

Through the Eyes of an Entangled Teacher: When Classical Musical Instrument Performance Tuition in Higher Education is Subject to Quality Assurance

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What happens when a classical music instrument performance course at a Norwegian state university study programme is assessed for quality following a standardized procedure? The article explores frictions and negotiations between managerial quality assurance and classical music performance education in a contextual sense, focusing particularly on the teacher-student relation. I employ my own experience as an instrument performance teacher in a Western Classical Music performance study programme while drawing on state acts, regulations, managerial processes, educational politics, funding, and classical music performance education's habitus and heritage. I begin by addressing the institution of higher music education in the Norwegian state and relevant funding perspectives. Next, I identify complex relations entailed in recruiting future students, and I address conceptions of quality both from managerial and artistic perspectives as well as from that of persons engaged in quality assessment for the local university. I pursue the student-teacher relationship, focusing on consumer relationships and accountability. Music educators' professional understandings and the effects of the academization of higher classical music performance education anticipate a discussion identifying some possibilities for future research.

Keywords: quality assurance, higher education, classical music performance, music performance teacher

In 2018, I published my first monograph, *Informed Play* (Rolfhamre 2018), a research-based educational handbook for lute performers around the world, hopeful that it would also be incorporated in course curricula at various universities. As a musical instrument performance teacher at a Norwegian state university, however, I soon came to realise that the educational timeframe I had to honour—that is, the number of teaching hours offered to students per semester—

makes it challenging to cover the full extent of the topics upon which my idea of informed play is grounded; it would be difficult for students to complete it and also have enough time to also play their instruments and learn the necessary repertoire and performance techniques. Furthermore, I am also an administrator for one of the courses to which this argument is relevant, and, as such, I am responsible for conducting the university course assessment procedure to “ensure the course quality,” which, according to the local university’s standard (see below), does not assess whether the students can actually play well. By design, the assessment procedure places the student’s perspective at its centre instead, and it covers only their conception of the course design and their experience of their teacher’s competence (social, artistic, and pedagogical). Therefore, on the one hand, we have the teacher’s vision of what their classes should entail, to prepare their students for future professional lives as musicians, and, on the other hand, the teachers are judged not by the relevance of their vision, but by how their students experience the course work. For instance, a teacher may have a long career with much expertise on what works and what does not in a professional music market, but the local quality assessment system asks if the students alone think the course content is relevant and whether it is sufficient to satisfy the learning outcomes defined by the course, which are determined long before the course begins and the students and teachers get to know each other (Sirek and Sefton 2018, 63). This means that the students must be able, *during the course’s progression*, to judge whether the course curriculum is sufficient for them to learn what they have not yet learned. Logically, without diminishing the student’s skill in any way because they may be brilliant performers and/or academics, one may ask whether a student who has sufficient knowledge to judge the future outcome of a course by its mere progression and a description of its design, indeed, needs to participate in the course in the first place?

As a teacher being subject to two such contrasting perspectives, quality assurance procedures (bottom-up) *versus* the teacher’s artistic integrity and vision for their students (top-down), I soon became puzzled by the discrepancies between what I thought should be taught when presenting my *Informed Play* monograph in 2018 and what is quantifiably assessed in order to pass judgement on, for instance, my competence as a teacher. In this context, it is the friction and negotiations between educating for professional practice, institutional frameworks, and quality assessment systems that interests me. Specifically, it has led me to ask what

happens when a classical music instrument performance course in a university programme is assessed for quality following a standardized procedure? The question is, indeed, a multifaceted and complex one in need of some restrictions to make it manageable. To address the issue here, I will draw upon my own experience as an instrument teacher in a Norwegian state university study programme in Western Classical Music performance to investigate frictions and negotiations between these various perspectives. Although my case is local, my ambition is a general one; that is, the core of the present article is not the case itself, but rather the perspective on the effects of the friction and negotiations being outlined and explored performatively and how they can inform future quality assessment processes to better fit musical performance development.

I begin by discussing the institution of higher music education in Norway and its relevant funding perspectives. Next, I identify complex relations between the recruitment of future students and addressing conceptions of quality from managerial and artistic perspectives as well as from the perspective of the local university's quality assessment process. After that, I pursue the student-teacher relationship focusing on consumer relationships and accountability. The music educators' professional understanding and the effects of the academization of higher classical music performance education then anticipates a discussion intended to identify some possibilities for future quality work.

The Norwegian state higher education institution: A framework

The introduction to the Ministry of Education and Research's *Long-term Plan for Research and Higher Education 2015–2024* (Kunnskapsdepartementet 2014) boldly claims that the Ministry has high ambitions for research and educational quality. In fact, the word quality appears no less than 68 times in 53 pages with no clarification on its significance and application or at what instance it can be deemed to have been achieved. Using value-laden formulations, such as: "improved quality," "international visibility," "breakthroughs," "important competitive factors," "facilitating value creation," and "adaptability and increased productivity," it sets high standards for what Norwegian higher education should produce. Education and research should "impact the economy by enhancing the quality of the workforce and the services delivered and enabling us to develop and adopt new solutions and products" (Kunnskapsdepartementet 2014).

According to the *Act relating to universities and university colleges* (2005), a Norwegian state higher education institution should contribute “to innovation and value creation on the basis of the results of research and academic and artistic development work” (§1-3). The universities and university colleges themselves should “be entitled to design their own academic and value-related bases within the frameworks laid down in or pursuant to statutes” (§1-5, second paragraph) following a predetermined set of standards and procedures. If the higher education institution meets these standards and many others, they may be accredited, that is, officially and pre-conditionally approved to educate. If they should not meet the expected standards, their accreditation will be withdrawn. Accreditation, here, is by law understood “to mean academic assessment of whether a higher education institution and the courses it provides fulfil a given set of standards. The accreditation shall be based on evaluation conducted by external experts appointed by NOKUT (the Norwegian Agency for Quality Assurance in Education). To be accepted by NOKUT is essential for the functioning of higher education institutions in Norway, as it authorizes each institution to provide educational programmes and ensures that students will be given the opportunity to receive financial support and/or loans from *Lånekassen* (The Norwegian State Educational Loan Fund).

With around 150 employees, NOKUT incorporates various methods to certify that Norwegian education institutions comply with the relevant laws, regulations, and quality standards. Using bold statements, such as “Norway is a knowledge economy,” they make the connection between quality assessment and finances clearly perceptible (NOKUT 2019). According to Chapter 2 of the “Forskrift om kvalitetssikring og kvalitetsutvikling i høyere utdanning og fagskoleutdanning” from 2010 (Regulations Concerning Quality Assurance and Quality Development in Higher Education and Tertiary Vocational Education), universities and university colleges must have a systematic quality assurance system aimed at continuously improving the quality of the educational programmes and documenting the process to enable NOKUT to monitor the work (§2-1). The quality assurance system must involve internal and external participants, be publicly available, and must, at its best, conform with the ‘Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area, ESG’ (2015; Forskrift om kvalitetssikring 2010, §2-1). NOKUT must perform quality assurance assessment within intervals of no more than eight years. Should NOKUT find that an institution does not provide a sufficient quality assurance system, they may grant a period of one year to

improve before they revoke the accreditation (Forskrift om kvalitetssikring 2010, §2-2 and §2-3).

For educational institutions to keep their accreditation and receive state funding and other necessary goods, they must also provide internal checks for quality assurance which also incorporate student evaluations of courses as well as the study programmes (Act relating to universities and university colleges 2005, §1-6). If these and other standards are met, the state educational institution receives state funding and because it in general cannot claim fees “from students for ordinary courses leading to a degree or for professional training courses” (§7-1), it relies on state approval and funding to stay operational. The lack of tuition fees in state-owned higher education institutions is an important factor that attracts international students, particularly in an era where the trend in many other countries is to introduce or increase tuition fees (Wiers-Jenssen 2019). In Norway, higher education funding is mainly received by the institutions from the state through basic funding and through produced student credits: that is, when students complete a course, they are awarded credits which, in turn, generates income for the educational institution. A completed study programme is awarded more funds than a collection of individual courses. This has led to an increase in the number of admitted national and international students at the Norwegian institutions to secure funding and, more often now than before, institutions overbook their admissions (Wiers-Jenssen 2019; Høst et al. 2019, 8). But the basic funding differs between institutions. In Norway, the old universities have relatively greater basic funding and more teachers relative to the number of students than the newer and smaller universities, which results in inequities in their financial possibilities and their reliance on the number of enrolled students (Høst et al. 2019, 14).

