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Better in Tune

Towards constructive facilitation process of
orchestra auditions

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Abstract

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This research delves into the phenomenon of orchestra auditions, examining the current efforts made by the orchestra to improve the audition process. It also suggests additional ways to enhance the process, with a particular focus on the wellbeing and development of the candidates. The central research question guiding this thesis is: In what ways could professional orchestras facilitate a more constructive audition process for their candidates?

By examining the audition process through the lens of Gibson's theory of affordances, the study seeks to assess how these affordances are incorporated into the structure and logistics of auditions. The PERMA model is used to understand how specific actions during auditions can influence candidates' overall well-being and experience. Additionally, this study identifies the responsibilities of both orchestra musicians and organizations in improving the individual experience and well-being of audition candidates within the current audition framework.

A qualitative approach, grounded in a Community-Based Participatory Research (CBPR) framework, was employed. The findings indicate that adjustments made to the audition process by orchestras and organizations can significantly impact the audition environment, supporting candidates' development and wellbeing by reducing music performance anxiety and, therefore, elevating their sense of self-control and eventually increasing performance flow. Through an extensive literature review, this research identifies a substantial gap in the study of audition processes, emphasizing the need for continued investigation in this area.

Keywords: affordances, auditions, community-based participatory research, flow, music performance anxiety, music psychology, orchestra, PERMA, wellbeing.

Contents

| | | |
|-----|---|----|
| 1 | Introduction | 1 |
| 2 | Literature review | 4 |
| 2.1 | Wellbeing of musicians in the professional classical music world | 4 |
| 2.2 | Music performance anxiety in auditioning process | 5 |
| 2.3 | Towards constructive evaluation and feedback of auditioning performance | 8 |
| 2.4 | Increasing sense of security to facilitate a better flow in orchestra auditioning process | 10 |
| 3 | Conceptual framework | 14 |
| 3.1 | PERMA | 14 |
| 3.2 | Affordances | 17 |
| 4 | Implementation of the study | 20 |
| 4.1 | Research task and question | 20 |
| 4.2 | Methodological starting points | 21 |
| 4.3 | Data construction | 23 |
| 4.4 | Data analysis | 27 |
| 4.5 | Research ethics | 30 |
| 5 | Findings | 33 |
| 5.1 | Affordances optimizing audition preparation | 34 |
| 5.2 | Affordances increasing sense of security and flow on audition day | 41 |
| 5.3 | Affordances enhancing candidate development post-audition | 45 |
| 6 | Discussion and Conclusions | 53 |
| 6.1 | The PERMA model as an analytical framework | 53 |
| 6.2 | The value of affordance framework in addressing the research question | 55 |
| 6.3 | Enhancing the audition experience and fostering positive emotion | 56 |
| 6.4 | The role of engagement and relationship throughout the audition process | 58 |
| 6.5 | The role of meaning and accomplishment in auditions | 59 |
| 6.6 | Research participants' feedback and future directions | 61 |
| | References | 64 |

1 Introduction

...Your brow is sweatin' and your mouth gets dry
Fancy people go driftin' by
The moment of truth is right at hand
Just one more nightmare you can stand

See the man with the stage fright
Just standin' up there to give it all his might
And he got caught in the spotlight
But when we get to the end
He wants to start all over again

You wanna try it once again
Please don't make him stop
Let him take it from the top
Let him start all over again

(Stage fright, The band 1970)

"Stage Fright" by The Band (1970) paints a vivid picture of the anxiety and pressure performers face when stepping into the spotlight. The lyrics describe the physical symptoms of performance anxiety—sweating, dry mouth, and the overwhelming sense of tension as "fancy people" watch (Kenny, 2011, p. 4). The performer experiences "stage fright," a phenomenon where despite preparing to "give it all his might," the pressure of performing in front of an audience leads to a heightened state of anxiety (Kenny, 2011). The line "caught in the spotlight" emphasizes how this pressure can make someone feel trapped or exposed, and the desire to "start all over again" reflects the wish to overcome mistakes and anxiety to perform better.

In the context of orchestra auditions, "Stage Fright" metaphorically illustrates how even skilled musicians can be overwhelmed by the pressure of performing in front of judges. Like the performer in the song, musicians facing Music Performance Anxiety (MPA) may feel caught in the spotlight, struggling to focus and execute their skills. Understanding stage fright's emotional and physical toll is crucial for creating audition environments that support performers, helping them manage

anxiety, find their flow (Csikszentmihalyi, 1997, p. 36), and ultimately perform at their best.

As a professional viola player, myself, I have participated in different orchestra auditions from age of sixteen. During and after my higher academic studies I have participated in over dozen auditions for professional orchestras. With time and with every audition my motivation and self-evaluation declined influencing my performance and participation in auditions, as well as my pursue of a fixed orchestra position, this led me to engage in this research topic.

Classically trained orchestra instrument musicians often participate in numerous of auditions until landing a job, if at all. There is no statistical research regarding the number of auditions that one needs to take to land an orchestra job, but if we look at the amount of job offers and people auditioning, there are many more musicians than positions (Bennett & Bridgstock, 2015, p. 264) and therefore obtaining a fixed orchestra position is highly competitive (Kegelaers 2023, introduction). The highly competitive environment in the music industry can have detrimental effects on a musician's overall well-being, influencing their performance, success, and mental equilibrium. Auditions, in particular, are often a primary source of overwhelming and unmanageable anxiety for many musicians (Kenny et al., 2014, p. 19).

