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How Theories About Instrumental Practice Strategies in Western Music Evolved Since the 1700's: A Select Annotated Bibliography

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How theories about instrumental practice strategies in Western Music evolved since the 1700's. A select annotated bibliography.

Summary

As music teachers, we introduce our students to a variety of methods for learning their instrument. In addition, it is necessary to impart wisdom on *how* to practice those methods and strategic ways to approach the learning and preparing of pieces for performance.

This paper will endeavor to compare and contrast how those strategies and techniques have evolved over the past 300+ years to better understand what practice strategies are “tried and true”, which have been discarded over time, and what has been added to the pantheon of strategies and scientific studies as performance practice and our understanding of psychology and learning theory has developed. The goal of this paper is to learn what the consensus is on effective practice techniques through an extensive study of the history of practice and clinical studies on the subject, thereby allowing myself and others the ability to be better teachers for our students, and ultimately help them be better practitioners and performers on their chosen instruments.

To illustrate the main problem. If a student spends ½ an hour a day practicing, out of the 6 days outside of the lesson, that constitutes 85% of the time they spend with their instrument away from the teacher. And the teacher (assuming a ½ hour lesson) spends only 15% of the students instrument interactive time with them. Therefore, providing students with effective practice strategies and self evaluative tools for self direction that they can employ during the 85% of the time they spend away from the teacher assists the student in a variety of ways. They learn and develop faster and better. Because of this timely positive feedback, students are more likely to continue with the instrument and gain greater enjoyment from the experience of learning how to perform. The 15% of the time the teacher gets to spend with the student can then be more productive with greater value for the student.

Conference Papers

- 1.) Smith, Corinne Roth. “Adapting Piano Instruction to the Needs of Children with Learning Disabilities: Merging Research & Intervention.” Paper presented at the 24th Annual International Conference of the Association for Children and Adults with Learning Disabilities, San Antonio, TX, February 25-28, 1987. <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED292244.pdf>.

Smith earned a Bachelor's degree and a PhD in School Psychology from Syracuse University, and her Masters degree in Psychology from Temple University in the 1960's. She authored the leading textbook on learning disabilities, "Learning Disabilities: A to Z: A Complete Guide to Learning Disabilities from Preschool to Adulthood", which was one of the first textbooks in the field. She subsequently published many other books on the subject. She served as Dean of the School of Education at Syracuse University where she founded the Psycho-Educational Teaching Laboratory. Additionally, she designed and consulted on the Special Education Governmental Programs in several foreign countries. She received the Syracuse Post Standard Woman of Achievement Award, and served on The new York State Governor's Council for Youth.

This conference paper focuses on methods and strategies for teaching disabled children. It includes sections on practicing and at home motivation strategies. Specifically on distribution of practice time (shorter practice sessions with greater frequency, rather than longer focused practice sessions with less frequency), the discovery of how much repetition is optimal for a particular student (student specific instructions based on their ability), teaching students how to use self-verbalization (counting and saying names of notes) to aid in learning.

Smith draws on psychological and educational research for her findings as well as data gathered from her own research studies. And it is clear by the extensive bibliography included in this paper that she has done a great amount of research on the subject. *This bibliography will also serve as a helpful tool for further research on the topic of practice strategies, as psychological issues play a major role in motivation, self evaluation, problem solving, procrastination, and other issues involved*

with practicing.

While this paper is geared towards children with special needs, the strategies named within can easily be used for a variety of learners, and may be helpful for any student's arsenal of practice strategies.

It is interesting to note the similarities in specificity of "how" to practice between this and Cocker's *How To Practice Jazz* published just three short years later. Further, I note that this paper mentions "Involving Parents" in the process. Therefore it is in direct agreement with at least two other sources in this bibliography.

Dissertations and Theses

- 2.) Bashaw, Donna Ruth. "The Evolution of Philosophies and Techniques of Piano Pedagogy from 1750 to 1900 Traced Through the Teachings of C. P. E. Bach, Clementi, Czerny, Chopin, and Leschetizky." MA thesis, California State University, Fullerton, 1980.