In a system where an institution is funded based on the number of students who complete their studies (as in the one described briefly here to serve as a case for my argument), more students means better finances, which is crucial in order to expand the study programme and keep the tenured positions of teachers who recruit new students. Of course, such a funding system affects institutional activities and practices. The grading scale system is particularly interesting here. It ranges from A to F where C is *satisfactory*, B is *above average* and A is *exceptional*. At the other side of the scale we find D which is *satisfactory but with some shortcomings*, E is *satisfactory but with considerable shortcomings* and F is *not*

approved. Unlike the other marks, the F mark does not produce course credits, which consequently results in the institution not receiving any financial support from the state for the students receiving that mark. Giving a student the mark F, then, has economic repercussions for the institution's budget. Understandably, the institution puts great pressure on its staff and faculty members to do what they can (within the regulations, of course) to have their students pass their exams and complete their study programmes within scheduled times to secure funding. Working under such pressure to secure and sustain the study programme, it is not uncommon that the E mark, which should theoretically be better than F, is sometimes used to generate course credits from students who may very well deserve an F. In other words, the institution's ability to not pass their students stands in relation to their economy and is at the discretion of the individual examiner. Furthermore, the teacher's assessment of their students often goes beyond their individual attainment of course learning goals and development of music performance ability, as it often also considers their effort and attitude (Oltedal 2017, 242).

The examiner of a given course plays an important role in maintaining musical standards and quality assurance procedures, but often they do not, even though they may be specialists in their field, have any formal examiner's training and may know little about the local quality assurance system and pedagogical activities. They may also experience various degrees of examination procedure preparation before undertaking an examination. Obviously, as the examiner—internal or external—determines the student's mark, they have a direct impact both on how students and the institution value and rate the competence they have gained according to the course's learning goals. The collected marks given in an exam further inform the institution's managers when they assess the success rate of their students and the course design (Ross 2009). Examiners are individuals with their own backgrounds, values, and artistic practices and can, for instance, be harsh, forgiving, understanding, or rigid. As a result, the resulting grade can differ depending on who the institution or course instructor responsible appoints as examiner, in accordance with their evaluation of the examination. This is particularly true in music performance courses, where judgment is more subjective than in other fields such as Maths or Arithmetics. Additionally, examiners may, upon their appointment being made public, affect indirectly the pedagogical activities prior to the exam. That is, when the examiner's identity is made known, the teacher's strategy on priming their students for the exam may change accordingly. An examiner

who is particularly concerned with playing technique may cause a teacher to propose a technical show-off repertoire to their students. Similarly, an examiner mainly interested in the communicative, emotional perspectives of music performance may promote a less technical repertoire, but one that gives the student ample room to showcase their phrasing, emotive rhetoric, or similar characteristics. In the words of Valerie Ross, the examination procedure thus “influence[s] the teaching-learning ethos and social support system” (Ross 2009, 481).

It should be noted that not all courses are marked using the grade scale system. Some use the binary *passed* or *not passed*, where only the first mark generates funding and thus entails similar funding-based assessment situations. The marking system to be used in each individual course is decided by the course descriptions.

Individual versus collective

Classical music performance education is highly centred on the student’s main instrument, and all other supporting courses of the degree programme relate to it (Angelo et al. 2019, 87). Therefore, in musical instrument performance tuition, the individual teacher, who is often a renowned, active musician, plays an important role in recruiting new students. A violinist may choose to apply to a given institution because they want to learn from a particular violin professor, for instance, rather than because they have been attracted by the overall reputation of the institution itself. As such, the individual professor’s own artistic vision and pedagogical strategy becomes important to keeping a sustainable student portfolio. However, when several established, student-recruiting professors teach the same course—e.g., the *Main Instrument 2* course, different sections of which are taught by violin, horn, guitar, lute, vocal, and flute professors, each with their own profile, strategy, and agenda—it becomes more difficult to set up a shared framework for assessment of quality. The various instrument traditions may also differ between each other as well as internally in the learning outcomes that best serve their needs.

In Figure 1 below, I sketch the situation in a somewhat simplified manner (the real-life scenario is, of course, more complex than the figure portrays). At a first level, we have the framework provided by the institution through strategies, course descriptions, study programmes, quality assurance systems, staff policies, student rights, infrastructure, etc. Within this structure, the teacher has their own artistic

agenda and ideology from which they design their educational activities and lead their students onwards. This pedagogical practice may serve various ends (far more than the present model can justify) and the selected path has impact on where student-teacher-institution-visibility arises for prospective future students. If successful, the educational practice, or simply the teacher's reputation, may hit the mark with its targeted audience, and more students will apply to study either with the teacher or the institution. Far more important to the artistic integrity of the teacher, as an artist, is their selected path—and the artistic quality concept—they seek to lead their students to fulfil or relate to professionally. (I will return to this issue below.) Should the teacher guide the student towards an unheard-of artistic expression, or to something more familiar to a mainstream music market? Should they promote the standard, canonical repertoire, or have their students explore mostly unknown or rarely performed music? Would winning competitions triumph over creating provocative artworks (which may not exclude one another, but they may require different course work designs)?

However, if one prefers that musicians represent individuality and uniqueness in the music community, mainstream recognition and mass market may not be the proper focus for a teacher guiding their students. The possibility is that the “unique” musician may hit the mark and inspire fellow musicians in such a manner that it creates a recruitment market from a greater audience of prospective students. This comes with great risk, as there is no guarantee that this possibility will become a reality; the “unique” musician may equally well risk being considered an outsider, too unfamiliar to produce such a result. This is a risk that is not necessarily preferable if considered from an institutional financing perspective, according to which economy is based on the number of students passing their exams (i.e., completing course credits) every year. (See Figure 1 below.) Linking “quality” with “habit,” Frederik Tygstrup comments, “This has well been one of the most persistent topics of the modern discussion of artistic quality: on the one hand, market success and the impact on a large audience, on the other hand, quality as defined by a cultural elite” (2016, 23; my translation).

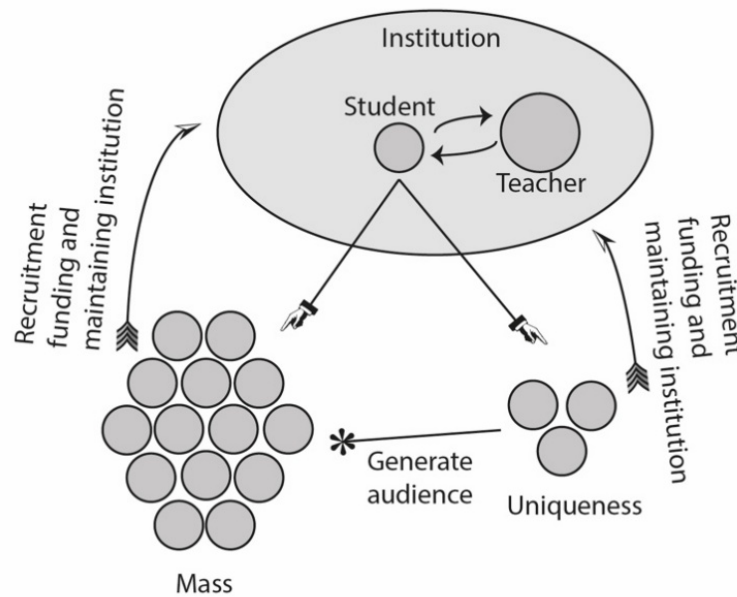


Figure 1. A proposed, simplified ecology for student recruitment, educational strategies, and student-teacher relationship. (My illustration)

The consumer, Tygstrup argues, becomes the producer in the sense that their user-data—through services such as Amazon, Netflix, Google and Apple—becomes the quantifiable data that determine what the production companies will produce in the future (2016, 24–5). In this sense, the teacher should be attentive to the student market in order to guide their students towards a mainstream ideal that a potential mass market of future music students will find appealing. If successful, a larger number of students may find that they would like to pursue the study programme and thus increase the student portfolio and finance framework through produced study credits. Following such increased economic resources, the teacher may be given a more sufficient budget to offer an even more alluring study environment through acquisition of material, increasing master classes, and concert activities. But, it is not necessarily true that this production mentality supports, or conforms with, the expectations of a cultural elite. Here lies an important conundrum: The potential student can only base their opinion on their previous experience and their own artistic values, because they may not yet have become part of the cultural elite to which they, through pursuing a study programme, ultimately may end up belonging. As such, the teacher is caught somewhere between increasing the student portfolio to maintain or fortify the economic framework (which is necessary for there even to be a teaching position and study programme in the first place)

and responding, and/or relating to the established cultural elite represented both by fellow artists and the cultural industry (record labels, funding institutions, managers, booking agents, etc.) specialising in one or more specific artistic expressions (Tygstrup 2016, 24–5). At this point, Tygstrup makes an important remark that it is a matter of “what we are socialised to regard as natural ... how we employ specific pre-conceptions on situations, we experience, and also how the situation even can develop” (31; my translation). Accordingly, Tygstrup points to *habit* as a key concept in dealing with and understanding the processes of “quality” (33).