Orchestra auditions serve as a traditional international method for securing a permanent or temporary position as a musician within an orchestra. While the audition structure typically follows a similar format across orchestras—comprising three rounds with repertoire including classical and romantic concertos, as well as orchestra excerpts—it remains a dynamic and evolving process unique to each audition. Various factors influence the audition process, such as the number of candidates, jury members, duration of the audition (spanning one or two days), the number of rounds, whether the audition is conducted with or without a screen, and the specific instrument repertoire required for the audition.

A large number of studies have been done on the actions and trainings that individual musicians can do during preparation for an audition in order to reduce anxiety and increase performance level (e.g., Hatfield, 2016; Hoffman & Hanrahan, 2011; Spahn et al., 2016). Research on the audition process and its facilitation by orchestra panel members is limited, therefore prompting the need for a study to explore actions taken to create a constructive and psychologically safe environment. This study will investigate various aspects of the audition process, such as invitation letters, pre-recording rounds, pre-audition rehearsals, familiarity with the audition space, and post-audition feedback using the five elements of the PERMA model (Seligman 2011) and the concept of Affordances by Gibson (1979). The aim is to enhance understanding of how these factors contribute to a positive audition experience for musicians and improve overall audition practices within orchestras. Looking into this process from a pedagogical and logistical structure standpoint, can help in identifying the responsibilities of the orchestras (including the organizational level) on the individual experience and well-being of individual candidates in audition processes.

In my research report, Chapter 2 will delve into the relevant literature, while Chapter 3 will outline the conceptual framework. Chapter 4 will detail the implementation of the study, covering research tasks and questions, methodological approach, data construction, analysis, and research ethics. Moving forward, Chapter 5 will showcase the findings, and Chapter 6 will present my conclusions and discussion.

2 Literature review

My literature review is largely grounded on previous scholarly work on music psychology and music education. It will delve into the wellbeing of musicians in the professional classical music world, music performance anxiety in auditioning processes, towards a constructive evaluation and feedback of auditioning performance and Increasing sense of security in auditioning processes.

2.1 Wellbeing of musicians in the professional classical music world

A study by Gross and Musgrave (2020) shows that working in music as a musician can have consequential harm on the individuals' mental and physical wellbeing. Musicians frequently report high rates of physical discomfort and pain related to performance (Ackermann, 2012, p. 184). Musicians are more likely to have stress-related hearing loss due to the work environment, such as acoustic stimulation and different elements of stress (Hasson 2009, p. 11). In comparison to other work forces, orchestra musicians reported higher levels of job-related strain (Kivimäki & Jokinen, 1994, p. 75).

According to Nagel (2010, p. 142), the job market for classical musicians in the United States is notably more challenging than for other highly skilled professionals, who often make career decisions at a later stage. Unemployment rates in the arts, including music, have historically been high, with many musicians working in roles that do not reflect their level of training or accomplishment. This chronic lack of job security and career opportunities, combined with the pressures of competition and fear of rejection, exacerbates psychological stressors for professional musicians.

A study on job satisfaction in symphonic orchestras revealed surprisingly low levels of job satisfaction among orchestra players. This dissatisfaction stems from

the limited musical freedom and lack of advancement opportunities in their work environment, despite their expertise in the field (Mogelof & Rohrer, 2005, pp. 103–104). Additionally, freelance musicians expressed concerns about the scarcity of work, financial insecurity, and the significance of reputation within musicians' networks (Dobson, 2010, Discussion). The study also highlighted a notable correlation between heightened performance pressure and increased alcohol consumption among freelance musicians.

Another study (Ascenso, 2018) that looked at classical musicians' wellbeing through the lens of PERMA suggested that musicians' wellbeing is largely positive. They scored higher in the scale of PERMA than the general population on positive emotion, relationship, and meaning. On engagement and accomplishment, they have scored not less than the general population (Ascenso, 2018, p. 9). This study contradicts the broader literature on the wellbeing of classical musicians. One reason for this discrepancy is that Music Performance Anxiety was not a central focus of the study; it was assessed with a single item that addressed general functioning rather than performance-specific situations.

2.2 Music performance anxiety in auditioning process

Music Performance Anxiety (MPA) is widely investigated and considered as most researched in the field of music psychology. Kenny explains that performance anxiety is a multifaceted issue influenced by a combination of genetic, environmental, and personal factors such as experiences, emotions, thoughts, and actions (Kenny, 2004; 2011). She defines MPA as:

the experience of marked and persistent anxious apprehension related to musical performance that has arisen through specific anxiety conditioning experiences and which is manifested through combinations of affective, cognitive, somatic and behavioural symptoms. It may occur in a range of

performance settings but is usually more severe in settings involving high ego investment and evaluative threat. (Kenny, 2010, p. 433.)

While some degree of performance anxiety can be beneficial and typical, excessive levels can be incapacitating and may even qualify as a form of mental illness (Matei & Ginsborg, 2017, para. 3). It affects all musicians regardless of their age or level (Brugues, 2011, p. 102). We also see evidence of higher performance anxiety in higher education music students (Kaspersen & Gotestam, 2002). Feelings of nervousness and anxiety are a frequent pre-performance notion and related to musician's past performances (Kenny, 2011). Anxiety significantly impacts a musician's ability to perform, concentrate, make decisions, and alters their perception of the environment as threatening. This can result in behaviour driven by perceived threats that may disrupt the overall performance outcome (Nieuwenhuys & Oudejans, 2012). Professional musician specified mostly three causes for MPA, 'pressure from self', 'excessive arousal' and 'inadequate preparation for performance' (Kenny, 2014, p. 12).