Bashaw studied music education at Cal State Long Beach, and Law at Cal State Fullerton where she wrote this master's thesis. (Further attempts to obtain additional information about her, including locating and messaging her on Facebook, did not produce either a response or more information.)

This may be one of the most valuable sources I have found on my topic. If nothing else, for its use as a secondary or tertiary resource for further materials. It is a wealth of information on the genealogy of not only the piano teachers mentioned in the title, but also their influences and those they influenced. It includes many references to other works relevant to the topic of pedagogy and performance practice. It also breaks down each of the listed teachers in terms of these listed sections on each one; "The Man, The Pianoforte (it's historical place, development, and acceptance during their lives), The Method, His Students, His Compositions, and His Influence". There are also two appendices which include a genealogy of pedagogues from C.P.E. Bach through Leschetizky (ending with a list of Leschetizky's students). As well as a historical time chart with three columns showing 1. Pedagogy Methods and Materials, 2. Development of the Piano, and 3. Biographical Data on the listed teachers. Bashaw draws on all of this historical and biographical evidence to support her arguments regarding the evolution of philosophies and techniques of piano pedagogy from 1750 through 1900. A bibliography of books on the subject written by both the teachers mentioned in the title and many other authors is also included.

The author makes a great point in her conclusion, stating, "A number of conclusions can be drawn from this study. First, it is evident that the changes in technique, music composition, and the development of the piano cannot be separated". For example, as the pianoforte developed, aspects such as pedaling and touch and feel became more and more important to practice. This concept would most likely be true of any instrument, and therefore raises the question of how the development of other instruments have influenced practice strategies related to those instruments. This subject engages several other sources listed in this annotated bibliography.

As a primary source, specific to my topic is Bashaw's statement in her conclusion, "One trend in piano technique which is obvious from this study was that toward greater relaxation and freedom. C.P.E. Bach, Clementi and Czerny all advocated a 'quiet' hand with the work all being done by the fingers. Liszt and Chopin introduced a new freedom of playing using wrist, arm and even shoulder to produce the effects that they wanted. A freer technique of playing was embraced by Leschetizky even though as a child he was taught rigidly by Czerny. This freedom was necessary to perform the music that was being written in the Romantic period." This last sentence lends evidence to the evolution of practice strategies, and how, and why, they evolved over time.

This source engages several of my older and newer sources in providing information on the subject in the gap between 1750 and 1900 that is lacking in other sources. In addition, the "method" and "influence" sections of each chapter provide information relevant to the topic.

Further, and more specific examples of relevance are discussions of Leschetizky's 'tyrannical teaching method', as well as specifics on memorizing a piece. A notable controversy mentioned in this

work in the genealogy specifically states that C.P.E. Bach introduced the “Thumb Under fingering and Rounded Hand Technique” in 1753. There has long been a controversy over “Thumb Under” vs. “Hand Over” technique in piano playing, and now we know when it started, and who started it.

3.) Hendricks, Renee Christine. “An Examination of the Teaching Methods of Seven Nineteenth-Century Piano Pedagogues.” MA thesis, The American University, Washington, 1988.

I can find no information on the author. However, this thesis engages the above thesis by examining the teaching methods of seven nineteenth century piano pedagogues including (but not limited to); Carl Czerny, Frederic Chopin, and Theodor Leschetizky. Hendricks draws on information gathered in her sources, listed in the bibliography, for evidence on her topic.

This source is also valuable as a secondary source as it mentions for instance, Hummel's three volume work, “A Complete Theoretical and Practical Course of Instruction on the Art of Playing the Piano Forte” which offers “over two thousand short, mainly static exercises for various combinations of fingers.” Stressing the development of strong and accurate fingers. This speaks to the “fundamentals” aspect of practice, which is an important component of practice for any instrument.

Each chapter of this thesis concerns itself with one of each of the pedagogues it specifies and discusses in depth each of their teaching methods. The conclusion of this paper indicates an evolution in teaching methods and/or an individuality of methods. “A comparison of similarities and dissimilarities in the methods shows that the earlier pedagogues—Hummel and Czerny— had more in common with each other than with the later pedagogues—Kullak, Deppe, and Leschetizky, who also held some common views. Chopin's approach to teaching was uniquely his own, and Liszt's was characteristic: of both early and late nineteenth century trends.” This is relevant to the question of evolution in my topic.

