

The Essence of Excellence: Mental Skills of Top Classical Musicians

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to use Orlick's (1992) model of excellence as a framework for studying elite classical musicians. The picture of excellence which emerged included such aspects as: a deep commitment to music and/or excelling, non-materialistic goals, a strong sense of self, a positive perspective based on continued growth and learning, and an abiding love for and enjoyment of music and music-making. Musicians also considered creativity, spontaneity and flexibility to be the foremost prerequisites to performance excellence. A refined performance focus allowed the musicians to translate this essence of excellence into consistent high level performance.

Introduction

In recent years, as more emphasis has been placed on improved performance, the demands placed on performers have increased. Concomitantly, there has been an increase in interest in the psychological aspects of excellence. The domain of music has been no exception to this trend (Ericsson, Krampe & Tesch-Römer, 1993; Fogle, 1982; Green & Gallwey, 1986; Grindea, 1984; Hanson, 1992; Lipton, 1987; Lorenzi, 1993; Molo & Ness, 1992; Reubart, 1985; Ross, 1985; Whitaker & Tanner, 1987). However, stage fright has been the main focus of the literature (Grindea, 1984; Reubart, 1985) and mental preparation, on the whole, has been seen largely as a remedial approach for dealing with incapacitating performance anxiety. Thus, this study represented an attempt to provide a more holistic view of performance excellence from the viewpoint of elite classical musicians.

The main purpose of this research was to explore and document the mental factors related to excellence of

elite musicians. Orlick's model of excellence (1989, 1992) was selected as a suitable framework as it presented a comprehensive approach. The model considered self-belief and commitment to be the foundations on which five other aspects of excellence were based: ability to focus, use of visualization, ability to control distractions, ability to evaluate constructively, and mental readiness, a general construct which includes planning ability and willingness to learn. This framework helped develop the interview instrument. A secondary purpose of the study was to assess the relevance of Orlick's model (1992) to the performing arts, namely, elite classical musicians. This article is based only on one aspect of the complete study, namely that which was considered to be the "essence of excellence" for the musicians interviewed.

Methodology

Subjects

Internationally renowned soloists in the field of classical music served as

subjects for this research. Participants were selected on the basis of their reputation for excellence. Criteria used to judge excellence included:

- musicians' participation in international music festivals (e.g., Salzburg, Tanglewood, Bayreuth)
- having been a guest soloist with orchestras of international standing (e.g., Berlin Philharmonic, Vienna Philharmonic, New York Philharmonic)
- having made at least three recordings on national labels
- playing as a member of a world renowned chamber music ensemble
- efforts were made to interview string and wind players as well as pianists.

A list of the names of all artists interviewed (n=30) was given to ten professional musicians along with a list of the criteria for selection. They were asked to confirm the subjects' level of excellence. Of the thirty, sixteen were considered by the panel to meet the criteria. These sixteen musicians represented the sample for the study.

The musicians ranged in age from 15 to 54 years old. Thirteen were male, three were female. Ten musicians were string players, four played wind instruments and two were pianists.

The Interviews

Participants were interviewed using the Musician Interview Guide, adapted from Orlick and Partington's Athlete Interview Guide (1988). This guide consisted of 25, mostly open-ended questions and examined such ar-

reas as goals, practice routines, preparation for performance, focus during performance, best and worst performances, enjoyment, and potential recommendations for novice musicians.

Most of the interviews were conducted during two international festivals in Austria. Interviews ranged from one hour to two and a half hours. All interviews were tape-recorded in their entirety, and verbatim transcripts were made from the recordings. Five transcripts were sent back to artists for authentication of content. The five participants confirmed that the transcripts represented what transpired during the interview.

Analysis

Transcripts were qualitatively analysed. Initial readings of two transcripts resulted in preliminary tags being made (Wentzell, 1986). Tags with similar meanings were grouped to create categories following the procedural guidelines outlined by Coté, Salmela, Baria and Russell (1993). A meeting with another coder experienced in qualitative studies was held in order to clarify and agree upon the category labels used, and two further interviews were subsequently analysed. Categories were enlarged and other categories were added to capture ideas not previously expressed. This process was continued until all interviews were analysed and "theoretical saturation" had been reached (Glaser as cited in Coté et al., 1993).

All sixteen interviews were thoroughly re-analysed using the final list of categories. An independent assessor was then given descriptors of each of the categories and was asked to analyse two transcripts using the list of categories.

Inter-assessor reliability was high (92.7%).