Different perceptions and ideas of “quality” are then at play simultaneously, between which the teacher must find some preferred solution stemming from their internal negotiations between various frictional concepts to create a space where their artistic and pedagogical ideals can unfold. A central perspective to this statement is the exploration of the teachers’ own professional understanding (to which I will return below). But before the argument is mature enough to deal with this, we must come to better terms with the relation between institutional and artistic conceptions of “quality.”

Quality assessment

The general public generally regards “quality” in higher education and music performance as being synonymous with “good.” Reputation often becomes a proxy for top quality, or excellence, and it often favours, in Chris Brink’s words, “the old, the rich, and the beautiful” (Brink 2010, 140). But phrases such as “top quality” and “excellence” are by no means a simple matter, as they raise relational, provoking questions such as “Is it better than the others?” rather than “Is it good?” By extension, reputation fuels quality comparability between various institutions and programmes and between today’s and yesterday’s education. Students may ask whether a study programme in which they are interested is a good investment. The market may ask whether it provides the demands of the employers. With ever-shifting markets and civic activities, the content and methodology of education are always in flux, and they change according to the developing disciplines within which they seek to educate students. In recent years, we have seen an increasing shift from the supply side of education to the demand side, from learning and perfecting knowledge for its own sake to preparing for a job and civic engagement (Brink 2010).

Of late, external quality assurance has gained much focus in higher education worldwide. We often see this through two types of commitment: (1) a managerial control of quality assurance through internal routines and (2) the need to build an institutional quality-based culture to increase the commitment to quality improvement (Elken and Stensaker 2018, 191–2). Quality assurance procedures are central, key performance indicators for both NOKUT and the national Ministry of Education and Research, discussed above. If Norway is defined as a knowledge economy, and the educational institutions relevant to this article are financed by the state, it is easy to see how the designated quality assurance protocol is a paramount condition for being able to finance their activities and staff, and it makes evident that the demand side has overpowered the supply side of education. The “shift towards a consumer (economic) model of education rather than a transformative one,” Terry Sefton comments, “can affect both how students approach learning and how teachers approach course planning, to avoid or minimize risk and to maximize success rates” (2018, 80). These effects can be seen somewhere at the intersection between managerial quality procedures and quality culture in what Mari Elken and Bjørn Stensaker (2018) call *quality work*. To them, the well-functioning higher education institution must acknowledge the practices which are not always visible or formalised. Only by directing attention to the practicalities of improving quality in the institutional setting, can we provide the necessary improvements and corrections to the managerial and cultural processes “that may be decoupled from what goes in practice” (Elken and Stensaker 2018, 200). The quality work in classical music performance education is generally made by music performance instructors. While education politics is dominated by grand narratives as it builds on comprehensive philosophies of how to ensure the best choices for the education of future generations, classical music performers are more concerned with individual relations and development (see below). Through this perspective it is often withheld that quality in education can be defined, made operational and measured (Johansen 2009, 33). Education politics and classical music performance education are separate social systems that regard and communicate with the other self-referentially, each from its own perspective (36). In fact, musicians may take advantage of conceptual fogginess on the part of those rooted in education politics as a shield to deflect and invalidate questions from those who do not have their expertise. On the other hand, the higher education sector may disregard any form of mysticism advanced by performing musicians

and regard them pragmatically as economic actors providing a desired service to meet market demands (Angelo et al. 2019, 91).

For comparability and effective limitation of administration costs within large, multifaceted educational institutions (e.g., in the areas of philosophy, AI, engineering, the arts, language, ICT), it is easy to acknowledge the managerial need to have one single quality assurance procedure to assess all educational activities. One single quality assurance system, however, may not be suitable to implement within different kinds of educational activities (such as maths, medicine, music performance, and visual arts). In such cases, there will be friction and discrepancies between what is implemented, practised, and assessed. This generic quality protocol situation has provoked reactions from Norwegian artists, largely because of the perceived discrepancy between the values promoted by the state's education politicians, post-secondary music education institutions, and the music performance community. This is particularly the case when quality initiatives are applied too broadly to address the particularities of individual fields of study in a just way (Johansen 2009, 33). The Arts Council Norway initiated a four-year research programme, from 2014–2018. The project, *Kunst, Kultur, og Kvalitet* (Art, Culture, and Quality), resulted in, among other things, four anthologies and a series of essays in which various representatives from the cultural and artistic community sought to better understand what quality entails within and surrounding artistic practice (Kulturrådet 2019). Tygstrup, referenced above, was one of many project participants who provided useful resources on the topic, some of which will be considered here.

Artistic quality

Norway is one of the most academically oriented college sectors in Western Europe, with streamlined and formulaic degree programmes and career structures. In 2015, the state initiated a restructuring of the higher education sector, with a large-scale merger process to reduce the number of state educational institutions. Over the past 10-15 years, traditional music conservatories have merged with universities or university colleges and now find themselves within new settings which challenge the traditional conservatoire notions of mandate, knowledge, and competence. The conservatoire vocational mindset has been replaced by goal-oriented competitive entities and new expectations of civic and academic impact and new

pedagogical standards. Marked by high expectations of research paths, publications, the standardisation of courses, grades, and positions, vocational education has become more university-like (Angelo, et al. 2019, 78–82). State higher education policies and the traditional vocational classical music performance mindset thus have conflicting interests, values, and processes. Accordingly, to better assess quality assurance processes, we must consider the perspective of quality in classical music performance.

In his contribution to the Arts Council of Norway’s Art, Culture, and Quality project, Håkon Austbø (2018) takes us straight to the core of assessment in classical music performance by focusing on jury-work in performance competitions. (Austbø is concerned with traditional classical procedures of competing, rather than televised versions such as the Voice, Idol, and others, although there may be similarities that I will not expand on here). To make his argument easily accessible, he presents a hierarchical list of quality-related features of music performance:

1. The musician plays the right notes at the right time and in the right place, true to the notation.
2. The musician plays according to the relevant performance tradition and style.
3. The performance is historically informed within relevant historical periods, styles, and geographical locations.
4. The musician displays an understanding of the composer’s intentions.
5. The musician conveys an understanding of the “nature of the work.”
6. The musician’s musical interpretation is unique and personal. (Austbø 2018, 16; I have translated and rephrased the bullets for increased clarity).

