Yeah. Yeah, I guess. But usually when I sing on my own, I don't think too much Indian, classical. It's also something because then sometimes I want to relax my mind. And I don't want to think so I just think some Italian songs and so it's not very complex. But sometimes I like to repeat when I hear some Indian classical, and then I just repeat what they do. Exactly. And that's like crazy. I can do it. I'm like, oh, it's actually I can do it. So it's fun.

Okay, and yeah. I think I'm really good. Yeah. Do you want to add anything?

I think Yeah. I mean, I, like I said before, like, sometimes I doubt if I am a performer, because I don't usually enjoy the process. Especially the beginning, like before starting, I don't enjoy. I'm very, very scared. And but then I noticed that when I play with people that are having fun, then I can get drawn into their energy. And then I also can start to enjoy it. But sometimes, yeah, I'm just like, yeah, second guessing.

Do you think that this thing that you may be not enjoy that much? Which is I think it's that's my personal opinion. I think it's very normal. Yeah. But do you think it has something to do with with a very strict indication that you are having because it's sounds like a very disciplined process and sounds also very traditional music so very strict rules.

It's possible. I mean, there's a lot of so before I started learning indian classical music, I went to India, and one of the first things I learned is that I should not perform until after 10 years of learning. Okay, because it's so complex and deep and different

that I should not attempt to sing it in front of people. I only after 10 years, then I develop enough. And there's this Yeah, that was like this big thing. And I also notice it's it's very difficult. I cannot just sing it like that. It's not I won't be able to. There's such a respect to the music. They don't want to. I could feel almost I disrespect the music if I don't sing it properly, that I'm ruining the bag. And I'm not displaying it properly because already, it's not very known music. So if you sing it for someone, maybe the first time to hear it, if they don't hear the most beautiful way of presenting it, then then maybe they won't be interested to learn more about it. So it's I think already the status of Indian classical music is very, very tough. Yeah, sounds tough. Yeah. So, but this year, when I came to India, I saw some students that were performing and they are only learning for two years. So then I was like, huh, so what is it? And then I see okay, they're not performing classical classical performing mix, like classic and they're just and the teacher like yeah, just sing it's okay. You know, just go for it. And it's actually much healthier mentality because otherwise you learn for like so many years and you never go on stage and then then this one time you go on stages like this crazy build up.

Yeah, exactly. Like you learn the theory, but the practice of actually going there and doing it. It's something new. It's it sounds like you have to learn this on your own.

PARTICIPANT 3

VK: Would you say that you would characterize yourself as a singer who has anxiety about singing? And if you'd like to tell me something about it.

P3: Okay, I've been singing since I was very young, but I've always had a lot of anxiety. But once I got on stage, I could manage it a bit because doing what I love helped me overcome my anxiety. But I remember trembling since I was a little girl. Trying to find someone, to gather the courage to overcome the anxiety. Growing up, I think I manage it better. I still have it before, for sure, but once I'm on stage, I feel okay. I do it because I know I'll enjoy it afterwards. I've found some tips for myself that help me relax because it used to affect me. For example, I do some deep breaths, I tell myself that everything is fine, positive thoughts. I know there's no reason for it.

When you get anxious, do you notice any physical and psychological symptoms, like a pattern?

My leg and hand tremble, I can't stay stable, I sweat, especially when I hear the word "exams." My ears might start to burn. My hands sweat, and you can't breathe well. It used to affect my performance. When you're singing and you think you're trembling, it doesn't help. I was born with anxiety; the word "exam" is a trigger for me, for example. But now these things don't happen to me anymore; I've found ways to manage it.

Have you ever noticed avoiding doing something because you're anxious?

Oh yes, for example, because I knew I had anxiety from a young age, I avoided doing more challenging things, like taking on a song with high notes. I knew that if I didn't breathe well, I would go off-key in the high notes. You have anxiety about how things will go; you can't sleep if you have an exam the next day. If I generalize my anxiety now, it goes away, I remind myself that I'm prepared.