Results

The purpose of the research was to elaborate on the “essence of excellence” as it emerged from the interviews. This essence included: a deep commitment to music and/or excelling, non-materialistic goals, a strong sense of self, a positive perspective based on continued growth and learning, and an abiding love for and enjoyment of music and music making. Creativity, spontaneity and flexibility were considered by musicians to be the foremost prerequisites to performance excellence. A connected focus during performance allowed musicians to translate this excellence into consistent high level performance.

Commitment

It was clear that elite musicians were highly committed to their musical pursuits. Those interviewed had made music the focal point of their lives even if they had families and/or other interests, and this commitment was made very early in their lives. Commitment was clearly one factor that determined whether participants achieved their full potential with their chosen instrument.

The musicians’ involvement with music had started very early and by the age of fifteen, 88% had already made the decision to pursue a career in music.

(Began learning instrument at 10)...a little while later, one or two years, I got really bad in school because I wasn’t learning any more. I wasn’t interested in anything else any more and was just fixated on playing.

...when I became 15, I switched to (present instrument) and was captivated. I never really did something that I didn’t like to do and I never liked to study so...I lived to practice though....When I was in college, I practised even more...10 hour days of practising, and I was always having to take time off if I had an important concert coming up because I was practising so much that my lips were like, worn down to a frazzle...

For fourteen or the sixteen musicians, music was still the focal point of their lives.

I came to the conclusion that music and all that pertains to it...that’s the most important. Everything else will have to, not submit to it, but fit it somehow.

Very few people are privileged to combine their profession with their hobby...something that they love more than anything else. Music is the most important thing in my life...music is my whole life.

Goals and Dreams

All participants readily talked about their dreams and aspirations concerning their music. These goals could for the most part be divided into three distinct subcategories: self-growth or personal excellence goals, goals concerning the music itself, and a strong desire to express feelings with their music or to give something of themselves in their interpretation of it. Some of the musicians also talked about how their goals had changed or evolved over the years.

Nine of the sixteen musicians interviewed felt strongly that music gave them an opportunity to grow, to be the best they could possibly be or to better themselves.

I have only one long-term goal, I always had it: through the music, through the study of music, to develop, to discover myself, my personality, and to grow.

...I want to be a very good musician. I think that's the only aim a musician can have.

You want to play as well as possible. That's enough. You spend your whole life with this one goal because somehow, you always fall short of what you imagined.

For nine of the musicians, music itself was a top priority. They had aspirations of interpreting the music as well as they possibly could, of respecting the composer's intent when interpreting a piece and/or of understanding the music more and more.

When I practice, when I learn a piece, I always feel very much respect for the work. I would like to be an honest interpreter of the thing I want to play. I think the rule of an interpreter must be to try to be as honest as possible regarding the composer. So, this is a very big goal.

I try to keep it very clear - the instrument is only a vehicle and the main goal of my existence, as an interpreter, is the music. The instrument just helps you express...Sometimes, priorities get switched around, music becomes a vehicle in order to show...how wonderful

they can play that instrument, how fast, how clean, how loud...It's the end of my profession in my opinion. The most important thing, the music, gets to be secondary.

I only know that this is necessary in order to do the music justice. You must learn to give yourself completely to the idea behind the music notes. There is always an idea, a tone quality and you have to be always freer and more knowledgeable to be able to interpret it properly. Purer somehow.

For many musicians, music was a vehicle to communicate with the audience or with their colleagues (e.g., when playing chamber music). Seven musicians expressed goals in these terms.

*It's very hard to explain, but I think it's...all what you feel; you have to...express it. To let the people feel what you feel....So all that you think, all that you want to express, that's it really - that the people really can hear it - not just that **you** feel it. Because you have to put it across.*

Self-growth, doing justice to the music, and communicating feelings encompassed most of the general goals or dreams that drove the elite musicians to even higher levels of excellence. It was interesting to note that goals were not expressed in material or competitive terms at all. Only one participant was clearly materialistic in his approach to music because of his problems and general disillusionment with it. Four of the musicians interviewed insisted that it was wrong and/or impossible to live by materialistic goals in their profession.

(Those goals)...have nothing to do with the music itself...I must say honestly that I'd rather play at home to my heart's content than say I can play in the best concert halls of the world and it's (the music) not as good.

There are people who dream of worthless things- he needs a Mercedes or whatever - material things. I try to give them (students) more idealistic dreams, that they dream of the music, what they can do with a piece, to develop a certain ambition from these dreams.

