Psychological Perspectives on Musical Experiences and Skills

Research in the Western Balkans and Western Europe

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17. Conclusion: Progressing the State of the Art of Music Psychology

Renee Timmers, Blanka Bogunović, and Sanela Nikolić

Introduction

This book contributes to the state of the art of music psychology in at least three ways: firstly, each chapter of the book offers fresh insight and understanding to its particular research area, with findings also having further implications for the broader field of psychology and music in general, and the psychology of music, specifically. Secondly, the book is significant in promoting research from the Western Balkans, a region where research in the psychology of music has developed consistently over more than four decades (see Chapter 1, by Blanka Bogunović, Renee Timmers, and Sanela Nikolić for an overview), and with proactive encouragement it should feature more prominently on the international stage. Thirdly, the book is an example of an initiative to address the urgent issue of rebalancing the unevenness in scholarly dissemination that is influenced by socio-political and linguistic barriers and inequality in scholarly practices. This concluding chapter discusses research findings, overlaps and distinctions in the psychology of music in the Western Balkans and Western Europe, as evidenced in this book.

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Current state of the discipline: Research findings

Firstly, taking the contributions of the chapters in this volume together, we reflect on the insights developed in this book irrespective of regional origin. Part 1 investigated the psychology of aesthetic experiences and emotions—emphasising underlying dimensionality (Chapter 2, by Dragan Janković and Maja Mađarev), practice-based perspectives of musical experts on aesthetics (Chapter 3, by Sanela Nikolić and Ivana Miladinović Prica), and understanding aesthetic emotions cross-culturally as functional and embodied (Chapter 4, by Renee Timmers, Scott Bannister, and Thomas M. Lennie). The three chapters share an emphasis on interactions between cognitive evaluation related to meanings attributed to music and situated, embodied experiences with music. As an affective experience, situated aesthetic experiences may be characterised by variations in arousal and valence plus a cognitive evaluative dimension (Chapter 2); these cognitive evaluations and affective experiences become specialised with musical knowledge and expertise (Chapter 3), and are contextualised in function depending on the cultural and listening situation (Chapter 4).

The theoretical conception raised in Chapter 2 is based on experimental studies from which the Valence, Arousal, and Cognitive evaluation (VACe) model of the aesthetic experience of music is formulated. This model parallels approaches in the visual arts that highlight the role played by meanings evoked by artworks in the formation of aesthetic experiences.

A nuanced example was offered in Chapter 3 of the idiosyncratic aesthetic approach of three music experts involved in creating a musical piece through composition, public performance and critical reception. Qualitative analysis found themes related to metacognitive layers of aesthetic experiences, considering 'music completeness,' imagery and metaphors, and specialised musical knowledge. The highlight of this chapter is the participation of two cutting-edge expert musicians who have had an impact on Serbian neo-avant-garde music since the 1970s. Our understanding of the specialist musical knowledge of the performer is further developed in the chapters on memorisation strategies (Chapter 10 by Valnea Žauhar, Dunja Crnjanski, and Igor Bajšanski and Chapter 11 by Jane Ginsborg), whilst receptive approaches to bringing

contemporary music to a broad audience are explored in Chapter 7 (by John Sloboda).

Closing Part 1, Chapter 4 situates research on aesthetic emotions in the context of understandings of music cognition as dynamic, embodied and functionally embedded. It argues that a functional perspective focused on contextual aesthetic affordances of music will facilitate the investigation and understanding of aesthetic emotion across diverse cultural contexts. Such aesthetic affordances engage closely with structural aspects of music, with bodily and physiological associations, and with relational meanings and values attributed to music. This chapter provides further detail about the affective and conceptual dimensions presented in Chapter 2, whilst offering a bridge to 4E cognition of music as discussed in Chapter 9 (by Andrea Schiavio and Dylan van der Schyff).