Do you think practicing helps reduce anxiety?

I always have anxiety, but when I've studied, I tell myself I've done what I had to. It works as reassurance; I've prepared.

Alright, do you generally think that during your university education, there is enough information provided by the professors regarding this aspect?

No information.

Do you feel there should be more consideration for students?

Certainly, you can find people (professors) who support it, there are isolated cases, and at the music school, my teacher was supportive. In the university, I have some people I can turn to when I have anxiety about something, and we can talk openly and do breathing or relaxation exercises. Not in the majority because you won't turn to everyone when you have anxiety. It also depends on the relationship you have with the professors; some are closer to you, while others are just there to teach. In school, they refer you to a support group if you have anxiety; I haven't tried it, but many do. There is definitely more awareness now regarding psychology and anxiety.

Do you think there should be courses on performance anxiety?

It would be great to have a course on managing anxiety instead of entrepreneurship classes, for example. For instance, instrumentalists sweat on their hands; how will you play, for example? It would be great to have courses on managing anxiety in performance. Now they have introduced some courses as minors, like the Alexander Technique, which helped me see myself differently.

There is a lot of anxiety in general, and nobody talks about it, and there are people who avoid doing something because of anxiety; they simply don't perform because they have anxiety. So, if we had relevant courses, they could handle it.

Do you enjoy studying songs? Do you incorporate improvisation or play in your practice?

I enjoy it very much; there is nothing else to do as a singer. In my practice, I have a routine. I will break it down into sections, take on the difficult parts accordingly, study the beginning, put it in a slower tempo to see what it does, repeat it, and move on.

Have you ever found yourself doing household chores and singing? Do you notice your voice being different or discovering new things when you're not practicing seriously?

Yes, I do silly things, but I haven't noticed it too much; I do it unconsciously. I don't do it seriously; I have fun with it.

PARTICIPANT 4

VK: So, would you describe yourself as someone who experiences anxiety when singing?

P4: Well, when I'm singing, not always, but I do experience more anxiety during rehearsals than in actual performances. I feel anxious in the first minute, and then it starts to roll. I think I'm bothered a lot by criticism because when I'm with people I don't know well, I get anxious about their opinion. When I know them well, I don't have that feeling, and I feel secure on stage, like I'm presenting something I've prepared. Rehearsal is where you make mistakes.

Have you noticed any specific physical or psychological symptoms related to your anxiety?

Yes, my heart rate increases, and my hands can get sweaty. Anxiety also affects my voice; it kind of blocks the system. There's not much room for it when you're anxious, and you might produce something you wouldn't want. Your body warms up, like you're exercising or doing gymnastics.

Have you ever experienced not wanting to attend rehearsals due to anxiety?

No, I always want to because rehearsals are the most important part for me. It's not the performance that's the most important, because that's something ready that I've worked on with others and present. The most important work for me is the rehearsal, working with others. I don't feel anxious before going to rehearsal; it hits me there.

So, despite the anxiety, you still go?

I've never felt in my life that I didn't want to go to a rehearsal. I'm one of those who want rehearsals, and it's not easy to find available musicians, which makes me anxious because I might delay or abandon a project due to the difficulty of finding people to rehearse with.

Do you think that during your studies at the conservatory, you received enough information and support regarding your anxiety?

I had a group lesson that was a performance class. I learned things from how each person approached it and how it changed them during the process. I saw changes in their voices, and I liked that. I've learned a lot about controlling my own anxiety from this class. However, the school itself, the professors, and my main instructor never made me relax. No, they did the opposite. I was always relaxed, and I'm generally a very calm person. Since I've also been involved in performance and acting, I didn't have any complexes. The stress you have before going on stage is healthy, not serious anxiety. But after school, I can say that this anxiety I mentioned appeared after school. Until then, I never had it; I wasn't afraid, and I wasn't nervous during rehearsals.

So, after school, did you experience anxiety because of the workload or because you didn't feel there was enough support from the institution?