I combine enjoyment with my profession which I think is my greatest ambition....because I don't believe in 'Mr. X', the number one cellist or violinist or pianist in the world and the greatest. I don't believe really that such things exist in the music anyway...what does it mean number 1, number 2 or whatever? You could say who is the most famous maybe, or the best paid, yes, o.k.. But the greatest? It's a matter of taste anyway.

Another five musicians pointed out that these more materialistic and/or competitive goals were more often a strong motivating factor when a musician was young. In the early years of learning an instrument when so much of the work is mastering the technical skills required to play, they felt it may be necessary to have such goals because one is not yet able to see the broader picture - the music.

Children don't see so far in advance. My goal as a child was to get out of (a former communist country) and the way to do it was to get to be so good with my instrument that they'd allow you

to go to competitions. That's what I did. Later, the goals were always more concrete...career oriented goals. Anyway, I think that goals change a lot with age. When you're young, goals are determined by the need to measure yourself with others. Later, this becomes boring...the goals change, they become more related to the music itself.

The goals of the elite musicians remained idealistic even after many years in their profession. Their love for and commitment to the music remained strong. It is interesting to note that for at least four of the musicians interviewed, their commitment to excelling and/or making beautiful music transcended the commitment they made to their instrument.

I love my instrument and I think it has fantastic qualities, but so does any other instrument...music is more important.

Sense of self

There was no doubt in the musicians' minds concerning the importance of having a strong sense of self in order to survive in their chosen profession.

It's like in sports, self-confidence and security are two of the most important factors. If you approach something with fear and think 'Now I have to play this', I'm only able to function at 40 to 50 percent of my abilities. I always have to think, 'I can do everything'.

I believe there is enough space for many different kinds of musicians and I have my own qualities even though I know that some colleagues have some other qualities which are stronger than

mine. But, I have something that I want to say and people want to hear.

This belief that a strong sense of self was very important, even necessary, in order to excel did not always translate into unwavering confidence in one's ability to be the best or play one's best. Most of the musicians interviewed appeared to experience some fluctuations in their level of self-confidence.

You think, 'I hope nothing goes wrong!'...Of course, then the self-confidence comes in: 'You can do everything'. It's a constant up and down...I think that when I'm playing on the stage, then the confidence wins.

Some musicians felt that while a strong sense of self was important, too much of it could be detrimental.

I find that humility is one of the most important things in your approach to music. I can't say any more than that. You have to defer to music and not have the feeling that you have to make the music. Humility in the face of something really great.

Self-esteem...is a condition that everyone wants to have because they associate it with inner strength. I aspire to it but...I don't think much of having self-esteem and nothing else...I have a picture in mind of a child who plays totally without self consciousness...open to everything in the world. When this child would say, 'I have self-esteem', he would get all caught up in himself and couldn't play any more.

Self-effacement is a very interesting concept raised by the musicians. It reaffirms the musician's belief in and

commitment to music. Self-effacement and a strong sense of self were not mutually exclusive. On the contrary, one must have a very strong sense of self to have the courage to forget oneself and focus on the music.

Perspectives for excellence

As a result of listening to these elite musicians talk about their goals and aspirations, their approach to music, as well as the focus they aspired to attain, it became clear that they carried some common perspectives into their musical endeavours. First, they viewed playing music as an on-going developmental experience and as such had goals of continued growth. Second, they felt that it was important to keep the "big picture" in mind. Third, they were positive thinkers. A fourth perspective for excellence raised by a limited number of the musicians interviewed was a feeling of being in control of one's self or one's life, while accepting things that could not be changed. With the exception of one musician, who had given up his career aspirations, they viewed their work as an opportunity for self-growth, and they felt that one should never stop learning.

Opportunities for self-growth and lifelong learning

Most musicians commented on the fact that they greatly enjoyed learning and looked for opportunities to grow in their music and other areas of their lives. They constantly sought out opportunities to play with different and better musicians in order to continue to learn. They felt that they were always growing and learning, and that any given concert only represented a stage in their development, not their last word on a given piece of music.

Above all, I hardly think that there is someone who can claim to know everything. He'd have to be at least 500 years old....Everything is relative and that's why I say you have to be flexible, you must be like a chicken pecking corn - I need this, I can learn something here, I can benefit from that, I can contribute there....Everywhere kernels are lying around. Some eat everything in sight and have nothing from it. Others won't touch anything. You have to find out what kernels you need.

When I think of future life about music, I like to see it with no arrival point. Like a road, you always have to keep going, I like to think that when I will be old, it will still be going on.