The chapters in Part 2 examined music listening experiences at a young age (Chapter 5, by Mirsada Zećo, Marina Videnović, and Lejla Silajdžić), in adolescence (Chapter 6, by Ivana Stepanović Ilić, Marina Videnović, Zora Krnjaić, and Ksenija Krstić), and for adults in concert settings (Chapter 7, by John Sloboda). All three chapters connect with the theme of active sense-making, using a range of research methodologies (action research, empirical large sample-based, practice-led research). For young children, sound exploration and guidance to create a fantasy story help to support focal attention to the musical sounds and creative engagement with musical structures, as well as enhancing the imagination, aural skills, and cognitive development (Chapter 5). The didactic approach explored in the chapter gives children rich opportunities to be creative regardless of musical abilities and previous knowledge, offering a promising avenue for inclusive music education. Whilst acknowledging the challenges to incorporate this practice into the relatively traditional forms of music education in general schools in the Western Balkans, the authors advocate for the use of unconventional sound instruments in music workshops that can add novelty, flexibility and inclusion into existing practice anywhere.

Later in life, adolescents choose and prefer music that supports values and attitudes they identify with, which involves a certain level of geopolitical specificity (Chapter 6). The presented research shows parallels between models of musical preferences developed and tested

in Western, often English-speaking countries, and musical preferences in Serbian adolescents, as well as rediscovering previously established relationships between musical tastes and the values adolescents hold. Some differences were found too, concerning preferences for specific genres related to the Serbian socio-historical context, and relationships between preferences for rebellious music and antagonistic values. This raises questions related to the role of music preferences and values for the development of adolescents' musical tastes and their interaction with their socio-cultural context.

Meaningful engagement with music, including unfamiliar music, may be supported by experimenting with how music is presented in concert settings, allowing more active involvement by audiences, and presenting music in contexts that balance predictability and novelty (Chapter 7). The author points out the role of music higher education institutions (MHEIs) as important bearers of novelty, originality and freedom for experimentation that are 'natural homes for researchers' (p. 158), as 'opposed to commercial or municipal arts organisation settings, where the research-informed innovation is a greater challenge, but one which may have more profound effects on the industry, if achieved' (p. 158). The chapter illustrates the power of practice-based research to bridge innovations in academia and industry, and concludes with an invitation to conduct more comparative research into experiences of, and motivations for, concert attendance in different countries, which could tailor artistic and organisational responses more closely to socio-cultural realities in different countries.

Cross-inspiration between the chapters of Part 2 may also highlight the relevance of values for adult music listeners, and the role of early exposure and creative development as a primer for long-term musical enjoyment, as advocated in Chapter 5. These chapters complement the growing body of research on engagement with music across the life-span and the rewards associated with contextual music listening, including research into audience motivations and barriers (e.g., Burland & Pitts, 2016; Pitts, 2017; Pitts & Price, 2020; Rickard & McFerran, 2012).

Chapters in Part 3 developed insight into the intrinsically social aspects of music performance and the ways performers relate to others, whether those others are physically present or imagined (Chapter 8, by Andrea Schiavio, Henrique Meissner, and Renee Timmers). It outlined

the understanding of music cognition as embodied, embedded, extended, and enactive (Chapter 9, by Andrea Schiavio and Dylan van der Schyff) and gave both an overview and detailed case studies of strategies of expert memorisation of complex music by performers (Chapters 10, by Valnea Žauhar, Dunja Crnjanski, and Igor Bajšanski and 11, by Jane Ginsborg). Findings concerning performers' thoughts and attitudes about others in Chapter 8 are relevant for the understanding of emotions during practice and performance, including potential triggers for negative emotions or supporting factors for positive emotions, complementing insights on performance anxiety discussed in Chapter 15. Chapter 8 illustrates differences between the experiences of practice and performance, which may influence how musicians may need to prepare for a performance in terms of felt emotions and performance strategies, with implications for motivation, memorisation and skill development. Chapter 9 highlights the relevance of bodily factors including how they drive musical creativity and discovery and the embedding of skill development in 'musically relevant brain-body-world synergies' (p. 205). These perspectives chime with the action research of Chapter 5 that encouraged children to improvise sounds using resonant instruments, with the extended reality explained by musicians in Chapter 8, with shifts in our understanding of aesthetic appreciation and aesthetic emotions argued in Chapter 4, and the notion of experiential knowledge outlined in Chapter 3. Such experiential knowledge accompanied by theoretical knowledge is also key to the memorisation strategies discussed in Chapters 10 and 11. These latter chapters outline how musicians memorise through deliberate practice: repeating shorter or longer sections, anchoring actions through identifying structural moments and groupings, and creating a mental map that consists of goal-directed actions, where the goals are the production of particular musical sounds or events and gestures (Schiavio et al., 2017). These are close body-mind-instrument-sound interactions shaped over years of cultural experience (Loaiza, 2016; Reybrouck, 2020).

