Review

Reviewed Work(s): Psychology for Musicians: Understand and Acquiring the Skills by Andreas C. Lehmann, John A. Sloboda and Robert H. Woody

Review by: Scott D. Lipscomb

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Psychology for Musicians: Understand and Acquiring the Skills
By Andreas C. Lehmann, John A. Sloboda, & Robert H. Woody
New York: Oxford University Press, 2007

Reviewed by Scott D. Lipscomb
University of Minnesota

Prelude

I taught my first Psychology of Music course during the spring of 1994 at Southern Methodist University. Since that time, I have frequently taught graduate courses on the subject at both Northwestern University and the University of Minnesota, primarily to students majoring in music education, music therapy, or music technology. During these many years, I have been actively in search of a textbook that adequately addresses the learning objectives in such a course. I have used many different texts with varying degrees of success. Davies (1978) provided an entertaining overview of the field that was readily understandable to the musician new to psychology, but was already terribly out of date back in the mid 1990s and the review of literature was not remotely comprehensive. Dowling and Harwood (1986) provided a more research based approach to the field, providing significantly more detailed explanations of the various topics. Though preferable from an instructor's perspective, some music students found the text overwhelming. Other texts (Deutsch, 1982, 1999) are so detailed in their presentation of research findings that they are intimidating to the novice in the field, serving more appropriately as reference texts to supplement the students' growing knowledge base.

It is my belief that the presentation in the text under review is significantly more coherently organized and appropriate introductory text than even Hodges (1996), an edited text conceived primarily for a music education audience and to which—in the interest of full disclosure—I contributed two chapters (Lipscomb, 1996; Lipscomb & Hodges, 1996). Other texts present the field in a reader friendly format, but sacrifice the depth of focus and/or clear citation of resources upon which claims and conclusions are based, e.g., Jourdain (1997) or Levitin (2006), either of which have proven extremely practical for use in an undergraduate, non-major course. As stated explicitly by the authors of the present text, the past publication that most closely aligns with the content and approach of this new volume is Sloboda's own *The Musical Mind* (1985), to which they acknowledge *Psychology for Musicians* "could be considered a sequel" (p. vi.).

Exposition

About a decade ago, after teaching the Psychology of Music several times using one or more of the texts mentioned above, I settled on the "course reader" approach that allowed me to cull relevant sections from a number of texts, along with primary literature on a variety of topics, into a kind of "greatest hits" collection of readings. After reviewing the recently published Lehmann, Sloboda, and Woody (2007) text, I am convinced that an appropriate balance has been struck between detailed presentation of research findings and practical application of these findings to the musical life of performers and teachers. In the following paragraphs, I will enumerate many of the positive aspects of the text and offer several critiques identified during a comprehensive review.

One of the primary strengths of this text is the obvious benefit derived from a multiauthored, collaborative work. This approach provides a significantly more coherent and even handling of topics in comparison to the model used in most edited volumes, containing individual chapters written by different authors (or sets of authors) and compiled by a peer editor. The varying backgrounds of the three authors—musicology & psychology (ACL), psychology and higher education administration (JAS), and music education (RHW)—provide three very different frames of reference from which to consider the subject matter. The reader is richly rewarded as a result of the obvious level of discourse that occurred during the collaboration process.

The text is clearly organized into three major units. Part I provides an introduction to the basic ideas and concepts fundamental to an understanding of music psychology (Chapter 1), then proceeds to present information related to music learning (Chapters 2 to 4), focusing specifically on musical development, motivation, and practice. Part II (Chapters 5 to 8) addresses the set of necessary skills a musician must possess, including musical expression, interpretation, reading notation, listening skills, memorization, composing, improvising, and performance anxiety management.

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Part III (Chapters 9 to 12) focuses on the roles individuals assume when actively engaged in the musical experience: the performer, the teacher, the listener, and the "user." This overarching framework provides a solid edifice from which to observe and come to a deeper understanding of the role of music in our lives.

Within this large scale framework, individual chapters share an equally coherent organizational scheme. The opening paragraphs of each chapter provide a clear presentation concerning the specific topics that will be presented and the sequencing of topics included. After expounding upon each of the primary topics addressed—the major portion of each chapter—the closing paragraphs often provide a concise summary of the major points enumerated. Though repeated from earlier in the chapter, this type of repetition is very useful within the learning context, especially for those students to whom the concepts covered are new. Adding to the value of these sections, they often illustrate practical applications of the concepts covered, a means of further facilitating student learning and retention. These summary sections are used consistently throughout Part I to elucidate the most significant points included in each chapter. However, I was disappointed to realize that, as the text continues, these very useful summary sections are not included consistently. When absent, this review is direly missed.