The paper also includes an appendix of “Pedagogical Compositions and Writings by Pedagogues” in the work as well as an extensive bibliography of sources which may be useful for further exploration of my topic.

Music Scores

4.) Czerny, Carl., *Practical Method for Beginners on the Piano: Opus 599*. Edited by Willard A. Palmer. Second edition. Van Nuys, CA: Alfred Publishing, 1992.

Carl Czerny is notably one of the most prominent teachers of Western classical music from the 19th century. A composer whose music spanned the Classical and Romantic era, his works number in the thousands and his methods and books for study are still used today in the teaching of piano performance. Czerny was a child prodigy who began composing at age 7, and ended up studying with Ludwig van Beethoven. He began teaching at age 15, and drew on the methods of Beethoven and Muzio Clementi for his philosophy. Eventually he would become Franz Liszt's teacher.

This teaching method includes 100 short excerpts (8 to 16 and rarely 24 measures long) for classical instruction from very simple (single note, half and whole note, on the beat) to complex (a variety of chords, melodic lines, clefs, key signatures, syncopated rhythms, etc...) that are great exercises for anyone learning to play the piano, or as single line reading for bass and treble clef instruments. They are meant to be used as in depth, small scale “etude” studies. Practitioners are directed to use these short exercises to not only develop strong technique, but to practice the “skills of practicing” by breaking down small sections, and working towards a small achievable goal.

As the student progresses through the exercises, they are confronted with ever increasing levels of difficulty and new challenges of fingering, phrasing, dynamics, etc... This prompts the student to engage in problem solving, a key component of practice.

This source is engaged directly by Lauren Shack Clark's review of the Opus. That review highlights the composer's motives and methodology behind the work. Those motives and methods engage several other sources I have listed, and this source is particularly relevant to my topic in that it represents a concrete example of a tool for exercising practice strategies.

Other Monographs

- 5.) Johnston, Philip. *The Practice Revolution: Getting Great Results from the Six Days Between Music Lessons*. Pearce, Australia: PracticeSpot Press, 2002.

Philip Johnston received his Masters degree in Piano Performance from Indiana University. He has recorded for Warner Music as a concert pianist. He is also the founder of "PracticeSpot.com", a very successful online resource for music teachers and students designed to help students through the six days between lessons. Johnston runs one of Australia's largest piano studios and has written several books on the subject of practice.

This book is dedicated to the subject of practice and how we as teachers *teach* practice behaviors and strategies. It begins by breaking down the "Quantity Myth" which deals with how much time a student practices and compares that to their progress, rather than their progress being tied to the quality of effective practice strategies. Subjects discussed include how teachers can better communicate instructions to their students on how to practice, why students don't practice, common flaws in practice, a framework for learning a new piece including memorization, speeding up pieces, and preparing for performance. The book also discusses the learning process in terms of project management and the role parents can play when given good direction.

Johnston draws on his extensive experience as both a student, and music educator for evidence that his concepts are sound.

The subject matter of this book is specifically directed towards practice strategies on all levels. Therefore, its relevance to my topic is clear. This book in particular engages nearly every other source I have, as, again, it is specifically about practice strategies.

Included in this work are two websites with further resources on teaching, methods of practice, and teaching studio promotion.

- 6.) Pearce, Elvina. *The Success Factor in Piano Teaching: Making Practice Perfect*. Edited by Craig Sale. Kingston, New Jersey: Frances Clark Center for Keyboard Pedagogy, 2014.

Elvina Pearce received her undergraduate degree at the University of Tulsa in Piano Performance. She then went to New York City where she studied with Isabelle Vengerova (her students include Samuel Barber and Leonard Bernstein). Pearce has performed with the Chicago Symphony and has done recitals at Carnegie Hall and The National Gallery of Art. After several collegiate appointments and studying pedagogy with Frances Clark, she helped found the Francis Clark Center for Keyboard Pedagogy in 1999 and served for six years as Vice President on its Board of Trustees. She was named an MTNA Foundation Fellow in 2008, and received a Lifetime Achievement Award from the National Conference on Keyboard Pedagogy in 2011.

