

A cellist's autoethnography: The psychology, musicology, and performance of approaching Beethoven and Mendelssohn holistically

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Summary:

Musicologists, psychologists, and musicians tend to understand the performative style and technical aesthetics of music originating during the transition during the late Classical and the early Romantic periods (in this context, 1796-1829) in different ways. On one hand, current studies regarding historical performance practice do not reach the actual practices of many performers. On the other hand, what educational psychologists know about learning constructively seems far removed from how musicians learn instrumental music. Additionally, musicologists tend to approach the learning and teaching of music in a transmissive and traditional way, while educational psychologists support constructivist approaches in which the individual can be the engine of learning and express his or her own voice.

As a consequence, there exists a tension between instrumental practices and conceptions arising from modern musicians' use of different learning processes aimed at different learning results than period instrumentalists. This creates an environment of incomprehension, misconceptions, and standardized reproduction of music from this transitional period, leading to the current phenomenon of audiences turning back to classical music because of its predictable characteristics in concert scenarios. Thus, this repertoire is still awaiting an academic-performer eye-opening approach in order to reach a general consensus among scholars and artists, similar to what occurred with Baroque music in the 1960s and 1970s via the movement of "historically informed practice" (HIP).

Considering such paradigms, as an autoethnographer completing a multidisciplinary postdoctoral research proposal, and benefitting from my artist-researcher background, I will approach the performance psychology and technical aesthetics in the variation works for fortepiano and violoncello by Beethoven and Mendelssohn. I shall do this by following a research triangulation, including a constructivist system for learning instrumental music, an empirical musicology approach linked to HIP, and the autoethnographic perspective. Consequently, instead of copying what performers did to play the repertoire during this period, I will go deeper to comprehend how people might have understood music, why they did so, and who I am in this process.

I am collecting data by accessing the original manuscripts and other sources, and by journaling my learning process and recording my individual study sessions as well as the practices involved in rehearsals/concerts with my fortepianist. Data will be analyzed using the mixed methods approach. Results will be disseminated by means of writing scientific/popularized articles and a constructivist manual for performance, playing concerts, attending conferences, recording the music, and filming a documentary. Therefore, my research will not only be shared with scholars and musicians, but with a great number of non-academic people. In this way, new technologies will be used in a field that is typically library-specific, with the final aim of bridging the gap between theory and practice.

More info: <http://guadalupelopeziniguez.com/beethoven-mendelssohn/>