To Austbø, quality assessment strategies within classical music performance usually approach this hierarchy either from 1–6, which is indeed the most common, or from 6–1 depending on the preferences of the individual jury members. As Synne Skouen remarks: “The professional, classical music community is, on their end, almost hysterically performance- and knowledge-centred... Among music performers, there is an increased demand for virtuosity as an undeniable goal for quality” (Skouen 2018, 22; my translation). Focusing on Austbø’s bullets 1–5, we can grasp the fundamental precedence held by the musical “work.” This is further emphasised by Tanja Orning (2018), who speaks of the public quality assessment of contemporary art music, where the music reviewer most commonly focuses on the work rather than the performance:

In the public quality assessment of contemporary art music, the reviewer most often focuses on the work; what is to be evaluated is the composer’s intention and development. Even if the work rarely is assessed in written form [i.e., the score],

but rather as sounding matter (performed either in a concert or through recordings), we often see how the performance remains unmentioned. In many ways, you could regard this lack of considering the performance as a heritage from the nineteenth-century's artist ideal and its related work-concept, where a division between the *creation* and the *performance* was established. Despite one hundred years of experimentation in contemporary art music, the work-concept remains solid. (Orning 2018, 27; my translation)

What Orning refers to is the aesthetic change that occurred in the nineteenth century where the “work” received a status of an artwork. This did not only affect the performance on contemporary written musical compositions, but also how historical works from earlier periods were performed, understood, utilised, and perceived. In Lydia Goehr's words: “One way to bring music of the past in to the present [Goehr is here addressing the nineteenth century], and then into the sphere of timelessness, was to strip it of its original, local, and extra musical meanings” (Goehr 2007, 246). This was perhaps an essential aesthetic strategy at the time, which crystallised itself as a shift from the earlier interest in historical works to find models, to establish a new perspective in which “they began to see musical masterpieces as transcending temporal and spatial barriers.” She continues: “By severing all such connections, it was possible to think of it now as functionless. All one had to do next was impose upon the music meanings appropriate for the new aesthetic” (246).

But to remove the musician from the music in the name of objectivity and assessability is not a simple matter. As Goehr beautifully remarks, “The imaginary museum of musical works may well remain imaginary, as it continues to display the temporal art of music in the plastic terms of works of fine art, but it will never achieve complete transcendence and purity while it allows human beings to enter through its doors” (286). The selected strategy for assessing musical performance quality here is pivotal for the foundation of musical practice and, by extension, pedagogical strategies and visions. Austbø remarks that the ideal that music is to be assessed in a next-to-objective fashion (cf. the bullets' 1–6 order in the above hierarchy), rather than the uniqueness-perspective (i.e., bullets 6–1) which some withhold, has an impact on what sort of musical artists are being produced and promoted, that is, the aptness of a young performing musician within the traditional career-path. Those who win competitions have a better starting point for establishing a career, and they are better off also because competitions enable networks that are essential for a music performance career. As such, the musical

community beyond competition activities most often reflects the dominant hierarchy (bullets 1–6), which leads to a music practice characterised by accuracy, predictability, and lack of originality (Austbø 2018, 16–17).

For the music performance teacher, an important perspective presents itself here: Why are we educating young performers and to what end? Obviously, I will not be able to address the question in full, but what should be addressed is whether we are educating young musicians for a job or to become artists. The two ends are not mutually exclusive, but they differ in learning content and artistic ideals, as well as the accountability and mandate of the music performance teacher. If getting a job is the main focus, one would perhaps design the course content in relation to orchestral musicians, music administration, music therapy, music pedagogues, culture politicians, public acceptance. In contrast, an artist-emphasis may cultivate uniqueness, provocative artistic statements, underground art-scenes, the cultural elite. In the case of this latter example, no dichotomies are pure, and the ‘black and white’ is always connected by a gradient. What crystallises here as a pivotal point for the music performance teacher is where the teacher identifies and localises themselves and their students within this “gradient scale.” Also of consideration is where they consider the threshold to be between the one and the other (see Fig. 2 below).



Figure 2. A visual representation of Austbø's suggested quality-dichotomy including a position-parameter. (My illustration)

Clearly, there is a potential for mismatch between the prerogatives and focuses of the two quality-perspectives, i.e. course and study programme evaluation and classical music artistic practice assessment. The “getting a job” approach, for example, often takes precedence in music education for more than one reason. The first is to fit the music market enough to sustain a career. As Austbø comments, the main focus of the music market is to sell products or services to which appropriate quality criteria are assigned (2018, 17). The second reason is to fit the national framework for quality in education (at least in the present local case), where the consumer-product/service-relation prevails. A third reason is because students have to live. They need a sense of security that they will be able to earn enough to

live (i.e. for shelter, food, transport, internet, etc.). A tenured job, of course, is better suited to provide this than a freelance career, which is less predictable and unstable. Such careers demand a different skill-set than does the focus of the unique artist who “lives for the art” and who may ensure living expenses through touring, scholarships, patrons or secondary jobs such as driving a bus, working in a grocery store, or teaching secondary school. If we recall the above-mentioned phrases from the *Act relating to universities and university colleges*, the *Long-term Plan for Research and Higher Education 2015–2024* and the mandate to NOKUT, the first perspective (i.e., to get a job) would clarify and support the present university quality assurance system question: “Is the course sufficiently performed for the student to reach the learning outcomes which qualify them to get a job?” A recent, unpublished report, *Kvalitetskriterier for utøvende og skapende musikkutdanning i Norge: Rapport fra en arbeidsgruppe oppnevnt av Rådet for utøvende musikkutdanning, november 2018* (Quality criteria for performance and creative music education in Norway: Report from a workgroup assigned by the Council of Music Performance Education, November, 2018; my translation) points out that, according to the government, quality is somewhat unanimous with the ideas of seeking improvement and establishing a culture for change within education (4–5). In the local Norwegian state university quality assessment system, which is my case study here, I should praise the writers of the quality assurance protocol for realising this improvement and culture-for-change imperative, but the question is whether the design actually serves to improve things for the performing arts and young performing artists.

Local quality assurance procedures

To address this latter perspective, I will now turn directly to describe the local quality assessment system at the state university where I work as an example. To ensure transparency, the university makes its procedures and mandates publicly available for both students and staff. The procedure is as follows: First, *student representatives and their registered substitutes* are appointed by a student election. Enrolled students can run for candidacy and there are one representative and one substitute per class. The student representatives participate in a study council to represent their classmates. The Faculty Director and the Student Organisation are responsible for ensuring the representatives receive the necessary courses and training.

Second, comes the *course evaluation* performed by a student representative and a course administrator (appointed among the local staff members, preferably one currently teaching the course), which can be performed in one of the following manners:

- 1) Digital survey followed by a dialogue between the course administrator and the student representative.
- 2) A student group discussion led by the student representative, followed by a dialogue between the course administrator and the student representative.
- 3) A dialogue between the course administrator and the student representative.
- 4) A dialogue between the study programme leader and the student representative.

A third step involves the *study programme meeting*, in which the responsible study programme leader, who is appointed through a public job application process, meets with the student representatives and course administrators to assess the study programme in full. This is also where a collective decision is made on which of the above course evaluation processes should be employed. The study programme meeting can be followed by *further meetings*, where the course administrator meets with the course teachers to improve the course based on the course evaluation. They may suggest changes to be presented to the study programme leader. The fourth step is the *periodic study programme assessment* (responsible entity: The Faculty Board). This procedure should be performed every sixth year, at least, and involves a full study programme evaluation. The evaluation is done by a board designated for the task, including both staff and students, as well as representatives external to the university. When the Faculty Board approves the periodic programme evaluation and the process has resulted in changes to the study programme, they will send it, together with a proposed revision of the study programme, for re-accreditation by the Academic Affairs Committee (only if the study programme is valued as 30 study credits or more) (Universitetet i Agder 2019).

Within the above process, the course administrator is given two template documents to guide the procedure.¹ The first is a checklist for student questionnaires, and the second is a document with mandatory questions to guide the dialogue between the student representative and the course administrative. Both ask the same questions in different ways. I will focus on the questionnaire template in which the student is presented with a range of statements, to which they should respond according to their own perception on a scale ranging from “I strongly agree” to “I

strongly disagree, with the additional alternative ‘Not relevant.’” The statements are organised under the topics Academic content and learning outcomes, Teaching and supervision, Learning environment, Workload and individual efforts, and Other.

In *Academic content and learning outcomes*, the first of two questions ask to what degree the student finds that the teaching methods contribute to achieving learning outcomes. This could be seen as a negotiation between the students’ conceptions of the teacher or teachers’ rhetoric regarding the teaching and learning activities, the nature of what is to be learned and how it is learned, and how the student understands the learning outcomes in relation to what they do. Obviously, the teacher and student may differ in what learning outcomes signify and what is the best way to achieve them. Expectations may also differ between students and teachers of various instruments within one single course. This is because, in Norwegian higher education, it is not uncommon for individual courses to be taught by several lecturers who may have minimal or next to no awareness of each other’s work. In main instrument tuition, for instance, one single course may include individual music performance activities with one teacher per instrument. The violin students meet only with the violin teacher, the clarinet students with the clarinet teacher, and so on. Furthermore, these teachers may be temporary professional staff who are not part of the tenured staff at the institution but are hired to teach only a few of the enrolled students within the course. These teachers may come to the institution, teach the students, and go home without having any additional administrative duties or imposed office hours.