You have to be open, to play with different people - that's my leitmotiv, always play with better people....Always something new from pianists, from violinists, from winds...you always learn something. I believe that's very important.

I always hope that my best concert is still to come! If I feel one day that I have played my best, I'd probably quit, change professions....I don't think I ever will feel this way because I feel that there's an unlimited amount of feelings.

Keeping sight of the whole picture

Generally, musicians felt that the "big picture" was the process of ongoing development and the pursuit of their long-term goals.

Events are important milestones, but in music, you have so many events (concerts) that there's no point in focusing on every event exclusively, you

should really focus on the developmental side and see the big picture....That takes a little bit of pressure off. You can feel more relaxed, that you are working towards a long goal....

The big picture was also felt to be important in the music itself. Musicians felt that there was sometimes a danger of concentrating too much on minor details in a piece and thereby losing sight of what the piece was all about.

At first, you have the whole picture, that's the music. Then I start to cut it up or take it apart, pieces at a time, to turn them over and look at them closely...totally apart from the music actually. You don't even know where this part fits in the whole...I know earlier (when the musician was younger), I found it extremely difficult to put it together again. Today, I try not to lose the whole picture from the beginning even as I am taking it apart...to keep the music whole in my head. Even if I practise a tiny little piece, I try to slip it back in where it belongs at the end.

...there are different kinds of lenses which you can use and two major kinds are the zoom lens and wide-angle lens. So, I think...I kind of upgraded my assortment of lenses. When I was young, I was using the zoom much more you know, to zoom in to little details of music and play this little phrase more beautiful or whatever. Now, I use a wide-angle lens more often, together with the zoom, to try to see the whole long line in the music...which is, finally, most important because those little things are important too but they still are secondary, and the shape of the music and the long line is, in my opinion the most important.

Not losing sight of the big picture in terms of the music itself, obviously has important implications in terms of the focus and perspective musicians want to carry into a performance.

Positive thinking

Ninety-three percent of the musicians shared a very positive attitude. They were optimistic in their approach; they always tried to see setbacks and/or mistakes in a positive light, they learned from them or even used them as a catalyst to performance excellence.

Every once in a while we'll miss a note....I try not to think of it. It's gone. And if it happened in a solo concert, I'm always relieved because now, I can play better.

(About a not-so-good concert) It was very upsetting for me, very disappointing. But, in a way, it was good to recognize I have to change something. It was one of the best things that happened to me...It's good it happened at that time, at the beginning; I had more time to do better.

Mistakes or difficult situations (e.g., when conductors made mistakes) became opportunities to be even better or to take control and to make it all right again. Similarly, stage fright or pre-performance nervousness was accepted as normal, or even viewed in a positive way.

Of course, there's always stage fright, and it's always there, but, for me, it's a thing that inspires me more than anything.

Conductors get a bit haywired! That's quite exciting too...it frees you to

play even better because you're not thinking about yourself.

Feeling in control

Another component of what might be considered a perspective for excellence which surfaced in a number of interviews was a feeling of being in control of one's life or one's destiny, accepting the things one does not have control over, but working hard at changing what you can. For example, one musician refused to accept the view that he was the victim of a non-receptive audience.

Because you have them (the audience) in your hand, you're the one to make them attentive...Only for very special performances would they all be together, euphoric and all concentrated....Usually, they are all over the place and you should consider that there are many individuals sitting there, that you have to gather them! You can gather them yourself or not!

Another musician accepted that he was not in control of some things, such as winning a competition. He went in to the competition to do his very best and hoped to win, but realized that he was not responsible for that part of it.

Of course, if you play a competition, everybody wants to win. Or, he hopes to win. When I played my competition...I didn't think, 'I have to win otherwise'..... But I thought, 'Just do the best and (the rest) doesn't depend only on you.' It doesn't depend on you if you win, not only on you. When you play your best, then you can be pleased.

Enjoyment

Musicians were asked whether their enjoyment of playing had changed over the years. All but one participant said that they enjoyed music at least as much or more now than in the early years.

Generally speaking, unless I feel lousy...physically or whatever, I enjoy playing...usually it's a festive occasion. I am nervous of course, but in a kind of positive way, because I enjoy it and look forward to it.

For the most part, the increase in enjoyment came from feeling that they knew more or understood more about music now, that they appreciated it more or that they had extended their horizons by including new music.

I've got more (enjoyment). A lot more! I've learned to enjoy the moment, to create in the moment....I started really enjoying it now. Now, at this time, it's optimal because I really enjoy seeing that I'm getting something across.