After school, while I was studying, I had many basic problems. I didn't have the money to study. I couldn't afford to study; I couldn't afford to put as much energy into music as I wanted. I always gave less because I didn't have the financial means. So, after school, I focused on solving one basic problem, which was financial. I worked on something else and not so much in music, something that would provide a steady income. I really want to start getting back into music, but I'm looking for a way to do it within myself. I don't know where to start. With this problem and the difficulty of finding people to rehearse with, it's challenging. In theater, we used to work together for two months on a project, and then we would present it. If I don't work together for at least five rehearsals to feel like a team, I don't want to perform. That's why I chose Indian music because you're a soloist and don't need anyone. In theater, there's more of a team spirit and teamwork.

The school actually offered some mindfulness classes, some Alexander technique masterclasses. At school, there was someone who taught mindfulness, an Alexander technique masterclass, and someone who was like a psychologist. I don't know if she was a psychologist by profession, but she was someone you could go to and talk about your problems without her discussing them. So, she must have been a psychologist. I went to her once.

Have the teachers understood the relationship with everything you can experience in this situation?

I had an incredible piano teacher. A teacher is born, not made. You need to be a person and communicative without pressuring others. But you also need to have all this understanding of what it means to be where you see your student, to be in the position you once were so you can go back; not everyone has this ability, they forget. Everyone forgets, in other words. There are also some who are teachers. He was calm, made me believe I can do it, supported me. But most of the teachers I had in my department (Indian music) were only focused on profit, on winning, which student will make us win. They are not even close to themselves, essentially. That's what I mean, they don't know what it means to be close to a student; they don't have it. And most of them were of older age. Teaching art is a bit difficult because narcissism plays a big role in artistic professions, so it's difficult to find good teachers there.

So, what do you consider a good teacher?

One who is a guiding light in your life, not just during your four years of study. One who stands there as a lighthouse, always showing you the way.

I think a teacher should love what they do very much, and what the teacher does is not about enjoying being a performer; they love teaching, conveying the knowledge they already have, loving their subject very much, and being able to pass it on to people. Because if they don't love it, they can't convey it. Because love is the only vehicle for transferring knowledge, nothing else.

The teacher I had from India loved me and conveyed a lot of knowledge to me, even though we didn't speak the same language and he was from a different world, from India, much older than me, a significant age difference, so there was no way we didn't have a gap. Yet, we looked into each other's eyes and communicated; there was love, respect, and it was mutual. It's not just me respecting the teacher. If the teacher doesn't respect me, how will it work? Respect is a fundamental element of love and,

So, do you think there could be more support?

They could, but it's a bit about the system. In my opinion, in such an institution as the one I experienced, I imagine most schools are more or less the same, but I haven't been to another one, it's that the system is like this. Visiting professors come from all over Europe, and the teachers play an advertising role for the school; it's a business system based on money. The more students you have, the more money you will get. The system doesn't allow you to build, to invest. Ethics is a very important value and is lost. It's important to support the students. The old system fights against the new system, and the new system is that a person can't hear aggression and violence if they haven't studied. Teachers who are over 50 years old grew up and were nurtured in such a system, and this is the difficulty, this is our issue, that people forget, it's very painful because they perpetuate it, they forget how it was in their place and become the aggressors while they were victims and do the same to the next generation. All this in a Northern European environment, in the Netherlands, in Dutch culture. The Dutch here are very direct. For example, if I hadn't studied, they thought I didn't want it enough, without caring if I was working. I felt they wanted to patronize me. There is a class difference between the Dutch and non-Dutch; the Dutch receive help from the state and can devote themselves to art.

Do you enjoy singing and studying songs?

I haven't studied deeply in a while, but I sing every day. I enjoy it, yes.

Do you sometimes feel that you improvise/play when you sing?