As a result, the voice student may read a learning outcome in the style of ‘After completing the course, the student should be able to perform and communicate music at an international level’ and expect some training in language, acting, and rhetoric, while the classical guitarist may instinctively think of topics such as phrasing, tone production, and technique. These differing expectations form the foundation of how the student replies and responds to different competence traditions within one single course. Similarly, the individual teacher’s conception of what is relevant knowledge and skill, as well as their teaching ideologies, may differ considerably and are often the result of complex relations between each teacher and student (Oltedal 2017, 243). This phenomenon is not unique for higher education, but is part of the music performance education tradition from beginning to end.

Secondly, students should rate whether “[t]he syllabus covers requirements for learning outcomes.” This, I argue, is not necessarily a matter of establishing facts, but of rhetoric and perception; if the student does not already know the course work by heart, how should they be able to judge the relevance of the syllabus in relation to the learning outcomes (in the sense of considering whether other, better literature and course materials might be used)? Is it not the point that the fact that they do not necessarily know it constitutes a selling argument for why they should register for the course in the first place? Is not the underlying reality of this statement, then, rather one of “does the teacher rhetorically persuade me that the syllabus is the right one?” If the evaluation is performed as the course reaches its conclusion, students may be better equipped to judge these matters, but if the evaluation is performed as a mid-way assessment, that is, at the middle of the first and/or second semester (if relevant), is it not too soon for anyone to judge if what they have read or *will* read is helpful to them in reaching the learning outcomes which they have not yet been tested on? In uttering these questions, as stated above, I wish by no means at all to call into question the competence of the students. Yet, the nature of the statements, I argue, is perhaps one of “judging the book by its cover.” Rather than assessing the quality of the course, the teacher’s rhetoric, academic ideal, and artistic vision in the eyes of the students is what is at stake.

Teaching and supervision pinpoints the student’s satisfaction with the quality of teaching, the scope of feedback and supervision from the course teacher, the variation in teaching and work methods, and the use of digital tools in the teaching. With the previous remark in mind that the main instrument serves as the organisational centre-point of classical music performance degree programmes and is an important recruitment factor, it becomes challenging to assess the quality of different educational and artistic practices within the one course. The generic degree structure imposed on vocational conservatoire mindsets clearly does not fit well. On top of this, the final mark may be established by an external censor who has no prior knowledge of the course progression. They can only base their decision on the course description, the censor instructions, the grade scale (if relevant to the individual course), and the exam delivery. A relevant representative of the teaching staff attends the marking meeting and may provide input, but the final grade is decided by the censor. In effect, this may result in the teachers having little or no input on the final grades. In courses of this sort, we see how problematic it becomes when a student is asked to rate, as mentioned above, their satisfaction with the

quality of teaching, the scope of feedback and supervision they have received from the course teacher, the variation in teaching and work methods, and the use of digital tools in the teaching. When ‘a teacher’ can at once signify several teachers, both skilled and novice, tenured or hired, technologically skilled or old school, then what does the students’ collective rating finally tell us? It may provide us with quantifiable data about the students’ overall impression of the course, but it does little to identify the staff activities and how quality assurance can be effectively assured and improved.

The *Learning environment* category is designed to address bullying, integration, and social wellbeing, as it includes statements regarding the relations between students and teacher(s), the academic environment among students, and their abilities to cooperate. The category also addresses the social environment among students.

The *Workload and individual efforts* addresses the student’s self-perception and enables them to rate their preparation prior to classes, their study efforts and how motivated they are to study the course. They should also indicate how much time they invest in the course per week by selecting one of the following alternatives: Less than 3 hours, 3–5 hours, 5–9 hours, 10–14 hours, 15–19 hours, 20–29 hours, or more than 30 hours.

The *Other* category asks the student to formulate up to three aspects of the course that are positive and up to three that should be improved. All should be rated as Less important, Important or Very important.

Learning modes and thresholds

The relation between student and teacher is key in the quality assessment of musical instrument performance studies, it appears. If the power of definition is given the student, however, and how they perceive the relevance of the course material, then, the situation becomes more complex. Now, we should also consider whether the individual student perceives that their learning modes are governed by their teacher’s practice. Roar C. Pettersen suggests that learning is based in three modes: 1) learning strategies, 2) learning styles, and 3) learning approaches. The first relates to what students do to learn (e.g., repetition, elaboration, organisation, and meta-cognition). The second addresses how they learn; that is, their preferred manner of receiving, processing, and storing information and knowledge. The

third is divided into in-depth approaches and surface approaches (i.e., on the one hand getting to know the core-mechanics of the topic and, on the other hand, learning facts and details) (2008, 15–19). If the student and teacher learn in the same manner, they may easily agree on a learning activity, but if they differ considerably and perhaps do not communicate properly with one another (for whatever reason), it may be more challenging to agree on the same terms. The students who fit the learning style promoted by the teacher may rate the course activities more positively than those who fit a different style better. Clearly, a successful learning activity stems from a negotiation between the student and teacher's conceptions of the what, how, why, and when of learning, and what qualifications there should be for a successful relationship between student and teacher. In Figure 3 and Table 1 below, I use gradients between two set criteria (be it artist/craftsperson, learning style A/learning style B, or something else entirely) to ask, through logical functions, what formula promotes learning. Should the teacher and student agree entirely? Should they agree on some things but not others? Is it best if they disagree? And, where do we place the threshold for what is acceptable between the two set criteria (whatever they may be)? These questions, naturally, are of a rhetorical nature, as I would find it difficult to imagine the possibility of posing any universal, generalised response to them.

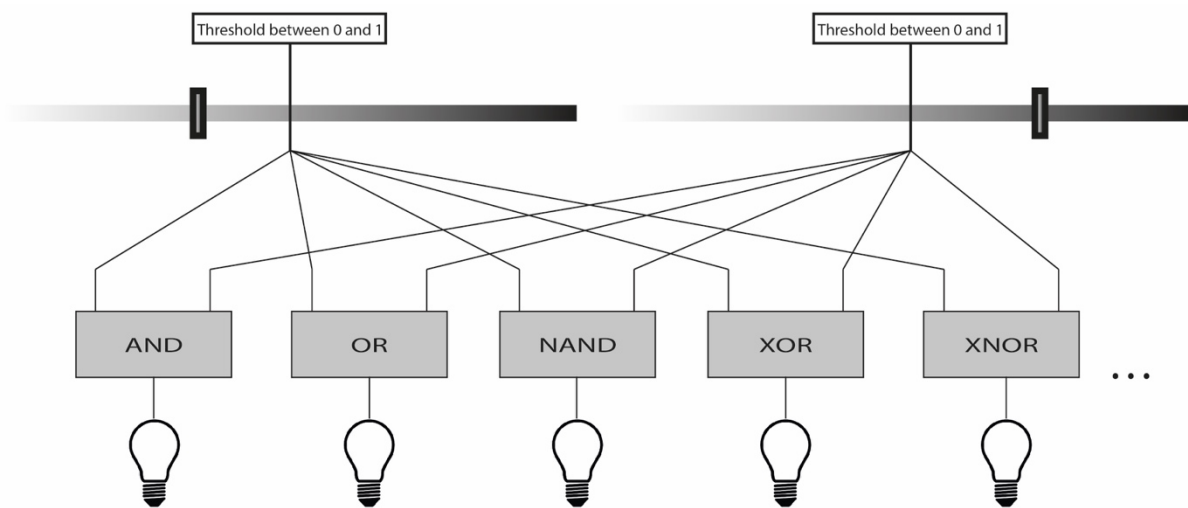


Figure 3. Student-teacher relationship expressed as possible logical functions.
(My illustration)

AND			OR			NAND			XOR			XNOR		
x	y	=	x	y	=	x	y	=	x	y	=	x	y	=
0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	1
1	0	0	1	0	1	1	0	1	1	0	1	1	0	0
0	1	0	0	1	1	0	1	1	0	1	1	0	1	0
1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	0	1	1	0	1	1	1

Table 1. Figure 3 expressed in table format.