In addition to the introductory sections and summaries, each chapter contains a set of consistent components. The reader will find beautifully integrated "Self Study" sidebars, providing additional "food for thought" and, once again, direct application of concepts and/or research techniques presented in the chapter to students' personal musical lives. A *major* innovation over previous texts is the inclusion of such explicit connections between theory and practice. "Study Questions," included consistently at the end of each chapter, assist students in the process of ensuring they have mastered the most significant concepts presented therein and are accompanied by "Further Reading" lists, providing resources worthy of investigation by the interested student. Throughout the text, clear and concise definitions of terms are consistently provided to the reader.

Another undeniable strength of this text is the consistent effort on the part of the authors to explicitly state practical applications of research findings to performance and music learning, a significant contribution that goes well beyond simply reporting the results of empirical investigations. As a result, the meaning and relevance of this work becomes clearly applicable within the musician's daily life, moving beyond a conceptual, theoretical framework. To my knowledge, there is not another text published to date that so consistently accomplishes this feat. I found the chapter on "The Teacher" to be particularly well written and directly relevant to music educators, both present and future. Equally important, from this same perspective, is the inclusion of "teachers" as a crucial component in the "music making and listening" context (pp. 6-7), a model that commonly includes composer, performer, and listener (or some variation on this triumvirate of participating constituents).

One organizational decision that I initially found challenging was the decision to hold off on introducing psychoacoustical properties of sound until the penultimate chapter ("The Listener"). This topic is typically one that is found near the beginning of a Music Psychology text, providing a physiological and psychoacoustical foundation for concepts discussed in the remainder of the text. Though bothered by this variation from the norm at the outset, upon reflection, I have come to appreciate the fact that this decision provides additional evidence that the authors have truly chosen to focus on practical applications of psychology as they relate to music learning and performance, rather than allowing themselves to get caught up in complex explanations of physics and physiology from the beginning. What was at first perceived as a weakness, I have come to realize might be yet another innovative strength of this text.

Overall, the textbook strikes a beautiful balance between communicability and depth of understanding. It is highly understandable for the novice, but sufficiently detailed for those already familiar with the field. The breadth of subject matter, multiplicity of perspectives, and the depth of coverage benefit greatly from the unique perspectives provided by each of the collaborating authors. The research cited presents a balance of studies carried out by the authors and other researchers in the field and across related disciplines. The manuscript provides the reader a clear sense of the significant amount of relevant research that has been carried out to date and reveals that each of the authors is actively engaged in the process of enhancing our understanding about the musical experience.

Development

Though my overall assessment for this fine text is extremely positive, no review would be complete without the identification of limitations and suggestions for improvement. The following section will further develop the themes presented to this point, while providing a constructive critical commentary.

As acknowledged previously, the organization of the text is superb, both as an overarching framework and within each chapter. The primary organizational issue that caused consternation at various points throughout the text resulted from the fact that, at times, figures are included that are never referenced directly in the text and, thus, the rationale for their inclusion may not be clear. At other times—or sometimes concurrently—there is no clear explanation of the intent and/or meaning of these data representations. Both of these critiques are true for Table 6.1 (p. 108), comparing sight reading and playing by ear with recall of a memorized performance. Interestingly, though not cited in the text for this chapter, the table is referred back to from Chapter 10 (p. 189). There are other examples of failure to include references to the figures (Figure 8.2, p. 149; Figure 8.3, p. 157) or failure to clearly communicate their relevance (Figure 6.2; p. 114).

Another concern related to these figures arises from the lack of information concerning the statistical significance of data presented. In Figure 10.1 (p. 194), for example, neither the graphic representation nor its explanation in the text provides the reader a clue concerning the significance of differences observed between use of rehearsal time when comparing student teachers, novice teachers, and experienced teachers. According to the figure, student teachers "outperform" novice teachers, but it is unclear whether this difference rises to the level of statistical significance. The differences observed between the expert teachers and the two less experienced groups is even greater, but, once again, no statement is made concerning what the reader can infer based on these data. The same critique can be leveled against the presentation of the data in Figure 10.2 (p. 201). In this latter figure, the intended meaning is also unclear due to the fact that—in this isolated instance—clear definitions for the various trait terms are not provided. As a result, the method for measuring constructs represented as axes in the graphs (aloofness vs. warmheartedness, conservatism vs. radicalism, and group dependency vs. self-sufficiency) is not readily apparent.