(The enjoyment is)...more intense now. Because I think I understood much less before about what I was doing....

It changed a lot. A whole lot...I always enjoyed it a lot, but now, I'm like addicted...I'm really addicted.

In summary, similar to the findings of Barbour and Orlick (2000) in his study of the mental readiness of professional hockey players, enjoyment of their profession seemed to be determinant in elite musicians' readiness to perform and excel. Musicians interviewed greatly enjoyed playing and making mu-

sic. For a majority of musicians, years of hard work had not in any way diminished their enjoyment of music; on the contrary, it had increased and intensified over the years as their levels of expertise has risen. They felt that they knew and understood more and loved it even more.

Concentration/focusing

Musicians discussed their preferred pre-performance and performance focus during the interviews. Musicians felt that concentration was a necessary element of excellence and that having the right focus was a determining factor in a quality performance.

Concentration is the thing you have to learn first and foremost....You have to guide them (the students) so they learn these things. Discipline is also a ground rule of the ability to concentrate, that you have to learn to turn off whatever thoughts are going around in a circle. These are very important. There are many things going through your head and you must see to it that these things bring you to one point and you leave the others.

The musicians interviewed pointed out that the kind of concentration they were seeking could not be forced. It was "there", or just happened if they connected properly with the music, and if one tried to force it, one would lose it.

It's a prerequisite, but if you try to have it, if you pursue it, then it's an obstacle. Only as long as it's not forced and not willed, but is just there, is it helpful. But then it's very helpful.

These musicians considered concentration an essential element of excel-

lence, something one could never hope to perform well without. However, they recognized concentration more as a frame of mind or a mental state than anything else. The ability to choose the right focus or enter the right frame of mind, and control distractions to regain the desired focus was considered highly important.

Inner qualities required to excel

In the course of the interviews, the musicians often referred to the qualities they felt were necessary to excel as a classical musician. They also talked about what they felt made them excellent. The basic elements of excellence proposed in Orlick's Wheel of Excellence (1992) were evident for these top classical musicians including commitment, belief in the meaningfulness of their pursuit, mental readiness for learning, full focus, positive imagery, distraction control, and constructive evaluation of their pursuits.

However, three additional inter-related qualities/skills were viewed as adding enormously to musicians' "big picture" of mental readiness for excellence: spontaneity, creativity and flexibility. None of these three qualities were mentioned by Ericsson et al. (1993) in their discussion of the differences between expert and eminent musicians, yet the musicians interviewed consistently referred to them as "making the difference" between a good and a great musician. Indeed, many would have called "talent" a combination of creativity, spontaneity and flexibility.

Spontaneity and creativity

It is very difficult to separate spontaneity and creativity. Creativity appeared to be a process that musicians

described when they talked about visualization, imagination and/or musical interpretation.

Musicians took up a new piece, learned it, and then lived with it. They drove around with it on the train, tram or car, carried it into every situation of their lives, and even took it to bed with them. What eventually came out in a concert was a personal expression of the feelings and emotions that music had aroused in them, refined and perfected by the hard work of preparing the piece technically on the instrument. This appeared to be the creative process of the artist at work. Spontaneity was interpreted as being the musicians' openness to the creativity of the moment, expressing impulses or inspirations as they were felt or experienced during a performance. Musicians valued creativity and spontaneity and felt that it was these elements that could make their performance special.

A lot is automatic...even the phrasing is automatic...it's the slight improvisation that you sprinkle above the skill...that you do differently from what you've learned or studied about the piece. There's something extra there that you didn't do at home when you were practising. It comes in the concert but you can't explain it. It comes from talent, from the desire to lay something personal down on the table. These things play a big role - the situation of the moment and the creativity, the stimulation of creativity is so determining.

I've learned to enjoy the moment, to create in the moment. Something you can't practise beforehand or rehearse beforehand! The conditions are to be well prepared, be physically fit and not to have done too much. If (these factors)

are positive then, playing is a lot of fun; you just start and it just happens.

Musicians felt that they must protect and nurture these qualities. Eleven of them said that they did not like to do too much repetitive work in practising, or in rehearsing just before the performance, or in playing the same concert too many times in a row.

I'm not one of these people who think I have to play this passage through 400 times when I practice so that I'm guaranteed that it's perfect that night.

I don't like to practice like a machine...There are people I know, they are very good because they practice a passage maybe a 100 times and then, they are very good because it's like a machine, it's automatic. I don't like this very much and when I practice, I try to put new ideas in what I do, not just move my fingers.