A study exploring the incidence of facilitating versus debilitating music performance anxiety, its emotional accompaniments, and contextual variations (Murphy et al. 2024). The findings suggest that anxiety's facilitative or debilitating nature may be shaped more by the accompanying emotions than the anxiety's intensity. Participants who viewed their anxiety as facilitating reported more positive emotions, such as enthusiasm and strength, even in high-anxiety contexts like solo performances. However, most participants still experienced MPA as debilitating. The study highlights that MPA's impact is context-dependent and can shift within a performance, with experience potentially transforming debilitating anxiety into facilitative anxiety. (Murphy et al. 2024, pp. 10–11.)

Research exploring the interaction between challenge, skill balance, and MPA reveals that a musician's perceived skill level influences their experience of flow and anxiety. For lower-skilled musicians, flow (Csikszentmihalyi, 1997, p. 36) may occur more consistently, regardless of task complexity, which correlates with

lower anxiety levels. In contrast, more skilled musicians may feel increased anxiety when performing simpler pieces, as this allows their cognitive focus to shift to more analytical processes, which can disrupt the state of flow (Fullagar et al., 2013, p. 250).

When looking at performance anxiety, auditions are ranked highest as the reason for anxiety in music performance (Kenny, 2011, p. 59). They differ from other performances due to specific stress factors such as solo performance, direct competition with other candidates and the long-term consequences of their level of performance (Cox & Kenardy 1993; Roland 1994). Many musicians report that auditions are the primary circumstance for unmanageable anxiety (Kenny, Driscoll & Ackermann 2014, p. 19). Auditions are highly competitive and characterized by high expectations of technique, musical quality, and in some cases, sight reading abilities (Aufegger et al., 2017). In Gratto's (1998) research related to audition anxiety, participants reported experiencing a range of symptoms during auditions prior to any intervention. These included an "increased heart rate (81%), a sensation of "butterflies" in the stomach (77%), technical mistakes (53%), memory errors (43 %), loss of concentration (43%), trembling (41%), sleep deficiency (39%), and shortness of breath (32%)" (Gratto, 1998, p. 31).

In the study by Brotons (1994), titled "*Effects of Performing Conditions on Music Performance Anxiety and Performance Quality*" the primary focus was to investigate how different performance settings impact MPA and the overall quality of musicians' performances. The study examined musicians under three specific conditions: performance in front of a jury, blind performance in front of a jury, and performance in a private, non-observed setting. The findings revealed significantly higher levels of MPA such as elevated heart rate, when performing in front of a jury, regardless of whether the performer could see the jury or not, in comparison to a private studio environment. Additionally, performance quality declined under high-anxiety conditions, particularly when a jury was present, suggesting that increased anxiety in these settings can negatively affect

performance (Brotons 1994, pp. 44–50). These performance conditions are similar to those encountered in orchestra auditions and competitions.

2.3 Towards constructive evaluation and feedback of auditioning performance

Constructive evaluation and feedback are essential components of the audition process in orchestras, as they can provide valuable insights for musicians to better their performance skills. An orchestra audition can be viewed not only as a mere "job interview" for an orchestra position but also as a valuable learning opportunity for the candidate.

Music performance-based evaluation has the tendency to be highly subjective (Barry, 2009, p. 250) as each individual listener brings their own unique preferences, experiences, and biases when evaluating someone's performance, which can greatly influence how they perceive and judge a candidate's audition. Factors such as personal taste, cultural background, emotional connection to the music, and even the mood of the listener at the time of the performance can all impact their evaluation.

A study that looked at musical performance evaluation from the perspective of psychological studies of aesthetic judgment gives an insight on who could be a "good evaluator", I quote: "(a) has good self-insight concerning his or her own judgment strategy; (b) is able to apply his or her strategy in a consistent manner across cases; (c) shows good temporal stability in repeated ratings of the same stimulus; and (d) is able to minimize all biases and to disregard irrelevant factors in the evaluation context" (Juslin, 2023, p. 102).

McVeigh's (2013, p. 8) study explores the implementation of standards-based performance assessment in music education, emphasizing the importance of aligning music instruction and evaluation with clearly defined standards, such as national or state music education benchmarks. The research identifies several

benefits of standards-based assessment, including greater transparency in student expectations, consistency in grading, and enhanced accountability in learning (McVeigh 2013, pp. 58–60). The study highlights the need for a structured framework in assessing students' musical progress, ensuring that their development is measured against specific learning goals rather than relying on subjective evaluations (McVeigh 2013, p. 61; pp. 67–68).

In the context of orchestra auditions, constructive evaluation should involve a systematic and objective assessment of various musical elements as indicated by Russell (2015), including technical proficiency, musicality, tone quality, intonation, rhythm, and interpretation. In their 2007 study on the "Power of Feedback," Hattie and Timperley emphasize the importance of effectiveness of feedback in education. They emphasize that feedback should focus on addressing three essential questions for both students and teachers, all linked to the student's goals: First, "Where am I going?" (What are the goals?), secondly, "How am I going?" (how much advancement is being made toward the goal?) and thirdly, "Where to next?" (What steps should be taken to enhance progress?) (Hattie & Timperley, 2007, p. 87). Goals and the feedback provided should not only outline the desired outcomes but also include specific criteria for success in achieving them (Hattie & Timperley, 2007, p. 87). This detailed information is crucial for effective feedback, as it allows individuals to understand what is expected of them and how they can evaluate their progress towards the set goals.