Infrequently, the rationale for decisions made or for conclusions reached is not clearly communicated. For example, in a discussion about "Distribution of Musical Skills in Society," the authors propose a division into four skill levels. The major issue with the four levels proposed is that the distinction between level 1 (average population) and level 2 (music novice) is quite imprecise and individuals assigned to either of these levels might easily be confused with one another; particularly problematic is the infusion of a self-categorization element (i.e., the way that the individuals think of themselves) that may not necessarily relate consistently to an individual's comparative level of musical skill (p. 16). In another instance, while discussing the professional training of classical musicians, the authors state that "professional musicians are supposed to be fully trained by their early 20s" (p. 39). It is unclear from this brief mention what constitutes "fully trained" and to what extent a classical performer who has reached this stage might anticipate improving performance skills beyond this age. There is certainly much more for a concert performer to learn about performance technique and the use of music to communicate with an audience. Wouldn't this typically require additional training by an expert mentor, resulting in musical growth and continuing improvement?

At times, in lieu of clearly stated objective reasoning for a conclusion reached, the authors provide instead a global—though unsupported—statement. For example, in a discussion of "motional rules," the authors describe the common practice of slowing the tempo near the end of a piece. Their use of the phrase "we intuitively sense this when listening to historical recordings" (p. 93), begs the following questions: Who is the "we" referred to? What is the particular relevance of "historical recordings" in this context? Wouldn't almost any expressive performance of music from the same period demonstrate this common slowing at the ends of phrases? The same "we" (I assume) appears again in a discussion of musical preferences. Describing a hypothetical situation in which the reader is asked to imagine driving a car in bad weather or heavy traffic, the authors state that "we intuitively avoid such stimulation [high arousal] by turning down the radio, selecting unobtrusive music, or turning the radio off" (p. 219). Once again, I feel compelled to pose the question: Who is represented by "we"? What about the heavy metal fan who derives great pleasure from loud, pumping music? Perhaps a bit of Metallica or System of a Down might be just what is needed to pass the time most enjoyably, while caught in traffic or forging ahead through inclement weather. As clearly presented in other sections of the text, individuals differ in their listening habits and preferences, which makes global statements like the ones critiqued here very difficult to support across an entire population.

Within the text, there are times—thankfully infrequent in number—when statements are made with inadequate support from the literature. For example, in a discussion about the role of music in the processes of identity building, mood management, and life transitions, the authors refer to the work of "some researchers" (p. 220) without accompanying citations. Many of the statements preceding and following this reference are

supported by numerous citations, so it is not clear why such an approach might have been adopted here. A similar failure to cite sources can be found associated with the claim that "research contradicts the notion" of fall back teaching (p. 185). Though this is a hopeful conclusion, the informed reader would feel significantly more confident in the accuracy of the statement if citations to supporting literature were included.

Though almost every section of this text is written impeccably with care and attention to detail, there are a few places in which the discussion provided is lacking in clarity. For example, in the presentation about musical memory and, specifically, the absence of external memory aids (musical notation or recording), the authors state that "when the performer is also the composer . . . memory is not an issue" (p. 108). Memory, in fact, plays a crucial role in *any* performance situation. Performances without musical notation require a very complex type of recall (whether or not the performer is also the composer). Even performances with music notation require significant musical memory, as the performer appropriately decodes and interprets the symbols on the page into an expressive musical performance. After reading through this section numerous times, I am still uncertain about the authors' intent in this regard. I also found it interesting that, in a discussion of improvisation and creativity, cadenzas in solo concerti were cited as "an obvious situation in which classical musicians explicitly become 'creative'" (p. 128). Such a statement would certainly have been true during the Baroque era and into the early 19th century. However, almost all cadenzas since 1880—with notable exceptions represented in the violin concertos of Brahms and Khachaturian—have been written out by the composer (or an arranger/editor), memorized by the performer, and performed with varying degrees of expressive flexibility (Badura-Skoda & Drabkin, 2007). The other cited example of creativity within the context of traditional classical training is equally suspect. The typical music theory or counterpoint exercise alluded to requires a relatively low level of creativity, necessitating more of a formulaic, puzzle solving approach determined by the overarching rule system (counterpoint in the style of the Notre Dame School vs. a Baroque chorale) than inspired creativity. This is not to cast dispersions or question the importance of these music theory based skills within the context of academic musical training, merely to suggest that the level of creativity required is minimal.

In the very important presentation concerning acquisition of abilities during childhood, the authors briefly introduce the important work of Jean Piaget and the concept of developmental stages. There is mention only of the "concrete operations" stage, without a clear delineation of the other stages of development proposed in Piaget's model. Though I understand the need to limit extraneous information so that those topics closest to the primary purpose of each chapter can be dealt with completely, a more thorough understanding of Piaget's stages would be very helpful to the student, as s/he considers the appropriately detailed handling of Swanwick and Tillman (1986) and other related literature discussed. Perhaps Piaget's failure to acknowledge musical skills as a primary element of development provides a rationale for not providing the complete set of stages, but it would provide a helpful nonmusical comparative framework from which to consider the other models presented.