The final part of the book considers the psychological aspects of becoming a musician: factors contributing to musical accomplishments (Chapter 12, by Blanka Bogunović), confrontations brought about by accelerated musical development when one is identified as musically talented early in life (Chapter 13, by Olja Jovanović, Ana Altaras

Dimitrijević, Dejana Mutavdžin, and Blanka Bogunović), attributes associated with different professional orientations in music (Chapter 14, by Ana Butković), and the challenges involved in the public performance of music (Chapter 15, by Katarina Habe and Michele Biasutti). All these factors combine in the provision of supportive and high-quality music education, including education promoting musicians' health and well-being as discussed in the final chapter, Chapter 16, by Raluca Matei and Jane Ginsborg. Chapter 14 reminds us that different music professions have their own challenges and appeals, including for different instrument groups, and, as also identified in Chapter 8, for solo vs. group performance. These findings correspond with the suggestion that specialties in music have specific job characteristics, which make them appealing to people with different personality dimensions. Few specificities have been observed so far in research on personality differences between expert musicians with diverse instrumental skills when comparing between regions or contexts. As such, little is known about the details of variations in the psychology of different musicians, including going beyond performance of western classical music, limiting tailored preparation for the profession.

Chapter 12 models the complexity of the interaction between psychological and environmental factors that contribute to musical accomplishment, and how these develop with age. The reported findings address a gap in the existing research corpus by investigating the joint role of motivation and personality dimensions for musical accomplishments through a developmental perspective. The role of personality may be related to the sensitivity to and aesthetic enjoyment of music, but also to other characteristics closely associated with musical skill development, such as conscientiousness and self-assurance. Such personality factors emerge as influential later in development, showing more strongly in adolescents and young adulthood than in childhood. The cultural perspective provided by the comparisons with the research done internationally showed similarities as well as some differences. Interpretation of these differences is complicated by the many co-occurring differences in music education systems, theoretical backgrounds, and musicians' profiles that were presented in the studies.

Chapter 13 further highlights the relevance of motivation, personal commitments, interests and values, and their interactions with an

educational and musical environment, through an examination of the reflections of adult musicians on their past experiences as students experiencing radical accelerated specialist music education. This chapter showcases the positive and some negative sides of this motivation for music. On the one hand, acceleration as an educational approach has helped them to become internationally recognised, outstanding music performers, transcending national, ethnic, and cultural backgrounds through music. On the other hand, acceleration risks failing to build the psychosocial skills that are necessary for long-term resilience and success in a music career. Choosing migration to countries with culturally richer milieus to ensure an adequate environment for professional development opened different experiences of the world and music, but it also affected their relationship to their homeland and brought the challenges of settling into a new environment.

The final two chapters address ways in which musicians can be supported to be better able to cope with the demands of being a musician, including the mental pressures of public performance, physical challenges of long hours of performance, and hearing protection. Chapter 15 complements existing music performance anxiety (MPA) models by highlighting the research studies regarding MPA in the Western Balkans, which are mostly oriented toward personality attributes closely connected to MPA. It addresses some of the preventive and intervention approaches in dealing with MPA, with an emphasis on the idea of reconsidering MPA as pre-performance excitement that has the capacity to contribute to optimal states of flow. In Chapter 16, the cross-sectional survey gives information about the ways in which MHE institutions in Europe and the Western Balkans have begun to improve support for musicians' health and well-being during their training. While most courses in both regions were theoretical and practical, there was an emphasis on the latter in several European, but not Western Balkans, courses. Courses in Europe were more involved with physical health and hearing protection, while more psychologists were involved in course delivery in the Western Balkans, focused on performance anxiety, stress management, mental skills, and strategies for practising and memorising. Since health education was introduced in the Western Balkans only relatively recently, some aspects of the wider infrastructure for health promotion (e.g., policies, services, and

regulations) may be less well developed. Music teachers and health services such as counselling are seen as relevant for students' health and well-being at the MHE institutions. Both chapters illustrate increases in supportive considerations of musicians' psychology and health, informing improvements in higher education practices and enhancing the training of the next generation of performers and teachers.