Formal learning strategies

One positive aspect of quantitative, student-based quality assessment strategies is that they enable formalised learning strategies. If, for instance, we know by acquaintance where students are when they start the course and we have defined where we want them to be at the end through learning outcomes, we can easily draw a line from A to B to delineate the expected progression of the students' learning. John Biggs (2019) presents one such idea through his *constructive alignment*, in which the teacher should align the student's current competence status with the desired learning outcomes by utilising relevant learning activities to transport the students from the state of not knowing to knowing. The methodology is an outcome-based education principle which, he states, "is concerned only with improving teaching and learning." The idea focuses, among other things, on the verb of the individual learning outcomes to design learning and assessment activities which naturally fall to the nature of the knowledge goal. Biggs idea is one of practical implications, which conform to the ideal put forth by the course description (where, in the Norwegian state system, the binding learning outcomes are defined). It is, accordingly, a matter of effective realisation of predefined objectives to satisfy the consumer-product ideology, rather than providing a space for the teacher's artistic preferences and personality. Make no mistake, a teacher may find such activities natural and fruitful and may find a way to personalise, or even habituate, such procedures easily, but it is a matter of perspective. Biggs model, I say from my own experience from using it, is highly effective for students, but it also requires that they subordinate themselves to the "contract" and to joining the ranks of service providers. The perspective here is focused on the course description and the quality-assessable and productive delivery of services. It still does not necessarily provide a space for the teacher to be heard on their own terms. It should be said, however, that in musical instrument performance training, constructive alignment is already an established practice, since students learn to perform by

playing and are assessed through concert activities. With that said, it is not necessarily the case that all defined learning outcomes are taken into consideration throughout this process, nor that they are all equally simple to assess following one single format. Here, it is natural for the activities and level of consciousness concerning such issues to vary from teacher to teacher.

It is important to note that music education is of a different nature than other fields of university studies. Rather than beginning the study at point 0 to transport the students to a defined end, which is the case in, for instance, programming languages, software-tuition, and other fields of learning, musical instrument performance education is an intervention within an already active learning activity. Student applicants have already practised their instruments for several years, are well acquainted with the field, and have an idea both of what to expect and what to achieve by pursuing further studies. When the study programme is completed, they still have years of maturing, gaining experience, and learning more before them and are in no way complete musicians. The aim of the study programme is therefore, at least from my perspective as a music teacher, not to complete their education, but to act as a catalyst and provide direction, as well as enable lifelong learning strategies. A good example of what I mean here could be drawn from voice performance studies, because, even if the student may well learn and understand how the body works, how to perform certain techniques and how to build a vocabulary, it is still a matter of physically transforming the inner workings of their bodies—i.e., retraining the vocal system, toning muscles in new ways, and preparing the body for a long career of hard work. This embodiment process takes years and cannot be fully achieved during one single study programme. Furthermore, ideals may differ among pedagogues. It is therefore necessary to equip the student with the tools and critical mindsets necessary to continue this process throughout their career, well after completing their studies. This raises some difficulties in formalising learning outcomes in such a way that they both serve the student and quality assessment protocols. Learning music performance is, therefore, a far more complex matter than course design and knowledge delivery.

Learning beyond the classroom

If the scope is widened to include more than pedagogical strategies that fit quality assurance mindsets closely linked with course descriptions, we must also consider

the importance of learning that takes place outside of formalised situations. A teacher may have control over what happens during classes, but only limited access to the student's own personal time and other activities during the day where they may also engage in various other learning activities. In my own experience, both as a practising musician and professor, the relationship between the two may be far more important to consider than the course-led classes alone. It is a matter of letting knowledge mature, or, so to speak, sink in. It is a matter of interacting with fellow musicians to hear, see, feel, and in other ways experience their practice and perspectives and contrast them with one's own. While focusing on formal² and informal³ learning situations, Göran Folkestad identifies four focal trends in the related literature (at least up to 2006 when the article was written). First, *the situation* where learning takes place. Secondly, *the learning style* and how learning evolves and can be understood. Thirdly, *ownership* of the learning activity, who holds the power of definition and the what, how, and when. Finally, the *intentionality* and focus of the learning situation (2006, 141–142). In the context of the local case and quality assurance in Norwegian state higher education, all four categories are covered by the local case quality assurance procedures, but informal situations are held to be inferior to formal ones. This is natural because the formal learning activities are what fall within the universities' accountability. If quality assessment, however, should fail to capture *actual* learning (formal and informal) as a result of emphasising formal, quantitative parameters we see how its potential impact can only become incremental in terms of learning before service delivery.

Accountability

A sort of consumer relationship between university and student arises where the institution provides the product (study programme) and the student is the consumer judging the quality of the product. But the product, here, is a “package” of knowledge, skill, and experience which is delivered and mediated through the teacher, who is, at least from the perspective presented here, entangled within the system without a clear, individual, representative voice. Recall NOKUT's statement above: “Norway is a knowledge economy” and the Norwegian government's long-term education and research plan, also above, “Research and education impact the *economy* by enhancing the *quality* of the *workforce* and the *services delivered* and

enabling us to develop and adopt *new solutions and products*. This in turn contributes to *adaptability* and increased *productivity*” (my emphases).

The students’ awareness of their role as consumers and their self-interest, together with the Norwegian universities’ practice of treating the course description as a contract between university and student, leave the teacher as a passive provider. Students come to classes expecting a course description and clear instructions on what they should deliver, do, and how they should act to gain success, and preferably with few elements of surprise (Sirek and Sefton 2018, 62–3). In fact, at the local institution, to have a study programme approved by the university, each course description must specify the estimated number of hours the students will be expected to spend on various activities. These numbers are then used, by suggestion of the Academic Affairs Committee, to calculate the labour needed to implement the course (Universitetets studietvalg 2018, 9). According to the Norwegian credit calculations, one credit equals 27 hours of labour. A 10-credit course thus equals an estimated 270 hours of labour, which could be specified like this (a fictive case using real-life categories) (see Table 2, below):

Learning activities	Estimated hours of work
Lectures	12
Seminar participation	10
Laboratory work with or without supervision	0
One-to-one tuition	5
Reading syllabus/self-study	122
Scheduled group work with or without supervision	0
Informal group work/colloquia/ensemble	50
Field work	0
Practice in school/hospital/culture school etc.	0
Preparation and rework in relation to the previous activities	10
Deliveries	20
Project work	0
Academic supervision	0
Processing the feedback from the academic supervision	0
Attendance as student in companies, orchestras, etc.	0
Exam preparation/reading time	37
Exam	4
Other (must be specified)	0
Sum (27 hours x 10 credits)	270

Table 2. The labour estimation of hours (a fictive case) that must accompany each course description at the local institution.

(My translation from Norwegian)

Tables like this one empower the risk-averse thinking on the institution's behalf, since clearer, more detailed, and outlined course descriptions with measurable learning outcomes make safer contracts (Sirek and Sefton 2018, 62–3). This also puts a quantifiable framework on the teacher who may be contracted to teach, for instance, the guitar student during 12 hours per semester, for which the teacher may receive 3 hours of preparation per teaching hour. Adding up to 36 hours in total, the teacher now knows that if they provide less than 12 hours of instruction, they must be prepared to defend this deficiency to their managers. However, if they spend more time than the 36 hours total, they know they do so on their own time. This means that a tenured professor must, at least theoretically, account for every hour spent at work in a labour agreement developed between the employee and the head of Department. As Sirek and Sefton put it, “This has significant implications for music education, since standardized, outcomes-based education leaves little room for creativity and for difference, and continues to reify hegemonic structures both in the academy and in the music classroom” (Sirek and Sefton 2018, 66).

As profit and demand increasingly inform decisions in Norwegian higher education, one should be equally concerned with the students' employability. Indeed, the quality assurance process and the study programme accreditation process address employability in rhetoric and statistics, but they make little space for the individual students' needs for nurture to reach a sufficient level of employability. Some students develop quickly on their own, with little need of individual music performance lessons. Others need close supervision and frequent lectures to prosper. On the teacher's behalf, some students need next to no preparation, while others demand much effort. A uniform schedule of 12 hours teaching per semester may provide predictability and fit the overall budget of the institution, but it does not necessarily promote good learning. This is somewhat confusing from a consumer product perspective, if we consider that the student makes an investment to meet a market demand, and the teacher is instrumental in moving students from beginner to employable, it makes little sense to not account for individual learning styles and rates at a structural level. Clearly, the underlying motivation is not the individual student's development *per se*, but the securing of satisfied customers and the production of credits to enable a foreseeable economy.