This is a Primary Monograph without a bibliography. It has two main sections; Part 1. "Pedagogy", in which Pearce discusses several subjects in depth, including "How" and "What" we teach, as well as teaching the beginner, and handling transfer students. Most importantly for the topic of my paper, she discusses "Teaching Students How to Practice". In this chapter she discusses tools for productive self directed practice as well as addressing the issue of quantity of practice vs quality of practice. There are also helpful tips and suggestions on "Early Level Repertoire", and "Technique – Tips for Teaching and Practicing". Furthermore, chapters 8 & 9 are devoted to Performance Preparation. Part 2. is dedicated to Professionalism and the ins and outs of the business of starting and running a teaching studio.

This source engages "The Practice Revolution" by Philip Johnston by addressing the need to prepare the student for the "six days of self directed practice between lessons". She also has a section titled "Time Spent" vs "Mind Spent" in which she discusses the value of thinking through what one is doing and their strategies and approach to that work, as well as mindful practice rather than mindless repetition that is often executed at a tempo that is too fast for mindful reflection. And, she addresses directly the subject of "Quantity" of practice vs. "Quality" of practice.

Pearce draws from her extensive knowledge of pedagogy gained over years of both performance and teaching for evidence of the effectiveness of the strategies she suggests in her

book.

7.) Quantz, Johann Joachim. *On Playing the Flute*. Translated by Edward R. Reilly. 2nd ed. 1966. Reprint, Lebanon, NH: University Press of New England, 2001.

As stated in the introduction of this work. Johann Quantz was Born in 1697 in a small town in Hanover, Quantz spent his formative years mingling with and learning from the town musicians. At age 9, after his father's death and the opportunity to escape a life as a blacksmith, he left home to study music with his uncle. He learned the trade of town musician from his uncle, studying a great variety of instruments. In his late teens he had the opportunity to move to Dresden. There he began a solid career as a court musician in service of Augustus II. He would remain in Dresden through his twenties and thirties, and develop his musical skills there, as well as taking a tour to Italy, France, and Great Britain where he both learned from and performed with many of the great musicians and composers of the era. That tour established him as one of the best musicians and composers in Europe. In 1740 he was offered a lucrative and prestigious appointment to serve Frederick the Great in Berlin, where he remained for the rest of his life. There he composed, performed and produced flutes. His wide range of musical education and experience qualified him to write a comprehensive essay on instruction in the playing of the transverse flute. It is notable that he also played a variety of other instruments from oboe to double bass to harpsichord, along with many others. This surely equipped him with a great knowledge of how to practice and develop skills on an instrument.

"On Playing the Flute" is "one of the foremost books from the Baroque era on musical practice and thought. Notable that it is cited on a wide range of topics from the time that musicians and scholars first began to comprehend fully that and understanding of earlier approaches to performance might have a vital bearing on the convincing re-creation of music of the past."

The first 9 chapters of the book are an in depth explanation of the technical aspect of playing the flute. Chapter 10, "What a beginner must observe in his independent practice" is concerned with *how* to practice those technical aspects. The remainder of the book is devoted to performance practice on a variety of subjects from "Playing the Allegro" and "Playing the Adagio" to accompaniment techniques and "How a musician and a musical composition are judged". Similar to many books written on the subject today, Quantz focuses on the technical aspects of the instrument, and practice techniques, and ends by including some practical information for the reader on how to perform and also how to conduct one's business of being a musician.

This source is also relatable to the Czerny Practical Method for Beginners on Piano in that it lists a number of specific exercises that the student should engage in, in a systematic and progressive way to achieve mastery of the instrument. Perhaps creating a link between Quantz's teachings and Czerny's later teaching.

The book includes a bibliography of additional books and articles, as well as an annotated bibliography of Quantz's works.

Scholarly Journal Articles

8.) Clark, Lauren Shack. Review of *Czerny: Practical Method for Beginners, Opus 599* by Carl Czerny. *American Music Teacher* 61, no. 1 (2012): 59-59
<https://www.jstor.org/stable/43544730>.