This connection with the real-world applications of research findings must continue to be developed and strengthened in different directions, pushing researchers to define concrete methods to support musicians and robust ways to model complex interacting factors. The aim is to enhance our understanding of the development of a diversity of musicians, the risks and opportunities of the profession and its strands, the interests and needs of diverse audiences, and the interaction and communication between musicians and audiences—both as interests in themselves, and as a way to improve and expand practice. Despite the strong representation and institutionalisation of the music humanities disciplines within the frame of the Western Balkans MHE institutions, psychology of music as a social science has often been pushed forward by the individual efforts of enthusiastic experts, who become representatives of the discipline. Increasingly such enthusiasts and representatives include professionals in musical practice—music educators, composers and performers. Knowledge and applications of this knowledge are developed in research communities but also among musicians who acknowledge the importance of psychological approaches to musical phenomena for the empowerment of their skills and practices.

Setting targets for future research: Equality, diversity, and inclusion in research practices

Whilst it is common to publish books after conferences, and indeed there is a legacy of book publications after ESCOM conferences (e.g., Deliège & Sloboda, 1996, 2004; Deliège & Wiggins, 2006), it is fairly uncommon for such books to explicitly promote research in specific geographical regions. Indeed, the setup of this book is unusual in selecting and therefore prioritising authors from specific locations rather than including authors primarily based on topic area, relevance of expertise

and research track record. This decision was made purposefully. We argue that it was important to do so and will be important for future books to address power imbalances that influence the realisation, publication, citation, visibility, and impact of research (Davies et al., 2021; Palser et al., 2022). Such power imbalances are economic in terms of funding and resource availability for research and discipline development, as well as linguistics, given the prevalence of English as the major language for academic publication. They are also political, socio-cultural and educational, with differences in resources for higher education, international exchange, and the promotion of open research agendas. For example, in the context of the Western Balkans, some differences are becoming visible between those countries who are part of the European Union (EU) such as Croatia and Slovenia and those who are not, with greater opportunities for exchange afforded to countries within the EU.

Systemic inequalities in research are strong and multifaceted. In the past decade, awareness has been increasing, and the demand to decolonise research and improve equality, diversity, and inclusion (EDI) of research practices is being more strongly heard (Wolbring & Nguyen, 2023). This concerns practices embedded in universities but also practices of publication, peer review, collaboration, and citation. We are offering only a very small adjustment in this ocean of unequal power dynamics. However, we do hope it can set off a ripple that will contribute to a greater visibility and flourishing of the psychology of music in the Western Balkans, and, in conjunction, a greater acknowledgement, acceptance and visibility of research in other regional areas.

Looking back on the chapters in this volume, we observe complementarity, overlaps and some differences in knowledge and research practices in music psychology in the Western Balkans from those that are known in Western Europe, such as the UK (our main reference). Overall, those commonalities are most strongly observed which concern, for example, the strong interdisciplinarity of the research field: researchers with a background in psychology teach in music departments and collaborate with musicians, and vice versa, music educators, musicians and music theorists adopt psychological research methods, or collaborate with psychologists, linguists, and/or therapists to inform and develop research and understanding. All chapters of the

book showcase such synergies between music, sciences and humanities, enabling the adoption of systematic empirical research methods, whilst also facilitating the embedding of research in ecologically valid contexts and addressing research questions relevant to musical practices, and building on existing musical knowledge and expertise.