Interviewee: I don't do that. No, but there are some specific moments when my body has positive energy and I start to improvise, create my own music; it's an open channel, it happens. I can't reproduce it whenever I want. It happens to me sometimes when I'm walking, sometimes when I'm working; I do it then. I'm in motion at work, and when the body's energy rises, it happens. But I don't think about it too much; I follow it, don't analyze it logically. The more you engage with something, the more inspiration comes, it opens up. But I haven't explored it too much, haven't experimented. It has to do with the mood; I'm happy at that time or have a sweet melancholy that I enjoy and accept. Anxiety doesn't play a big role; it's a clear mood. I don't think much about whether I'm doing it well or not; I keep going.

INTERVIEW B

PARTICIPANT 1

VK: What were your impressions of the sessions at first?

P1: So I felt as though this was the time when I felt the most playful. we were talking about it, because of interactions. Storytelling in the beginning, only just speaking or talking. And also, I really enjoyed these things with improvising, and also that we were doing it together, which is super nice. Because the other person I think, always inspires.

So I fear that the institutionalized way of learning and I created stuff like this. It's

it can create this tension inside the students that we have to fulfill these expectations all the time, because of the exams, like assignments, because we are being judged, everyday day, from the teachers, from ourselves.

Because yeah, we are being graded and have to get the credits.

It can really kill the creativity.

Because I have to, like, follow these specific things. And to complete them. And I cannot really be free.

So you think you need it in the institution? This playfulness?

Yeah, for sure. For sure, even though like I am not jazz department where we would do like improvisation like this, but I mean, it's needed for any kind of music

And do you feel like this all all this procedure of judgment that you said, is it triggering something also, you think in the students do you feel that you have to be very good all the time?

Yeah, of course. Of course, of course, like, with the instrument, with the voice, doesn't matter. Like, I have to be ,I really have this pressure that if I'm not warmed up how will I sound and my sound will crack or whatever.

My body is a bit more tired in one specific day, and I'm not that fast in my instrument.

So this is not like you don't have that much fun when you are thinking like that

because I can easily get into this. There is no space for for the other stuff.

do you think this is also a part of the traditional music? The culture of the traditional music?

Think so. Yeah. I think it's part of that, but more the way how teachers behave. So I'm sure that it's not the fault of traditional music itself, but the way how it is taught.

Would like to have more space for freedom and creativity in your lesson?

especially with traditional music, because I'm not coming from Anatolia or Turkey, I will never have the same connection with it. As someone who's from there, I will always feel a bit far from it, and these things, it should not occupy space in my head. Because it's an instrument like, I should be enjoying it, no matter where I'm coming

from. Also with singing is quite the same. It should not stop myself using it in a way how I want. Because in the end of the day, it's about enjoying. It should not stop me. but it stops me. And the teachers could take care of it for sure.

They don't help because they are more judgmental?

I think they just don't have these tools. I mean, these things, like, methods are just not in their vocabulary, or in their daily basis. Yeah, and probably they didn't get this

preparation of a bit more of a psychological side of teaching and, what kind of environment you create if you do this, or if you do that in the lesson. And how can it affect the students? I mean, these are very specific things that you have to learn if you're a teacher. Yeah, and I don't think that, I mean, the teachers in the department were coming from all over the place, from different institutions and, they got they got a different kind of preparation.

I would like you to tell me how did you how you felt in the sessions you said that this last one was more interesting to you, but can you describe a bit how you felt in sessions

I'm very happy that I do part of this. Because it's super nice to discover other things and something that is really not what I'm doing in my daily life. And

it's really made me think of this topic and problem and for sure, the first time because I didn't know what was going to happen and I was a bit like, maybe a bit not that relaxed and but then I understood your approach and, today, especially I was very comfortable. I mean, I always was comfortable. Sometimes I was not that

much. But in general I really liked these Games and exercises and with the language that it can be so alive, like how we understand or what you can do with music. I wish I could do more.

you said you were not relaxed. You were not like you were feeling anxiety, for example?

for example, there was this thing with telling the story and when you were raising your hands, I think it was because I was really concentrating to make sentences that make sense.