Based on the findings of the pertaining research presented above, if orchestra auditions are seen as real-life learning environments for candidates and future orchestra musicians, then providing constructive feedback becomes crucial. Offering feedback to those who did not secure a position can significantly impact their future performances.

The way feedback is delivered can influence the individual's confidence and motivation for their next audition (Zusuki & Pitts, 2024, pp. 445–446 & 450).

Therefore, it is vital for the jury panel to offer feedback in a constructive and supportive manner, emphasizing areas for improvement while also recognizing the candidate's strengths. Applying this approach in the setting of orchestra auditions has the potential to not only aid the candidate in their growth and skill development but also cultivate a positive and encouraging atmosphere for future auditions.

2.4 Increasing sense of security to facilitate a better flow in orchestra auditioning process

Becoming a professional musician is not just about mastering the instrument but it is also influenced by the surrounding environment while building one's professional life. A study by López-Íñiguez (2022) pointed out that the relationship with parents, professors and peers are the three key groups that have an influence on the path that a musician will take in his professional life. Interactions with these groups significantly impact a musician's emotional state and physical responses. López-Íñiguez (2022, p. 150) states in her study that: "The participants' discourse included paralyzing experiences that occurred when they were exposed to people who inhibited their learning or negatively affected their confidence, motivation, and emotion, particularly in relation to how others saw them as capable learners and professionals".

This sense of emotional security, or lack thereof, has a profound impact on a musician's ability to reach an optimal performance state, often referred to as "flow." The concept and phenomenon of flow, seen by Csíkszentmihályi (1990 pp. 75–77), as a state of total immersion in an activity, where individuals feel intensely focused, deeply engaged, and effortlessly involved. In this state, people are fully absorbed in the task at hand, losing awareness of time and external distractions (Kirchner, 2011, p. 290). Flow is "being in the zone" and is associated with peak performance and personal fulfilment. Reaching a flow state, particularly in high-pressure situations like auditions, requires a delicate balance between

challenge and skill. If a musician feels overwhelmed by the challenge, anxiety can hinder flow, whereas too little challenge may lead to disengagement (Fullagar et al., 2013, pp. 250–255).

Musical performances do not occur in isolated settings; they take place in dynamic, open environments shaped by various factors over which musicians have limited or no control (Clark et al., 2014, pp. 20–21). In audition settings, this may include external elements such as the lighting or temperature of the audition room, pre-audition warmup rooms, the presence and behavior of a jury, or interactions with other candidates. This raises an important question: What tools and approaches should orchestras, as organizations, use to increase the sense of security and facilitate better flow for candidates during audition performances?

In my literature review for this concept, I found that while a significant number of studies focus on preventing or reducing MPA through psychological interventions, mixed methods, and medication (e.g., Hatfield, 2016; Raluca & Ginsborg, 2017; Spahn et al., 2016), there is relatively little research on how to improve the overall sense of security in this specific context. Gratto's research on audition anxiety interventions (1998) suggests that techniques such as relaxation exercises and rehearsing in the audition environment are among the most effective methods for reducing stress (p. 32). These strategies help foster a sense of security and confidence, allowing performers to feel more comfortable during auditions, which may, in turn, lead to better flow during their performances.

A study that was carried out with academy music students and the use of a virtual reality performance setting intervention showed an increase in sense of security during performance. The students that took part in the research have mentioned that it was a safe space to fail and improve. Aufegger (2017, p. 428)

The results provide evidence that students experience simulation training as an opportunity to strengthen positive attitudes towards the preparation, delivery and review of performance, reporting an interest in simulation

training as an intervention to facilitate a deeper awareness of the physical and psychological processes underpinning successful performances.

The UK musicians' union and the Finnish musicians' union websites have some recommendations on how to facilitate a fair audition. These recommendations focus mainly on ways to eliminate bias in auditioning processes and on accessibility to information to reach a more diverse pool of candidates, such as using a screen throughout the audition for all candidates, advertising the jobs in accessible language, ensuring panel members confidentiality of scoring, adequate warm-up conditions etc.

The use of a screened audition, as suggested by Golding and Rouse (2000, p. 737), can indeed help lower bias within the audition panel by focusing on the candidate's performance rather than external factors. This can create a more objective evaluation process based on talent and skill rather than personal biases. In terms of the candidate's sense of security, the use of a screened audition may also positively influence their confidence and comfort during the audition process. Knowing that their performance is being evaluated based on merit and talent rather than subjective factors can help alleviate some of the anxiety and pressure that candidates may feel during auditions.

This sense of fairness and objectivity can contribute to a more positive experience for the candidate and potentially enhance their performance. Overall, the use of a screened audition not only helps reduce bias within the audition panel but also has the potential to positively impact the sense of security and confidence of the candidate, leading to a more equitable and effective audition process.