Dr. Lauren Shack Clark is on the faculty at Arkansas State University. She has performed as a pianist internationally. Dr. Clark is an MTNA Foundation Fellow and has recorded on various major classical record labels.

She points out in this article on the introduction to Czerny's Opus 599, written by Matthew Edwards, that this work is helpful for developing good technique overall, but is also suited as etudes to assist in the playing of other specific pieces and styles. Edwards also points out some specifics for practicing by breaking things down, and practicing hands separate, then when putting them together, making sure they complement each other and have the same flow with the melody. And notably,

“speed should be secondary at all times”. These ideas can be associated with many practice techniques mentioned in Sitton’s article on “The Pedagogy of Practice” as well as Johnston’s book “The Practice Revolution”.

The review of Op 599 speaks to two especially cogent practice strategies that appear to be true across all instruments. A. The need to break things down into manageable and focused parts, and B. the vigilance surrounding the issue of speed, and the need to keep everything at a manageable speed and not allow speed to override tone, feel, expression, precision, etc...

Clark draws on her knowledge of the composer, historical precedent, and her own experience for evidence to support her argument. This review is relevant to my topic in that it highlights the main reasons for a work such as this, as well as the composer’s own teaching strategies relevant to practice.

9.) Lawson, Colin. Review of *'Classical and Romantic Music, the Library of Essays on Music Performance Practice'* By David Milsom. *Performance Practice Review* 17, no. 1 (2012): 1–3.

Colin Lawson is a classical clarinetist, scholar, and broadcaster. He did his post graduate work at University of Birmingham, and in 2000 was awarded an honorary DMus from the University of London in recognition of his work in the areas of theory and practice.

This review of the volume discusses the larger issues of exclusion due to bias. As well as the issue of non-musicians discussing performance practice. He also mentions “The volume as a whole has a palpable string bias, with orchestral wind and brass instruments entirely overlooked, despite the momentous technical developments to which they were subject during the period under discussion.” This statement engages other sources listed regarding how practice and performance strategies and techniques have changed as the instrument itself changes.

Lawson is not kind to the author of this work in terms of his exclusion of some key figures in the area of performance practice particular to the classical and romantic era. However, his mention of those he feels should have been included suggest some alternative resources to examine. He also warns against some of the sources cited as being dated in their approach, which should be helpful for navigating the available information on the subject.

Lawson’s evidence for his claims that others should have been included in the work is based on those sources’ extensive work and knowledge on the topic being discussed in Milsom’s volume, as well as their inclusion in other prominent works on the subject.

10.) Sitton, Michael. “The Pedagogy of Practice.” *The American Music Teacher* 41, no. 5 (1992): 30–89.

Michael Sitton graduated *summa cum laude* with a B.Mus., from Mars Hill College in North Carolina. He also holds the Diplome de concert from Paris Schola Cantorum, where he studied as a Harriet Hale Woolley Scholar of the Foundation des Etats-Unis. He achieved his MA in Music At the University of Kentucky and earned his DMA from the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. He retired in 2020 as Dean Emeritus from The Crane School of Music at the State University of New York at Potsdam. Throughout his career he held several faculty positions at various universities and served as Dean of Fine Arts at Eastern New Mexico University. An accomplished pianist and composer, he also focused on sacred choral music during his career.

Interestingly, I find as I read the very first line of this article, the statement, “One of my teacher’s often said, ‘My job is to teach students how to practice’”. This is a statement that I have made many times to my students, and I attributed it to myself in my paper presenting my research topic. Obviously, I’m not the only teacher to employ this strategy, and this is evidence that the subject of “How to practice” is not a new concept, and that this article will be a great source regarding that subject. Further reading of the article did indeed yield a wealth of very specific information regarding practice strategies.

Sitton clearly lays out the indispensable value of effective practice habits for all levels of music enthusiasts and professionals alike. He states that, “When leaving a teacher’s studio after years of

study, the well-prepared student should have as secure a command of sound practice procedures as of scale fingerings. Yet, the systematic development of practice strategies seems most often to be neglected.” This quote from the article is evidence of the need to pursue the line of inquiry stated in my topic.