Maybe because of that. But that is just a small thing. Like, I was not like having a panic attack.

so you think it was more helpful when it was more specific things that you have to do

For sure

Do you think that you discovered something new? how was the improvisation experience for you?

I am sure that I discovered, like, probably just the simplicity that I don't have to think very complicated things. it's really liberating, like, it's something that

everyone can basically do just to feel comfortable to feel like free to do it. And it's really nice. I mean, it's always nice to realize that, it's easy, like, because there is this wait or like, position, I have to do this. And that. I don't know, big things. But sometimes it's nice to think of it like something very simple, such as nice to experience the simplicity.

Do you feel you feel a bit more confident about your creativity and your imagination?

For sure. I will try to think back . I'll be trying to think like, for example, for today, like that I'm capable of doing this, like I'm capable of doing more.

Like, without these vibes.

Do you think this old experience may help you a bit with any anxiety?

It helped me to to get a bit objective, from a different point of view.

do you have any recommendations? Do you have any other advice to me?

Maybe it would be nice to try it in a group.

Yeah.

I mean, we can do that, not for your research necessarily. Yeah. I thought about like the, for example, the storytelling to feel.

do you for I think I recognized some patterns when you were improvising this session and the previous one, like when it was more limited the things that you had to do. Did you feel this way or also?

That's a hard question. Okay, if you remember.

I mean, I could really I could notice that I was repeating some stuff.

PARTICIPANT 2

So how did you feel with the exercises?

The last I think the last round we did was pretty nice because you adapted the loop in a rhythmical cycle. And that helped me to feel like a consistency that I could improvise over.

It showed me how much the power of a word can have. I didn't really relate to what you were looping in the meaning, like, I was just keeping it as a rhythmical thing. And then, of course, I was trying to imitate a little bit of the melody that

it was growing up. But it was not a clear note for me. I was more set off because I wasn't used to it. By now, it's interesting game for sure.

Can you tell a bit more about the word things , the power of the word?

My last word was magic. And magic can be very unpredictable. And therefore and like, I imagined magical, so like, as a glowing light that has a wave and that when you use it that, like, sparkly and so you can see the transportation of the like, it's very visual, like the line of a candle.

Like the ornamentation you can use to describe the magic in there was actually a song, I sang for my teacher. Actually, you sing about magic in there, too. There was this lady that was wearing a sari. And when they are improvising with the with the word magic, he's doing also this. Like this, this type of

ornamentation. And then with "ice", it was more like, okay, ice can be cold, and it can be more stiff. It's not a very round word. Because it is like the shape

straight. It's like I said, it's like the cut, you know, so you can have these kinds of things. And the cold and I don't know.

How did you feel in the sessions?

For the story part.

I mean, I felt like I wanted to drag the story or was in something more scary and adventurous? Yeah. But in general, I once attended once, a workshop, a writing workshop. And there, she actually gave the example of a mouse. And then she said, actually, instead of saying, a beautiful mouse, which has all the perfect life, it's more interesting to talk about, you know, mouse with character. It has one rough year, a missing tooth. Like, instead of like having the protagonist being this shiny thing, imagine if it wasn't, and then see where the story brings you. And usually more interesting stories emerge from that than, oh, there was a beautiful girl that had beautiful life and beautiful blah, blah, blah.

Boring you know, so therefore, I think that thing pushed me to go in thunderstruck.

yeah, it was fun. Because we have like we had word like, we were like, opposites in approaching the story. Yeah, they're very positive. actually also shows how easy a creative process can be in creating a story.

How did you feel that all of the storytelling thing, the stories were previous to singing

I don't know how much I relate to understand the melody of the language. because I was when you were telling the story I was more focused on the meaning than the melody, of course, I also listened to the melody, but then there's something

deceiving, which is the accent, you have the Greek accent. I didn't feel like repeating everything. Okay, because everything you say, is Melody.

How did you feel about sharing stories before singing? Do you see any links?