In the following chapter, I will explore concepts that offer valuable insights into audition experiences and will form the conceptual framework for this study. These conceptualizations include the Seligman's PERMA model (2011) and Gibson's concept of affordances (1979). The PERMA model, which emphasizes Positive

Emotion, Engagement, Relationships, Meaning, and Accomplishment, will be examined concerning its potential to influence the well-being and flow of musicians in high-pressure environments. Additionally, Gibson's (1979) theory of affordances will be applied to understand how the physical and social environments of auditions can either support or hinder optimal performance. These frameworks will provide a deeper understanding of the factors that contribute to a more effective and supportive audition environment.

3 Conceptual framework

I have chosen PERMA model (Seligman, 2011) and the notion of affordances by Gibson (1979) as my conceptual frameworks for this study. The use of PERMA model in this study, can help look beyond the singular element of MPA in the process of orchestra auditions and give us a comprehensive understanding of how different stages of an audition can influence the overall wellbeing of a candidate.

Affordances can shape the actions orchestras take in facilitating auditions by influencing how they create opportunities and environments that enable candidates to perform at their best and have a positive overall experience. This concept provides a useful framework for understanding how the design of the audition process, including physical, social, and contextual factors, can enhance or limit a candidate's ability to succeed.

3.1 PERMA

PERMA model was developed to assist individuals in attaining peak well-being. This comprehensive model combines hedonic and eudaemonic components to provide a well-rounded perspective on well-being. Hedonic pursuits focus on seeking pleasure and immediate gratification as a pathway to happiness, while eudaemonic pursuits prioritize the pursuit of meaning, personal growth, and self-realization for long-term fulfilment. The distinction between hedonic and eudaemonic well-being lies in the emphasis on momentary pleasure versus sustained purpose and fulfilment in life. It recognizes that the path to flourishing is not uniform, as it is shaped by individual experiences and perspectives. Each person may derive varying degrees of satisfaction from the different elements of PERMA. The model focuses on five well-being elements: Positive Emotion, Engagement, Relationship, Meaning and Accomplishment.

Seligman's theories draw inspiration from Comte's positive philosophy, as both emphasize the value of concentrating on the positive facets of human experience and behaviour. Comte's positive philosophy promotes a scientific method for comprehending society and individuals, underscoring the importance of studying observable and measurable phenomena. Similarly, Seligman's positive psychology aims to enhance well-being, strengths, and virtues in individuals, moving beyond a narrow focus on pathology and dysfunction. Both Comte and Seligman underscore the importance of exploring and nurturing positive aspects of human nature to elevate overall happiness and fulfilment.

Enhancing overall well-being can be effectively facilitated through the augmentation of the fundamental components of the PERMA model. By strategically focusing on fostering positive emotions, engaging in meaningful activities, nurturing supportive relationships, seeking purpose and meaning in one's endeavours, and striving towards the accomplishment of personal goals, individuals can significantly elevate their overall sense of well-being and life satisfaction (Seligman, 2011). This academic perspective underscores the importance of integrating the PERMA elements into daily practices and behaviours to promote holistic well-being and psychological flourishing.

Positive Emotion circumscribes subjective experiences of happiness, hope, joy, and satisfaction. Engagement involves a state of flow that is characterized by focused attention and involvement in activities. Relationships play a crucial role in well-being, fostering connections and closeness with family, friends, and colleagues. Discovering meaning often comes from feeling connected to something greater than oneself, frequently arising through religious, spiritual, or advocacy involvement. Accomplishment, the final element, speaks to the pursuit of goals and achievements, requiring determination and resilience in pursuits such as academics, athletics, or career accomplishments (Seligman, 2011).

The PERMA model has been applied in the fields of music professionals and music education to assess the well-being of professional musicians (Ascenso et

al., 2018; Bonneville-Roussy & Vallerand, 2020). Additionally, research has explored the relationship between cognitive aspects of music students, such as musical sophistication, and their well-being during adult music learning (Cara et al., 2022). Cohen and Bodner (2018) suggest that their findings support Martin Seligman's recommendation: a dual approach that emphasizes promoting positive functioning alongside addressing and reducing harmful pathology can be effective in enhancing performance and supporting well-being (p. 534).

A research that looks into passion as a central element in well-being of musicians (Bonneville-Roussy & Vallerand, 2020) claim that in the field of music psychology and education, focus has primarily been on engagement, accomplishment, persistence, and performance as key elements of the PERMA model of well-being. However, aspects such as understanding the factors influencing positive emotions in music and the impact of social relationships on musical skill development have not received as much attention as engagement and accomplishment. The study also highlights that the aspects of meaning and fulfilment (M in the PERMA model) have been overlooked in music research (pp. 269–270). As a result, this study utilized the concept of "meaning" (Seligman, 2011) as a framework to explore the connection between passion and the wellbeing of musicians. In the context of the PERMA model of well-being by Seligman (2011), the validation of the Passion Scale Measure (PSM) enabled the exploration of the connections between passion and three key aspects of psychological well-being related to the "meaning" component: overall life satisfaction, feelings of personal growth, and sense of mastery (p. 275).

I believe that integrating aspects of the PERMA model into the orchestra audition process could further enhance candidates' well-being and overall experience. For example: By emphasizing Meaning (Seligman, 2011), candidates are encouraged to find purpose and significance in their audition journey, focusing on growth, learning, and self-improvement rather than solely fixating on the audition's outcome. Accomplishment (Seligman, 2011), within the PERMA framework, could play a crucial role in recognizing candidates' efforts and

achievements, fostering a sense of accomplishment by acknowledging strengths and areas for growth. By combining Meaning and Accomplishment within the PERMA model, candidates can cultivate a more fulfilling and enriching audition experience that prioritizes personal development and progress alongside the goal of securing a position in the orchestra.