The music educator's professional understanding

At this point, we may now turn to the music educator's professional understanding, or MEPRUN as Elin Angelo calls it. Following her model, we can speak of four levels, including the music educator's personal, collective, institutional, and political professional understandings (Angelo 2017, 194–197). Each exists in tension with the others and contributes to forming the teacher's actual and perceived identities (that is, do they consider themselves as teachers, musicians, mentors, artists, friends, administrators?). Following Angelo's argument, we can see how all the perspectives above are present. At the personal level, we focus on the teacher and their artistic ideal, their pedagogical preferences, their conceptions of the music profession, and the artistic tradition they represent. At a collective level, we have spoken of them being part of a group of colleagues which again represents certain canons, repertoires, pedagogical ideals, and musical practices. An orchestral instrument would, for instance, emphasise orchestral repertoire and traditions that, for a classical guitarist, would be next to irrelevant. Walking past a practice room where a flautist plays, one might hear long scales, up and down, but when one hears a soprano one may hear warm-up exercises and other sorts of technique-maturing activities. One may even be able to classify what one hears as a "French" or "Italian" school, or one or another professor's sound-ideal, etc. At the institutional level, which has been in focus here, I have described the situation as somewhat repressive in regard to the teacher within the system. However, teachers make do and find their own ways to relate to the system (some oppose it, others conform to it, still others are somewhere in between). The same applies to the political level, described by Angelo, which relates to the teacher's professional understanding in relation to ministries, policies, and municipal sectors. Both of the two latter examples are heavily governed by where the teachers are employed. In fact, tenured positions versus part-time temporary teaching contracts also make a difference because they come with different responsibilities and administrative accountabilities.

As for the young, newly educated music teacher looking for a career in higher music education, we can understand that there are more than pedagogical, administrative, communicational, and artistic skill and methodologies at stake. There are also questions of identities and power relations (here, in the Foucauldian sense) and how they create an understanding of one's own mandate. These are not necessarily in unison with policies, working contracts, or market, but at the personal

level where the teacher has an ideal profession to which they aspire, the ideal that inspired them to become music teachers and motivated them through their studies. When this, so to speak “when I grow up” inspiration meets contrasting imperatives and frameworks, it is not only a matter of quality assessment, but also a matter of working environment, motivation, and willingness to go to work.

In a recent study, Angelo, Varkøy, and Georgii-Hemming (2019) analysed ten transcribed interviews with higher music performance education teachers and leaders from the perspectives of mandate, knowledge, and research. Among the identified discourses focusing on the interviewees’ perceived mandate was the idea of an awakening — that is, the understanding of art, musicianship, and higher music education as fields that might reveal something new about humans and the world through change. Skilled artists and art can provoke this awakening, which relies on an acceptance of a mystical element as essential to good artistry. According to the interviewees, knowledge develops when internalised and made inherent and personal. With the right nurturing, it can result in new expressions, sounds, and ways of reasoning. This awakening is identified as a parallel path to the cultivation of what is already existing through competence in critical, nuanced, and creative thinking.

The interviewees collectively identify the basic knowledge needed to support this awakening and cultivation idea as handicraft, entrepreneurship, and critical reflection. Handicraft is an obvious need of the classical musician, and it provides a counterbalance to the mystical as it is more definable (involving good agility, good coordination, good contact between the bow and the string, etc.). Handicraft, which provides the opportunity of comparability and some level of objectivity as opposed to the subjective mysticality of music production (Austbø 2018), is then an important centre of attention in classical music performance education. As such, there may be among classical music performance teachers a concern that the new university structure’s time-consuming requirements to write, read, and discuss will have a negative impact on the vocational and artistic side of music performance. Musicians need to practice and improve (Angelo et al. 2019, 87). At the core of this concern is the idea of foundational handicraft as catalyst for excellence, and it is part of the vocational ideology. Students may be excused from courses secondary to their main instrument because of their high competence, with the explanation that the requirement of completing such courses should not hinder their promising career. This is related to the phenomenon of marking unfit

students more highly to generate funding credits, but here the motivation is to give them, perhaps, better grades than they actually deserve on secondary courses to promote their careers. Hired music professionals may also oppose the university managerial system by not attending their administrative obligations (answering e-mails, attending meetings, following protocols) because of their specialist competence. A possible motivation from such teachers could be something like, “The administrators can do what they want. I do what I was hired to do: Teach students to become promising music performance professionals.” Furthermore, when the quality assurance processes require the students to qualify their teachers, rather than the other way around, the traditional master-apprentice hierarchy is threatened (Angelo et al. 2019, 96). This may cause discrepancies between quality assurance protocol, the quality of teaching, and the students’ development as individual artists.

Also, the questionnaire responses may not quantitatively represent a large enough part of the total student mass for the resulting statistics to fully reflect reality. At a local institution, I have seen how certain students choose not to respond to student queries relating to quality, bullying, student satisfaction, etc., because they are satisfied and have nothing to report or because they would simply rather practice their instruments instead of sitting at the computer and answering “yet another query.” These are the most common responses I have met from students failing to answer the quality assurance questionnaires, but there are, of course, countless other possible motivations. The same certainly applies to the academic staff, who may prefer teaching, research, and administration to answering queries.

Needless to say, a teacher’s wellbeing has much to say about the study environment and course quality, particularly in main instrument tuition, where one course, at least from the perspective of the student, may revolve around this single teacher. So, in the case presented above, when the teacher’s perspective is withdrawn from the quality assessment protocol as a result of the consumer-product ideal that inspired the system, an important, central aspect of what is in fact quality assessed has gone missing. As such, at least from this perspective, one may ask how effective quality assessment actually is in terms of measuring a teaching institution’s success. As already pointed out, this voiceless, quality-assessed teacher then has, according to the quality procedure, only a mechanical function in delivering and securing effective learning outcomes.

Discussion: Friction, negotiation, and potential

Danielle Sirek and Terry Sefton identify a teacher as being entangled within systems of control, constraint, and convergence between actors in a dynamic relation of power (Sirek and Sefton 2018, 52). Following their reasoning, the inherited vocational music performance ideal described above functions as a “cultural gatekeeper of professions and bureaucracies”—i.e., as a sort of compromise between its inherited habitus, the traditional nature of music performance studies, and the university systems’ regulatory control, managerial processes, and funding dependency. This regulatory practice manifests itself through formalised documents, social interactions, and self-surveillance. “The university, as institution, maintains and re-inscribes habitus, and this occurs and is coordinated through texts and discourse” (56–57). Universities are ideas as well as places, where predetermined learning outcomes and performance-based assessment indoctrinate their subjects into “a way of being in the world.” This “way” applies to both students and teachers and is fortified by the controls within departments or faculties. It involves a multitude of actors who all respond to the formal conditions differently, “some with administrative roles, senior full professors, untenured professors, adjunct professors, teaching assistants” (60).

The task of enforcing compliance with regulatory mechanisms may provoke further difficulties when there is a lack of correlation between regulations and procedures and those performing the quality work. It may be left to the faculty to ensure the success of the managerial incentives and quality assurance work, as they may feel the pressure from above and resort to using the powers of persuasion (e.g., requesting, cajoling, reminding, scolding, threatening, etc.). As a possible source of great conflict, the situation may have a direct impact on academic freedom. In Sirek and Sefton’s words:

Individual professors may feel pushed to instruct in inflexible, prescriptive-compliant, outcomes-based ways.... The effect is a flattening—a flattening of pedagogy, a flattening of content, a flattening across disciplines and between instructors: a flattening of difference, and an erasure of creative possibility. Some instructors may not feel that they have the freedom to break free, and so this flattening is cemented and re-inscribed. (Sirek and Sefton 2018, 65)

The mission would then, naturally, be to untangle the teacher and give them a voice within the system. To do so, the first step is to better understand the situation, to which I have offered several perspectives above. The following step could be to

utilise these frictions further and follow up on the negotiations between them as they form the greater scenery.