Similarly, many chapters showcase collaborations between junior and senior researchers, researchers who bring different types of expertise, and researchers with different nationalities and genders, among others. This collaborative approach as a core characteristic means in principle, respect for otherness and plurality of thinking as an important quality of the research field. From this, the general determinants of an interdisciplinary research approach are distinguished as *complementarity*—as learning from others and adopting oneself; *sharing*—as dealing with the same subjects, themes, questions, and problems within different research communities, and *over complementarity*—as overcoming differences in the approaches of social sciences and sciences on the one hand, and the humanities on the other through standing for a holistic and pragmatic approach. This comprehensive strategy is an important precursor for supporting EDI as a general research principle open to different research communities.

Despite prevailing commonalities, specific complementarity between research in the two regions can be seen in subtle differences in research focuses and traditions. As outlined in the introductory chapter of this book, several countries of the Western Balkans have a long tradition of specialist music education equipped to educate and train musicians who excel in a range of musical skills such as composition, music performance, *solfège* (music-analytical hearing), and musical improvisation. In a highly competitive context, music education is specialised to educate musical talent and prodigies from an early age on, whilst also needing to excel at the level of tertiary education, and professional practice. Questions of motivation and skill development are key, combined with questions of the affordances of music and a profession in music, and the (changing) nature of aesthetic experiences—both for musicians and for audiences. This musical context of highly specialised music education is noticeable in the advances made to understand motivational, personality and environmental factors contributing to musical achievements (Chapter 12), to musical career paths (Chapter 13), and

choices (Chapter 14), and interactions between long-term specialised engagement with music and aesthetic experiences of music (Chapter 3). Sustained research efforts in this area have enabled the definition of models of interacting factors shaping the ability for musical achievement and how these differ for musical learners at a younger age or during adolescence and young adult age (Chapter 12). These specialisms are reflective of specific contexts where the psychology of music has been able to flourish due to direct interdisciplinary encounters between psychologists working as psychological consultants in the applied field of specialist music education for the gifted. Consequently, the themes are often related to psychological processes and attributes, and issues related to the education of future musicians and their profession. With greater recognition of psychology of music as an independent and flourishing research field in the Western Balkans, the scope of research is likely to broaden over the years to come.

Several chapters identify and discuss ways in which research questions and findings are situated in particular contexts and, as such, require care when generalisations are made. For example, Sloboda (Chapter 7) acknowledges that their experiments in concert presentation of live performed music have been targeted towards classical music and conducted with audiences in the UK with particular demographic characteristics. Whilst the dimensions identified may be useful to capture variability in audience preferences in other contexts too, they may be less valid where other genres of music and audiences are concerned. Comparing findings from a Serbian population sample and studies conducted elsewhere, Stepanović Ilić and colleagues (Chapter 6) identify parallels between relationships between musical preferences and values held by adolescents. However, they also note deviations related to perspectives on, and the status of, folk music in Serbia, which was combined with preferences for music categorised as rebellious. We may expect further variations in the role that music may play among adolescents, depending on the connotations of the music, as well as variations in values held by adolescents, depending on circumstances—local history is only one of these.

This is not to diminish the validity of the research, but rather to caution against over-generalisations and claims of universality. Over-generalisation receives strong criticism as a colonial tendency:

the assumption that WEIRD[1] perspectives (Henrich et al., 2010) are representative (Jacoby et al., 2020). Such tensions between finding generalisable results and acknowledging situatedness and contextual dependencies affect the core of psychological research, where the lack of generalisability is often interpreted as a limitation. A stronger voice for the humanities in the psychology of music should help to overcome this reluctance in acknowledging diversity and limitations of generalisation. In the meantime, there is pressure for psychological research in marginalised countries to show generalisable results, as without this, it may be harder to overcome marginalisation. A general need for a shift in approach and understanding seems therefore to be necessary. This shift involves the acknowledgement of diversity and its relevance for the understanding of music psychology and cognition, including variations in education, as well as socio-cultural and individual factors shaping the affordances of music. These questions have started to be addressed in this volume and other work and are likely to shape future research directions more strongly.