3.2 Affordances

The term "Affordance" was notably introduced by James Gibson in "*The Ecological Approach to Visual Perception*" (1979). Affordances are central to a shift away from traditional cognitive theories that emphasize internal mental processes, focusing more on the environment's direct influence on perception. Gibson argued that the world inherently contains structured, meaningful information that can be perceived directly by the observer, without requiring extensive cognitive processing. This idea builds upon Gestalt psychology's concept of "valences," which suggests that the significance of objects in the environment is immediately obvious, inviting various forms of interaction.

For example, Gibson explained that a chair suggests the action of sitting, a handle implies it should be grasped, and objects inherently communicate how they should be used (p. 130). When observers engage with their surroundings, they naturally perceive the possibilities for action and interaction that are present. Gibson stated that "affordances are what the environment offers to an organism, what it provides or makes available, whether beneficial or harmful" (p. 119). Affordances are also characterized by a dual relationship: they are neither entirely subjective nor entirely objective but rather emerge from the interaction between the two (p. 129).

In Glăveanu's (2020) framework, affordances are understood as possibilities for creative engagement that are shaped by both material objects and social norms. These affordances emerge from the dynamic interaction between individuals and

their environment, functioning not as fixed properties of objects but as relational features. Building on Gibson's affordance theory, Glăveanu explains that creativity arises from the ongoing interplay between people and the social-material context they inhabit (2020, pp. 338–339).

Affordances—both material and social—are central to creative actions, as individuals actively perceive and engage with these opportunities in novel ways. The perception-affordance theory (PAT) of creativity emphasizes that creativity is not merely an internal cognitive process but heavily depends on how individuals perceive and act upon the possibilities in their environment. Creative individuals excel at identifying unconventional affordances and using them in innovative ways. (Glăveanu, 2020, p. 342.)

The concept of affordances has gained significant traction in various domains of research, including music studies. In this field, affordances have been explored from multiple perspectives, focusing on how musicians interact with their instruments, environments, and fellow performers. For example, the article "Music and Affordances" by Windsor and de Bézenac (2012) explores the relationship between music and the concept of affordances. The study emphasizes that music is an active engagement, where different individuals may perceive different affordances in the same musical piece, shaped by their unique environments, experiences, and social identities. Krueger (2013) introduced the idea of the "musically extended mind," applying the concept of affordances to suggest that musical cognition extends beyond the brain into the physical and social environment. He argues that musical instruments, performance spaces, and social interactions afford specific cognitive and emotional experiences that shape musical thinking. Similarly, Tullberg (2022) provides a conceptual framework for understanding the relationship between musicians and their instruments, emphasizing that this interaction encompasses not only the technical aspects of playing but also the embodied and cognitive experiences that instruments afford. She explores how different instruments create unique affordances that influence the way musicians think, feel, and perform. Rooney's

(2024) study, "The Ecological Dynamics of Trumpet Improvisation," further extends this discussion by examining trumpet improvisation through the lens of ecological psychology and dynamics. His research investigates how a trumpeter's improvisation is shaped by the interplay between physical, social, and environmental contexts, illustrating how musicians dynamically interact with their surroundings during performance. Together, these studies highlight the importance of affordances in shaping the cognitive, emotional, and creative processes involved in music-making.

However, despite the growing body of research on affordances in music, this concept has yet to be applied to the specific context of orchestra audition processes. Auditions are critical moments in a musician's career, often associated with high levels of performance anxiety and pressure. By considering the affordances within audition environments—such as the physical layout, organizational clarity, and social dynamics—there is significant potential to improve the audition experience. This gap in the research suggests that applying affordance theory to auditions could lead to new insights into how the environment can be structured to reduce stress, promote focus, and ultimately support musicians in reaching their full performance potential.

The literature review and conceptual frameworks in this study aim to provide a comprehensive understanding of the musician's world and the intricate nature of auditions, particularly their impact on overall well-being. Key psychological states, such as MPA and flow, are essential to understanding how musicians navigate performance challenges. Additionally, examining the professional conditions musicians face sheds light on their unique pressures and experiences. Evaluation and feedback further influence a musician's growth, shaping both their education and well-being throughout their careers. The integration of the PERMA model and notion of affordances creates a cohesive framework that links these concepts, offering a holistic approach to understanding the dynamics at play in auditions and their effects on musicians.

4 Implementation of the study

In this chapter, I will define the research question that serves as the focal point of the study and articulate the study objectives to establish a framework for the research. I will expound upon the methodology utilized to guarantee the robustness and credibility of the study, elaborate on the methods employed in data collection and analysis, and provide a detailed explanation of the data collection process to ensure precision and relevance. Additionally, I will delve into the data analysis methods applied to extract valuable insights. Finally, I will address the ethical considerations in this research to uphold the principles of integrity and confidentiality in relation to the study participants and the research community.