If you're on tour, you have to play the same concert 10 times in a row, the same program. Every night, you have to be playing like it was the first time. It's very difficult...When you do a thing over and over again, there's an automatic that sets in...That's why this kind of routine work is not good for us.

Fourteen of the sixteen musicians interviewed felt that spontaneity and creativity were prerequisites to excellence in their field. Creativity was defined as the process of interpreting a piece and making it into a personal expression. Mental imagery or visualization was the major tool by which this process was achieved. Musicians lived with a piece in their mind for such a long time that it became a part of themselves.

Spontaneity was very important for the musicians. They also referred to it as inspiration or improvisation. The biggest danger to spontaneity and creativity was seen to be routine or repetitive work. While repetition and perfectionism gave security in automatization, musicians felt that it destroyed creativity and spontaneity.

Flexibility

If spontaneity was being open to the creativity of the moment, flexibility could be seen as being open to the dynamics of the situation.

Not as many musicians talked about flexibility directly, but it was viewed as essential to achieving excellence in music. They talked about the importance of not being so set in "instrumental habits" when going into rehearsals that they could not see a better way of doing things when presented with one.

It's better to practice less than too much. Spending too much time with the instrument and being too concerned, too busy with solving technical problems and repeating again and again technical things is rather dangerous because unconsciously...you get a certain routine and you get certain instrumental habits that become hard to change.

It may sound stupid, but I hardly ever practice the parts for a string quartet ...I always have the feeling that if I practised my part exactly then I'd be fixated in it. I'll have drilled it into me. Then I can't be flexible when I play with the others. They'd have to go with me constantly. But so, I can still be open, I can mark the notes during the rehearsal: 'Aha, maybe that's a good way of

bringing this out!' ...But when I say, 'It's the only way to play this' - maybe it doesn't sound so good when you mix it with the others.

The musicians spoke of flexibility in terms of being open to what was happening during a performance and going with the flow rather than trying to fight it.

*I taught myself to let a concert develop. At the beginning, I'm not quite so tense any more or aggressive: 'This **must** be good'. No! Consciously I just let go at the beginning. I wait and see what will happen, how the atmosphere is....It helped me a lot because it's the only way I'm in a position to control the piece.*

*I depend on the 'now', on the hall, on the acoustic. When I can go with that, I can get 'in'. On the contrary, if I try to force something so it's like I imagined - that's how I practised, that's how it must be - then I don't come into what happens....If I don't accept the conditions as they are **now**, it means I'm out.*

Being flexible was also implicit in the musicians' perspective for growth and continuous learning.

I've always been someone...if I say today this is black, it doesn't mean that tomorrow I'll still say that. You know, there are ground rules, but also there are always things where you must be willing to revise yourself. I can't swear that when I said something is like this 20 years ago, that I'll still say that today. Then I'm stupid, inflexible and have no possibility to develop! As long as I'm not totally calcified, I'll still try to

throw everything on it's head, not to let it set in cement. That's very important.

To summarize, flexibility was the third interrelated quality that musicians considered necessary in order to excel. Although only five musicians talked about it directly, flexibility was added to the list of skills/qualities required to excel because it seemed implicit in the musician's attitudes: in their perspective for excellence; in their willingness to forego a very detailed pre-performance routine, preferring to settle for some broad or general perspective outlines; and, in the mental state they wanted to carry into a performance.

Conclusion

The picture of the "excellent" musician that emerged from this study was that of a person clearly dedicated to music and to personal excellence with the chosen instrument. He or she was committed to achieving his or her goals, and as the performer grew, goals evolved and became more visionary in nature.

A strong sense of self was essential in order to withstand the pressures of the high profile career of a musician. He or she maintained a very positive perspective based on growth and continued learning, and a feeling of being in control of his or her life. A final component of this healthy perspective might be described as open-mindedness: being open to inspiration or to the creativity of the moment (spontaneity), and being open to the dynamics of a specific situation or performance (flexibility).

The ideal focus going into a performance was in the "here and now", on living the experience of the concert and

letting it happen, concentrating alternately on the big picture of the music or on specific technical details of playing as required by the demands of a particular piece.

Other specific mental factors such as refocusing, mental imagery and

constructive evaluation (Orlick, 1989, 1992) were important tools used by elite performers in order to achieve and maintain high levels of excellence. These and other themes pertinent to performance excellence among musicians are discussed in the complete report of this study (Talbot-Honeck, 1994).

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