Um, as much as in the creative process of the content, I don't see many names. Like, first also the asking me the favorite dress for that I don't see the link to build up to the storytelling to then telling another story with a melody. I don't see the link. Oh, I don't understand.. There, you have to explain to me what was the deeper link?

Yeah. For me, the link was to get to get more comfortable.

in other storytelling workshops that usually they share things like that from childhood or tastes or smells, and it makes you feel more good.

It did make me feel like happy. Yeah. I mean, it could also trigger not happiness.

And like, how did you feel in the sessions in general? Did you discover anything new?

I discovered that there are more varieties of improvisation, and being free.

I mean, it's a step again, towards having just fun and playing around with music.

Not being too much analytical about the harmony developing, just letting it go.

So for that, I think it's a nice release to just, to give to these kinds of games or practices. And I think these kinds of things could help with creativity, creative flexibility, in a sense, when you're directing me that you have like, as a singer you are very much in this frame of like, this is the realm living in, but if someone gives you these kinds of impulses, that adapting that is, it's an interesting process to become more flexible in that. And in the beginning, we were talking about social anxiety or stage anxiety, and made me realize that it's a much more common thing than I expected it to be. I'm maybe not alone in it, and maybe I can overcome it.

do you think like this kind of exercises, could help you or other people with MPA issues?

Yeah, I would say so. of course, you can do it in private.

But I think the interesting part would be to do it in a group because you have an audience, which is a group. The more people that are the more judging eyes look at you. So doing these kind of things and overcoming that but maybe there could be like a step like for starting in private and then you meet in a group?

Do you find helpful this kind of like exploring-maybe we can call it exploration - in the conservatory?

I think so. I mean, a conservatory is always very goal oriented.

So if you can, and unfortunately, that's how conservatory works at the moment. So at the end, you have to show the product. But I don't know if also you can show the process as a product. But if you can say, like, for example, you could use this as a method to write a song, for example, but you don't right away, think of it as a song, you just let it flow. Or you could use it as a method for people who are like this performance practice. Actually, performance practice is similar in the sense, it's just a

method. It's not really and also it's not graded. So maybe it's something that it's not graded it because once you bring in notes, then it's like, okay, well, you need parameters. And then what are you actually looking for? So it depends what you want to use it for

do you think that in the conservatory, we should change the goal oriented mentality? Like to focus more on the steps?

Yes, absolutely. I don't agree with how conservatory is so focused on like, the final only the final product and the final moment. It's actually also the whole process and also learning how to learn. And also maintaining, maintaining the motivation, for example, these kinds of things, and also maintaining the creativity. And yeah, for sure. I think that shift of focus should be more on that. Because, yeah, I mean, at the end, that makes you more free musician, and then you're more you can link easier with more people. So yeah, sure.

And do you think you would use anything of that what we did like to for fun?

Yeah, I could. I could imagine that.

If someone if I see for example, if I ever had a student who was very much in their head, like over analytical do to like break the ice to do some like,

I don't know telling the story or like, or like this directing, maybe that could help for like, just okay, don't think about like, what how you're using your voice or how if it's logical or musical, just explore where you can go with it.

PARTICIPANT 3

VK:How did you feel about the last exercise?

P3:I liked it because we were both participating, and we did it together. I had a sense of stability, and it inspired me, the way you were saying things; it made me visualize things.

What did you think about what we gained from the language?

It was very interesting; language is like a song, it has melodies and rhythms, tonalities, dynamics.

How did you feel about your creativity?

I liked that you were participating as well, and we didn't just focus on me. The game was well-structured, and I liked that we were creating a story together. I didn't expect the session to end this way, and I liked it.

What was the overall experience like during the sessions?

I think it all made sense because it started out a bit more playful, more fun and free, and then it ended up being more structured. The freedom was placed within a framework; it had both games and creativity, and in the end, it was about collaboration.

Regarding improvisation?