4.1 Research task and question

This study aims to explore the actions taken by orchestra audition panel members and organizations to ensure a more constructive and psychologically safe environment for candidates throughout the audition process. By examining the audition process from the perspective of affordances (Gibson, 1979)—opportunities for action provided by the environment—the study will identify actionable possibilities within the audition environment that support or hinder candidates' performance and overall well-being. It will also examine how physical, social, and organizational affordances interact to create a more psychologically safe environment.

To assess these affordances, the study will utilize the PERMA model to understand how specific actions during the audition process influence candidates' overall experience. Additionally, the study seeks to identify the responsibilities of both orchestra musicians and organizations in bettering the individual experience and well-being of audition candidates within the existing audition settings. To

achieve this aim, the study will focus on understanding and optimizing the logistical and pedagogical aspects of the audition process.

In this thesis, I search for the answer to the research question: In what ways could professional orchestras facilitate a more constructive audition process for their candidates?

4.2 Methodological starting points

My empirical research adopts a qualitative approach (Leavy, 2022, p. 19). The study is grounded in a Community-Based Participatory Research (CBPR) framework, designed to foster dialogue, identify key issues, and improve existing processes within the community and among the primary stakeholders connected to the research objectives (Leavy, 2022, p. 20). I posed semi-structured questions centered on audition facilitation, integrating my conceptual framework of PERMA (Seligman, 2011) to encourage meaningful dialogue among the various participants in the research group.

My research aligns with the interpretive paradigm or “*verstehen*” applied by Max Weber, which acknowledges that the understanding of reality is shaped by the social, cultural, historical, and personal environments in which individuals exist (Hennink et al., 2020, p. 17). Interpretations of experiences occur at an individual level but are frequently shaped by the larger social context (Hennink et al., 2020, p. 20). Consequently, constructions of reality and the derived meanings are commonly shared and comprehended within a collective framework (Hennink et al., 2020, p. 15).

Qualitative research is dedicated to investigating and comprehending the meanings, experiences, and viewpoints of individuals or groups (Hennink et al., 2020, p. 17). This approach entails gathering and examining non-numerical data, including interviews, observations, and text analysis, to better understand the

complexities of human behavior and social phenomena. Qualitative research allows researchers to delve deep into the context and nuances of a particular topic, providing rich and detailed descriptions that can inform theory and practice (Leavy, 2022, p. 9). It stands out for its unique ability to uncover insights from the viewpoint of study participants, delving into the meanings and interpretations they ascribe to behaviors, events, or subjects (Hennink et al., 2020 p. 10).

When facilitating an audition from beginning to end, for an orchestra musician position, there are different stakeholders involved in the process and therefore the community is composed of different actors of an orchestra organization that are involved in the audition process. In this research approach all participants are equally valued and will collectively identify key issues, problems and solutions (Leavy, 2022 p. 236).

CBPR is a “collaborative approach” (Israel et al., 1998, p. 177) to research that involves equitable partnerships between researchers and community members. In CBPR, community members are not just subjects of research but active participants in all stages of the research process, from identifying research questions to interpreting and disseminating results (Hennink et al., 2020, p. 52 ; Leavy, 2022, p. 10). This approach recognizes the expertise and knowledge that community members bring to the research process and aims to address issues of social justice and health disparities by involving those most affected by the research topic (Leavy, 2022, p. 109). By engaging with the community in a meaningful way, CBPR can lead to more relevant and impactful research outcomes that have the potential to drive positive social change (Israel, 2012, pp. 8–10). Applying the CBPR framework in this research helps recognize and revise the measurements that are taken by the orchestra when facilitating an audition and could enable change in the existing audition process, in pursuing a more constructive environment in all aspects of the facilitation of the audition.

4.3 Data construction

The study's data are gathered through a Community-Based Participatory Research (CBPR) approach and semi-structured interviews to foster dialogue. Utilizing semi-structured interviews (Kvale, 2009, p. 27) within the CBPR framework for investigating orchestra audition facilitation offers multiple advantages. This method strikes a balance between flexibility and structure, enabling researchers to explore various topics while ensuring consistency in data collection. Semi-structured interviews provide a deep exploration of participants' perspectives and experiences, resulting in rich, detailed data (Kvale, 2009, pp. 27–28). Furthermore, the open-ended format encourages meaningful dialogue and can reveal unforeseen themes or issues, thereby contributing to a more thorough understanding of the research focus.

The study community comprises five participants, including the audition producer, the orchestra manager, and three musicians from a major Finnish orchestra. An invitation email was sent to two major orchestras in Finland, inviting them to participate in the research. The email was addressed to the orchestra manager or communication manager of the organization. Upon receiving a positive response from one of the orchestras, I have proceeded to enquire the necessary permit from the city of Helsinki to continue with the recruitment of the participants. After enquiring the permits, a subsequent email was sent to the orchestra members (musicians) inviting them to take part in the research. Unfortunately, the musicians did not respond to the email. Therefore, I contacted them individually through a phone call or a written message explaining them about the research and its importance. My goal was to recruit between three to five musicians from the orchestra representing different instrument groups. I have successfully recruited three orchestra members with over 10 years of experience serving on audition panels, representing three distinct instrument groups. Additionally, I have enlisted the participation of the audition secretary/producer and the orchestra manager in the research project.