Though the authors are, in most cases, careful to include a variety of musical genres and world musics in their discussions, periodically a bias toward Western art music creeps into the text along with what seems to be a lesser level of familiarity with these other musics. In a comparative discussion distinguishing the activities of traditional composers and jazz improvisers, the authors incorporate a very useful model including the following facets: preparation, incubation, illumination, elaboration, and verification. Each of these terms is, of course, clearly defined for the reader. When comparing the "trial-and-error" elaboration stage, the authors state: "because the jazz musician has only a few chances at a time to try the new pattern, the elaboration process can take a long time" (p. 135). While this may be true in a live performance setting—while an audience provides verification in real time—the fact that jazz musicians often spend hours (sometimes days or weeks) practicing a single passage in solitude while mentally hearing the instrumental accompaniment (or, in modern times, playing with technology based instrumental accompaniment) leaves the impression that nonclassical performers (explicitly jazz musicians) practice less than classical musicians, an absolute position that would be difficult to defend.

In a text within which many connections are made between a wide variety of concepts and situations, there arise periodically missed opportunities, bypassing a potent "teaching moment." For example, when discussing exploration and enjoyment as types of activities that increase intrinsic motivation (p. 47), a study by Sloboda, Davidson, Howe, and Moore (1996) is reviewed. In a sidebar on the following page, a similar finding emerges in the context of the learning practices of popular musicians (Green, 2002). However, the dots are never connected for the reader, explicitly enumerating

the similarities between these findings derived from very different musical populations: young "instrumental music students" between the ages of 8 and 18 and adult popular musicians widely varying in age, respectively.

Throughout the text, research findings based on responses of individuals can be found. The musical experience itself is, of course, central to any text on music psychology. For this reason, I find it troublesome that a fictitious quote is used to illustrate a stressful performance situation (p. 155), when there are many sources of such descriptions readily available in the real words of actual performers. Sharing the true life experiences of performers serves to personalize the learning process in a way that fictitious accounts cannot.

Perhaps the most significant "missed opportunity" identified within this text is the rather strange and unexpected turn taken in the final pages. Surprisingly, the authors veer from their intent to enlighten musicians about musical experiences of all kinds to reach an astonishing finale. After beautifully integrating examples of Western art music, popular music, and world music throughout the text, the authors use these final pages to explicate their support for the classical tradition and to stress the importance of retaining its place in our culture, assuming an uncharacteristically heavy handed, traditional stance. It is possible that the authors wished to counteract the relatively equal weight given to various musics throughout the text to appease the more traditional mindset common within music academies. Regardless of the rationale, such a conclusion does not seem appropriate for a textbook of this nature, in which so many topics have been covered and inherent value identified in many genres of music. Instead of emphasizing the importance of seeing "classical music survive and prosper" (p. 240), a discussion of implications for *all* musicians (classical, popular, jazz, etc.) and music teachers would have provided a more effective and inclusive denouement. Many of the ideas expressed in this section are of crucial importance to the musician (e.g., failure of the current system to serve the students we train, the audiences they will need to attract, interacting directly with listeners, etc.), but these comments could easily have been stated in a manner relevant to a broader range of musicians, not just the classical performer.

Recapitulation & Coda

As stated at the outset of this review, *Psychology for Musicians* truly fulfills a very important need within the discipline. The text, authored by Andreas Lehmann, John Sloboda, and Robert Woody, is written in a manner that is clearly understandable to its primary audience, succinctly presenting concepts fundamental to the understanding and acquisition of musical skills. The text is aptly named indeed. The critiques enumerated herein should be taken as they are intended; as proposals for potential improvement and future consideration. The minor criticisms cited certainly do not outweigh—nor should they overshadow—the many positive aspects of the text and the significant contribution it provides for those of us teaching the next generation musicians, composers, performers, and music teachers.

Despite the importance we tend to assign to words spoken or written about any given topic, it remains true that actions speak louder than words. Last spring, I learned that the two-year course rotation within our division afforded me an opportunity once again to teach a Psychology of Music course during Fall 2007. As I revisited the many publications on the subject to determine which would best serve the needs of my students, I returned to many familiar texts used in the past, perused several others published in recent years (including the reviewed text), and considered the possibility of compiling an updated course reader, combining excerpts from many of these fine texts with primary literature. Once this arduous and comprehensive task was complete, without hesitation, I adopted Lehmann, Sloboda, and Woody's *Psychology for Musicians: Understanding and Acquiring the Skills* as the required textbook for the course. Let this action provide the "last word" in the present evaluation.

Author Note

Correspondence concerning this article should be addressed to Scott D. Lipscomb University of Minnesota School of Music, 148 Ferguson Hall, 2106 4th Street South, Minneapolis, MN 55455. E-MAIL: lipscomb@umn.edu

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