I would like to pursue the above perspectives through the lens of Julia Annas's *Intelligent Virtue* (2011), a sort of developmental, virtue-centred ethics drawing heavily on a skill analogy. Her examples make frequent use of music performance to support her argument, from which I make the simple assumption that if it can support a theory of virtue, then so can virtue support a theory of music performance education. As far as the skill analogy is concerned, "virtue is to be understood in part by the way it is acquired, and that its acquisition involves both the need to learn and the drive to aspire..." (27). Central to her argument is a developmental function in which virtue is not something one either has or has not, but something to be cultivated and learned over time: "The analogy with practical skill, then, enables us to see how virtue can be a disposition requiring habituation without becoming mere routine" (15). Another central claim is that practical reason is an integrated part of virtue (117), a virtue that is complex and evolves from the whole person. It is not one virtue that is independent of other similar features, but one that consists of many aspects and virtues that closely relate to each other:

To become virtuous we need to learn how to act, and to learn we have to have initial trust in the teacher and the context. If this is to lead to virtue rather than mere habit, as has been repeatedly stressed [throughout her book], this has to be accompanied by the drive to aspire. This involves understanding what it is to be loyal or brave, becoming self-directed, recognizing for oneself what loyalty requires rather than copying one's model, and striving to improve; all this leads to actively becoming virtuous rather than acquiring a mere habit.... The skill analogy and its application to virtue indicates that the practical intelligence involved is one which integrates and unifies all the relevant aspects of the situation from the start, rather than developing on separate tracks and then trying to tie the results together. (52 and 87)

From a pedagogical perspective, Annas's account of virtue is particularly useful because it does not base itself on there being a perfect virtuous person. Indeed, the developmental perspective provides virtue with gradients, meaning that, although someone is not perfectly generous or brave, they cannot be deprived of being just that as long as they are aware of their developmental stage and imperfections. This is the case, she exemplifies, with a mediocre pianist who still is a pianist even if they are not world leading (65).

I admit that, by drawing on virtue in a quality assessment discourse, I am getting dangerously close to embarking on a side track towards a very different quality

concept—the *quality of life*—but it is not my intention to pursue that topic here. Rather, what I wish to pinpoint is the quality of music performance education beyond quality assurance and service delivery. It is a shift of focus from the consumer product/service perspective, to a pedagogical quality in which student and teacher are viewed in a negotiating relationship, as two individuals with their own artistic aims, with the purpose of flourishing as performing artists. In Annas’s (2011) account, “[t]he virtues are part of the way we *live* our lives, whatever the circumstances are; we don’t discover the virtues in our lives, since we have to bring it about that they are there.... [There] is a sense in which virtue, in an account of [her] present kind ... gives a life what we call a positive directionality” (94 and 117). The music performance teacher, or any teacher for that matter, as a consequence, is (hopefully) a role model, someone to aspire to and be inspired by. And, it is not that they are successful that is of importance, but that they commit to goodness and embodies it for the reward of the activity itself:

We all know that the only way to encourage genuine virtue, rather than behaviour done for reward, is to encourage the child to appreciate the rewards of virtuous activity itself.... Virtues are dispositions which are not only admirable but which we find *inspiring* and take as *ideals* to aspire to, precisely because of the commitment to goodness which they embody ... regardless of whether they in worldly terms succeeded or failed. (81 and 109)

As a developmental function, Anna’s account of virtue emphasises learning and maturing. Like practical skills, virtue can “give us examples of enjoyment coming as a disposition develops” (69). The virtuous music performance teacher, then, differs from someone who is subject to mere habit as they also represent a striving to improve. The teacher’s professional understanding and practice is more than an effect of “repressive systems” (in the Foucaultian sense) promoted by politicians, law-enforcers, and regulations. It is the development of virtuous beings with the aim of not only achieving lifelong learning skill, but also learning *for* life. We can then move from understanding frictions, to using negotiations to delineate the scenery, to unlocking a pedagogical potential looking at the horizons of virtue. (That is, if one accepts Annas’s conceptualisation of virtue; opposers may find the parallels I make too opportune without further exploitation and defence, but this is not a matter for discussion in the present context.) With a good role model for a teacher, Annas’s virtue can provide an interesting framework for development, aspiration, and inspiration. Its developmental skill analogy makes it a conceptualisation particularly apt for pedagogical discourses. I am looking forward to

developing these ideas in future research, but I will let the above perspectives suffice for now.

Conclusion

From the line of reasoning performed here, the teacher as well as the student-teacher relationship of trust mark themselves as central in what could be articulated as a subject for “quality assurance” in music performance education. Rather than considering frictional situations in music education as obstacles, subjects for restricted debates, and causes for social division, I have shown how a focus on the negotiations within these situations can direct us towards other potentials for the role-model teacher (i.e., someone to aspire to) and educational development. From this perspective, quality assessment procedures are not necessarily an obstruction for good education (however “good” should be conceptualised and defined), but it can inspire us to discuss matters from new perspectives which ultimately support the progress of knowledge, virtues, and maturing for both the students and their teachers. This is especially the case if it is done carefully with representatives of all related parties and with an aim of evolving education in full (formal, informal, liminal, personal, etc.), rather than by supporting one quantitative model (here, the consumer product/service ideal). Education can thus be something more than merely providing knowledge services; it can be nurtured as a socially interactive practice where formal and informal knowledge and learning are emphasised for the sake of knowledge and development rather than of accountability and delivery.

Quality assessment policy within the higher music education of future musical performers is a tricky thing, it seems, and the above discourse would suggest that a consumer-product based quality assurance protocol would perhaps satisfy to the accountability of the relevant bodies. It does not suffice, however, in assessing the quality of learning musical instrument performance effectively. Nor, does it necessarily suffice to assess the way of life certain artistic occupations call for. This is partly because the temporal requirements of learning to play music well by far exceeds the limited timeframe of study programmes. We evolve as musicians throughout our lives. For quality assurance in music education to be purposeful not only for the monitoring body, but for improving the knowledge-production, the academic content, and the artistic life, other measures for assessment must be developed. Here, the teacher’s voice should become more prominent as an additional

perspective to the student's; the personal development of the students (artistic skills, life skills, virtues, and social skills, etc., in relation to them as individuals) takes precedence over fulfilment of the contractual learning outcome. How to effectively untangle the teacher within this managerial quality process is a difficult issue. Expecting individual teachers to produce more writing (e.g., logs, student reports, etc.) is perhaps not the right way. Such additional work will ultimately result in time management issues (Angelo et al. 2019). For in-and-out, hired musical professionals with fewer administrative responsibilities, such demands of documentation may ultimately become deal-breakers, leading such experts to turn down job offerings. One way of addressing the issue at the local institution is for the study programme leader and the individual course administrators to engage in a continuous dialogue with students and teachers to 1) offer conflict management, and 2) provide a more nuanced picture of student responses to quality assurance processes. The same communications can inform the administrators of the teachers' consideration of the students' effort, attitude (Oltedal 2017), and employability. Yet, this is more a matter of low-level quality work as the quality assurance system and the state incentives are designed to govern a consumer product accountability perspective rather than promoting the student's *actual* artistic development and career success. It has become clear that the path to partially untangle and give voice to the teacher within the quality assurance framework must relate to educational policies, state regulations, economy, and managerial ideals. It must also provide space for an active teacher to supply perspectives to the relevant ruling bodies and within the quality assurance protocol itself. We must promote the debate for the particular both at the local institution and in the state policies, perhaps with more focus on enabling managerial processes and quality work nurturing role-models for lifelong learning and dynamic employability than for merely satisfying current market demands from quantitative reasoning.

About the Author

Robin Rolfhamre is Professor of Music Pedagogy at the University of Agder, where he teaches and supervises musicology and music performance (lute instruments and classical guitar) primarily at Masters and PhD levels. His research is rooted in Music Pedagogy, Early Music Performance Studies, and Organology. He is the author of the Open Access monograph *Informed Play: Approaching a Biology and Concept of Early Modern Lute Instruments* (Norway: Cappelen Damm Akademisk/NOASP, 2018) and has published articles in international, peer-reviewed

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Notes

¹ Both documents referred to here are digital, internal work-templates made available for staff and students.

² In Folkestad's conception, formal learning sequences involve planned and formalised sequences led by someone responsible for the procedure.

³ Informal learning sequences, in Folkestad's view, arise from an activity through group interaction.