He goes on to give specifics in areas such as *rehearsing* or “Playing Through” vs. *problem solving*. Two major strategies of practice that must be clearly understood and implemented if students are to get the most out of their practice time.

Parental involvement is discussed (and its potential pit-falls) which engages one of my other sources, Phillip Johnstons' “The Practice Revolution”, where he discusses engaging parents in the process of practice so that they can assist in effectively monitoring at home practice throughout the week.

Sitton mentions several larger overview ideas such as asking questions of the student to assist them in guiding their own practice, and the use of metaphors and analogies, goal setting, and successful repetition. He then gives examples of some more focused practical techniques such as segmenting, layered learning goals, hands separate practice (specific to piano), slow vs. fast practice, linear thinking, and self-imposed obstacles, giving examples of each.

Evidence to support his arguments comes from his extensive experience as a piano teacher teaching these practice techniques.

11.) Suzuki, Akiho and Helen F. Mitchell. “What Makes Practice Perfect? How Tertiary Piano Students Self-Regulate Play and Non-Play Strategies for Performance Success.” *Psychology of Music* 50, no. 2 (2022): 611-30. <https://journals-sagepub-com.du.idm.oclc.org/doi/full/10.1177/03057356211010927>.

Akiho Suzuki studied at the Sydney Conservatorium of Music during her undergraduate years and was a fourth year honors student there in spring of 2018. Further information on her is scarce but I note that along with this study she has co-authored several other peer reviewed articles spanning the years 2019 to 2022.

Hellen F. Mitchell earned her BA in Music Education from Oxford University in Great Britain, and received her PHD from in Education from the Sydney Conservatorium of Music in 2004. She is the author of several peer reviewed articles on subjects ranging from music education to psychology in music.

Suzuki and Mitchell draw on empirical evidence from the study to support their arguments on what constitutes effective practice strategies.

In this study Suzuki and Mitchell explore the self regulated practice of five tertiary piano students over the course of two days with two pieces prepared for a quick study task for a mock performance. Participant's performances were evaluated by experts and ranked accordingly. Three phases of self regulated learning were evaluated (forethought or planning, performance, and self reflection). The study concluded that “successful pianists planned their practice and set interpretative goals, while their less successful peers practiced reactively without planning.” Suggesting that a well thought out and executed practice strategy or group of strategies is an important element of successful and effective practice.

This source engages other sources I have listed in terms of the validity and importance of learning and understanding practice strategies as well as planning ones practice time. These concepts are both mentioned on “The Pedagogy of Practice” and *The Practice Revolution*.

This study is particularly relevant to my topic in that it highlights current research on the subject, suggesting that greater discovery of evidence based approaches to practice are still being discovered and that practice strategies continue to evolve as we understand more about the psychology of learning. In addition, this study includes an extensive bibliography which is sure to prove useful regarding further research on this type of study and the subject therein.

Secondary or Tertiary Monographs

12.) Coker, Jerry. *How to Practice Jazz*. New Albany, IN: Jamey Abersold Jazz, 1990.

Jerry Coker is an accomplished Jazz musician who spent 2 years at Indiana University before going on tour with the Woody Herman Orchestra as a featured soloist on 2 of his albums. He later earned his Doctorate from Indiana University in woodwinds. His first book on improvising was published in 1964.

This book contains chapters titled “The Nature and Content of Your Practice” and “Structuring your Practice Time” where Coker discusses everything from how long one should practice and the various determining factors for deciding on this duration, to an extended list of what one should practice along with suggestions for how to practice those elements, as well as suggested duration for practice of specific skills including; tone, intervals, scales, arpeggios, etc... Coker even includes some sample practice routines.

The back matter of the book includes appendices of “Play Along Tunes” from catalogues such as the Jamey Abersold play along series. And a similar guide to play along exercises.

This book also references a number of specific exercises that a student should engage in to achieve proficiency at their instrument, however, it goes further than the Quantz and Czerny methods in that it cites more specifically a “schedule of practice” and suggested time frames for practice.

Coker draws on his years of experience teaching as well as interactions with other colleagues in his field for evidence of the efficacy of these methods.