I liked it because I could focus on the melody and use words as tools. I could let go into the melody without thinking too much. I generally like to focus on the melody, especially because I usually sing in a language I don't understand. You need some foundation somewhere. The fact that you were also participating gave me inspiration and new ideas in improvisation, and I felt like I had space. That's why I found new ways to use words. There was communication and space. In general, it helped me that in the last session, I didn't have to think about many things; I focused only on one word. I could develop my melody, make pauses, and I felt like we were having a conversation, and I was responding to you.

Do you think that through the sessions, you gained self-confidence and trust in your creativity?

Yes, because, to be honest, I usually don't improvise, even though I should because it's very nice. In the context of school, we did improvise, but because the teacher needed to hear us. It's very creative to improvise; it's easy and nice to start from a word, a phrase, without the pressure of being judged. You can be inspired by anything.

Did improvisation within the school context affect you?

When I first came to school, I couldn't open my mouth to sing or improvise. The instruction was to start singing. Certain words like "examination" and "judgment" made me anxious. I wouldn't be nervous if we did it in a different context, all together or if the teacher said, "Let's all do it together." I feel like I have to meet the expectations of someone else, and external criticism makes me anxious. You don't know what those expectations are, either from others or yourself. Also, if you don't have good knowledge, you lack confidence. If something is new, it can block you. At some point, you realize that everyone does it their way. Criticism will always be there because of our work. You have to decide that you'll do it your way or that it won't be perfect.

When you improvise, do you think it has to be very good?

It has to please me. I have three criteria that I consider: not singing out of tune, not losing control of technique, and staying in the correct scale. If these are okay, I'm fine. I don't want to do something that will impress. I don't put many expectations on myself, or I don't have high demands. Now we're starting to find our character. Now I'm better with myself because in the beginning when I came here, I compared myself to others. I think the teachers have pressured me because they're not that great musicians; I just didn't understand it at first due to ignorance, new information, and it disturbs your self-confidence.

Were you used to, when you finished something successfully, thinking about the next goal, not enjoying what you achieved?

I used to be in constant anxiety. Now, I try to tell myself to enjoy it and to stop. I take a step back and tell myself to rejoice. You can't control everything; you do what you

can. You can't always get stuck on perfection. If I had gotten stuck in perfectionism, I wouldn't have completed my performance because it was far from what I wanted.

Would it help you to have more creative lessons at school?

Yes, it would connect us more with our fellow students. We don't have lessons on performance, on dealing with anxiety. We had so many useless classes and nothing on these things, which are so important for all musicians. We should all be together, not separated into musicians and singers. It needs a more structured program. Of course, as the system is, if a lesson doesn't give you credits, there is no attendance. I used to be part of a theater group, and we did everything together. We participated actively, and that's how we felt like it was our lesson. With the group, you bond.

PARTICIPANT 4

How did you find the sessions?

I liked everything about them, the games, the second session was the most intense because I had to concentrate and find 4 words. I struggle with dilemmas; my mind gets stuck. I didn't have anxiety, but I had anticipation. That was the most intense moment from this perspective. The same goes for the stories. I noticed that at some point, I had more imagination; I let myself go, I needed some time.

Was it a pleasant process for you? What do you think about the experience of improvisation?

Yes, very pleasant. The experience of improvisation was nice too. Improvisation always starts as a mood for me, and I'm in a certain state, and then it translates into rules. If there's no mood, and you just have to improvise with rules, it's not easy. In our sessions, I hadn't entered that state; we went for improvisation. I noticed that I judged myself, I thought if I was making mistakes, what I was singing, what notes I was singing, if I was doing something boring, if I was repeating myself, and I tried to change it, and I had chosen to change the mood and direction.

In general, do you tend to judge yourself when you sing and have high expectations of yourself?

Yes, even when I sing alone, which is the best version of the song, my performance drops in front of an audience. But what always helps me is the lyrics and serving the words that someone else wrote and has been said. I focus on that and become the conveyer, a vessel, and someone else wrote this, so there's nothing for me to judge. There's a reason to be said, as if you honor the person who wrote it. With improvisation in my stories, it took time for my imagination to warm up; I got stuck.