The Western Balkans is not alone in possessing an active music psychology research scene. Pockets of research and discovery can be found across many European regions, and indeed in many countries across the world. This is exemplified by the successful conferences on music psychology promoting regional networks and international links (ESCOM, n.d.). At the fully virtual ICMPC in 2021, organised by the University of Sheffield, co-organisers came from Australia, Azerbaijan, Lithuania, Poland, India, Mexico, Colombia, and South Africa. Whilst the largest representation was from the UK, Germany and United States, presenters came from a total of 43 countries, highlighting the great geographical spread of this growing area of research. Including and referencing authors from underrepresented countries is only one aspect of the larger decolonisation and EDI agenda. Relevant initiatives include book translations supported by the Irène Deliège translation fund from non-English languages to English, but also the publications of special issues related to conferences and symposia, such as the 2023 special issue in memory of the Polish researcher Maria Manturzewska in *Musicae Scientiae* (Chełkowska-Zacharewicz et al., 2023). A further step

1 WEIRD stands for people from Western Educated Industrialised Rich Democratic countries.

is to co-design and co-write a full volume collaboratively, something that our University of Sheffield colleague Dr Cayenna Ponchione-Bailey (2022) is embarking on with musician-colleagues from Afghanistan living in exile. These steps should be readily adopted, and are important given the various inequalities that affect research dissemination and flourishing in regions with lower economic prosperity and higher socio-political and/or linguistic barriers. The rise of co-produced and participatory approaches to research is a promising step in an important direction, to diminish preconceptions of research paradigms and earlier findings in order to shape research questions and methodologies and instead enable a more inclusive approach, leading to greater diversity in perspectives (e.g., see guidance by UK Research and Innovation [n.d.], and dedicated chapters of Leavy, 2022).

Conclusion

In conclusion, we are proud of the contributions offered in this volume and grateful to all authors for their participation in this project and their patience in realising the full volume. The book is rich in insight and research findings, which are significant in functioning as a guide, and in informing and shaping future research. They offer examples of successful research approaches in contexts of limited funding and resources. Several studies have included a large number of participants (Chapter 6) or have been developed and conducted over a large number of years (Chapter 12). Many initiate new research directions (e.g., Chapters 3, 5, 6 and 13). We hope to have set an example that will have its followers, and that we can look forward to future volumes that will support the dissemination of research that is lesser known to an international readership, and, consequently, will promote regions of interest that international audiences should take note of. We also hope to inspire the further flourishing of psychology of music in the Western Balkans and other regions that have been on the relative margins of attention in music psychology, and encourage new generations of researchers to take up an interest in this area. The promise of research in the psychology of music is its development of knowledge and understanding, combined with the potential for real-world application. Applications of the research presented in this book relate to music

education across different ages, health and well-being development, the fostering of creativity and imagination, promoting rewarding audience experiences and adding to the vibrancy of the concert scene. Technology and collaborations with music providers, community musicians and therapists will further broaden the potential for application. We believe that locality has a role to play in sharpening the specificity and applicability of research. However, locality alone is not sufficient: research flourishes with international exchange and dialogue, where novel paradigms and shifts in understanding are scrutinised, shared, and developed. Inclusive research practices will be most beneficial to ensure critical exchange, collaboration and a critical mass to continue to enhance research outcomes, and build on what has been already examined, modelled and found, including in the Western Balkans and Western Europe.

This is not to overlook the considerable challenges that remain for the psychology of music to flourish worldwide, in contexts of economic limitations, political unrest and institutional inertia. As an example, internal and external factors are at stake in facilitating the flourishing of the discipline in the Western Balkans. A first requirement would be to overcome the overreliance on passionate individuals by increasing momentum, recognition and continuity of the discipline at MHEIs, through integration in the curriculum and inclusion as a postgraduate specialisation. Music is, as a research domain, multi-disciplinary, empirical and practice based. Psychological methods and theories align well with its empirical and practical orientation. Analogously, there is room for the psychology of music to be emancipated in psychology departments by acknowledging the key insights that musical behaviour and cognition offer to the understanding of human psychology. A second step is to further promote internationalisation, professional development and quality enhancement. Following the LOTUS review (2022) of leadership and organisation at European Universities, Prchal (2022) argues that such requirements for learning and development relate to individuals and institutions. This is also where internal and external factors come together: internationalisation and professional development can come from strengthened engagement with the international research community, meaning exchange at conferences, research visits, collaborations, and exploration of the potential for regional specialisations and international research networks.

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