Did you discover anything new in our meetings?

I can say I knew all these things about myself. But I need some time to process the information. But what pleased me the most was doing things together, being more creative together. I struggle with studying alone. It helped me regarding how you work with the part of imagination and inspiration. That inspiration comes gradually, even if you don't have it at the beginning. The more time you spend on something,

you'll get better, which gave me self-confidence. It's not that some people have inspiration, and some don't. I like the process of creation and composition; I just haven't had time for it. I would like to have time for it; I like the process.

How do you feel about the aspect of anxiety in our meetings?

Until I entered school, I didn't have anxiety. I enjoy the performing process because no one stops you. The space and time are yours; you say what you want, and the stage is your space. I never had anxiety; I found this process enjoyable. What gives me strength is wanting to have something to say. If you don't know something well and haven't studied it, only studying will solve it. What I learned in our meetings is about the concept of right and wrong, that there's no right or wrong. There's an open, free field. It helped me feel like I can play without it being right or wrong. My anxiety is whether the move to go on stage is worth it, if it's wrong, if it's worth saying something. It helped me feel like I'm going on stage and just playing without there being a reason, and that's neutral.

The exposure also created anxiety for me. The uncontrolled exposure when I started studying, being recognized by people I didn't know. I don't feel comfortable with it; I didn't ask for it. I tried to isolate myself from it; it took away the joy of not having a personal life. When this system changes, I will go out and sing. I didn't like being treated as if I were something special, being in the middle and being pointed at, demanding my attention. I had other, more important problems to control, like my finances.

CONSENT FORM

Dear UWTSD

I confirm that I approve of the research proposed into **“Finding creative ways to manage anxiety: Can improvisation within a playful and creative context reduce feelings of anxiety and enhance the singer’s confidence?”**: to be carried out by Evangelia (Vanessa) Kourtesi, of Vanessa Kourtesi Vocal Coach during private lessons between March 2023 and June 2023.

With warm regards

Vanessa Kourtesi

“Finding creative ways to manage anxiety: Can improvisation within a playful and creative context reduce feelings of anxiety and enhance the singer’s confidence?”

Consent to take part in research

- I..... voluntarily agree to participate in this research study.

- I understand that even if I agree to participate now, I can withdraw at any time
- I understand that I can refuse to answer any question involved during the research process without any consequences of any kind.
- I have had the purpose and nature of the study explained to me in writing and I have had the opportunity to ask questions about the study.
- I understand that participation involves... [outline briefly in simple terms what participation in your research will involve].
- I understand that I will not benefit directly from participating in this research.
- I agree to my interview being audio-recorded.
- I understand that all information I provide for this study will be treated confidentially.
- I understand that in any report on the results of this research my identity will remain anonymous.
- This will be done by changing my name and disguising any details of my interview which may reveal my identity or the identity of people I speak about.
- I understand that disguised extracts from my interview may be quoted in... [list all forum in which you plan to use the data from the interview: dissertation, conference presentation, published papers etc.].
- I understand that if I inform the researcher that myself or someone else is at risk of harm they may have to report this to the relevant authorities - they will discuss this with me first but may be required to report with or without my permission.
- I understand that signed consent forms and original audio recordings will be retained in [specify location, security arrangements and who has access to data] until [specific relevant period – for students this will be until the exam board confirms the results of their dissertation].
- I understand that a transcript of my interview in which all identifying information has been removed will be retained for [specific relevant period – for students this will be two years from the date of the exam board].
- I understand that under freedom of information legalisation I am entitled to access the information I have provided at any time while it is in storage as specified above.
- I understand that I am free to contact any of the people involved in the research to seek further clarification and information.

Names, degrees, affiliations and contact details of researchers (and academic supervisors when relevant).

Signature of research participant

Signature of participant Date

Signature of researcher

I believe the participant is giving informed consent to participate in this study

Signature of researcher Date