The group met three times for two and a half hours each session, totaling seven and a half hours, to delve into materials and ideas pertinent to the research topic. The questions and topics for discussion are derived from the insights of the literature review and conceptual frameworks. These meetings took place in March and April of 2024. All meetings were held at the orchestra's office spaces to ensure a safe and confidential environment. Each meeting commenced with a brief presentation that included, safer space guidelines, research question and aim, quick review of the PERMA model, two general questions and specific questions related to the meeting's topic. Given my extensive expertise in the field of orchestra auditions, gained through experience, and my engagement in writing and literature exploration on the topic, I took on the role of an active interviewer within the research group discussions. My primary objective was to steer the conversation in a progressive direction, fostering dialogue that delves into all aspects of the subject matter at hand.

General questions:

- What is our accountability to the candidate's wellbeing throughout the audition process?
- What is our role in one's development through audition making?

First meeting on 27th of March 2024, Subject: Invitation letter, audition and repertory, and pre-recordings. To encourage dialogue about these topics, I introduced open-ended questions related to each element.

Invitations:

- Who is typically invited to audition, and what criteria do you consider when deciding to invite a candidate? On what grounds?
- What information is typically included in the invitation, and when is it usually sent out?

- What factors do you take into consideration when crafting such an invitation, considering the PERMA elements?

Audition repertory:

- How do you select the repertoire for auditions and what factors do you take into account during this process?

Pre-recording:

- Have you explored the option of incorporating pre-recordings into the audition process?
- What are the potential pros and cons for both the orchestra and the candidates?

Second Meeting on 19th of April 2024 Subject: The audition day, the logistics and audition environment. To foster dialogue on these topics, I posed open questions regarding each element.

Audition Logistics

- What has been done till now to improve audition process for candidate and orchestra?
- When thinking about the logistics of an audition what is taken in consideration?

Audition environment

- In what ways can we support a candidate through the audition day?

- What could be the ideal environment during audition days, relating to PERMA elements?

Third meeting on 23rd of April 2024 Subject: Evaluation and feedback. In this session, I also introduced a solo performance assessment model by Russell (2015) and an approach to performance feedback by Hattie and Timperley (2007). To facilitate discussion on these topics, I posed open questions regarding each element.

Evaluation

- What system of evaluation do you use in auditions? Is it the same for all instruments?
- How could an evaluation tool help the jury in their decision making?
- What do we take under consideration when evaluating a candidate performance? What do you write in your notes?

Feedback

- What is your approach and thought process when crafting feedback? Do you follow a specific method or framework?
- Who should deliver the feedback?
- How to construct feedback in consideration of PERMA?
- Would the implementation of an evaluation system aid in providing more organized feedback?

During our sessions, participants, myself included, engaged in a rich dialogical conversation that delved into the multifaceted aspects of the orchestra audition process. Each individual brought forth a unique array of opinions, perspectives, and personal experiences, enriching the dialogue in meaningful ways. While our

conversations initially concentrated on specific elements of the audition, a remarkable sense of freedom and spontaneity emerged, allowing us to naturally explore related topics as they arose. This fluidity in conversation not only deepened our understanding of the main topic but also fostered connections to broader issues within the realm of performing arts and the landscape of orchestra auditions. Ultimately, our dynamic exchange of ideas not only encouraged self-reflection on our own experiences but also fostered mutual learning and a collective examination of the existing audition process.

All sessions, altogether seven and a half hours, were recorded and stored onto my computer. The recording was transcribed by me, altogether 240 pages of transcriptions (describe font size and line spacing here), and all private and identifying information was removed.

4.4 Data analysis

My research question for this study is: In what ways could professional orchestras facilitate a more constructive audition process for their candidates? To address this question, the study employs thematic analysis method (Braun & Clarke, 2016) aligning with Seligman's PERMA model (2011) and the notion of affordances, the actionable possibilities that an environment provides to an individual, shaped by the interplay between the individual's capabilities and the characteristics of the environment (Gibson, 1979). This method involves systematically identifying patterns and themes within the data to gain a deeper understanding of underlying information and insights. Thematic analysis enables the organization and interpretation of qualitative data by recognizing recurring patterns, trends, and meanings, facilitating a comprehensive analysis of the information (Braun & Clarke, 2016, p. 297).

The concept of affordances by Gibson (1979) offers a valuable understanding of how orchestras create constructive audition environments for their candidates. This perspective emphasizes the relationship between the environment and the individual highlighting how the features of an audition settings can facilitate or hinder a candidate's performance.

By adhering to Seligman's PERMA model, which emphasizes Positive Emotions, Engagement, Relationships, Meaning, and Accomplishments, the analysis aims to offer a holistic perspective on the data and extract valuable insights for further interpretation and practical application (see Figure 1). The research employs the PERMA model as a guiding framework and analytical tool to categorize the diverse activities carried out by an orchestra serving as an audition facilitator. This approach is intended to improve and streamline the audition process for candidates, ultimately enhancing their overall experience and potentially leading to improved outcomes.

After going through approximately seven hours of recordings from the research group, the conversations were transcribed into 240 pages. Upon careful review, irrelevant topics like greetings and small talk were excluded, along with repeated words such as "like," "mmm," "but," and "yeah." This process resulted in a refined transcript comprising 90 pages of meaningful conversation. The subsequent action involved replacing sensitive information, such as names, with numerical identifiers from 1-5. Instrument names associated with the research participants were substituted with "my instrument" or omitted from the sentence. When mentioning individuals within the group, their names were replaced by the corresponding numerical representation in the document. Similarly, names of orchestra staff were replaced with their job titles within the organization. For instance, "...What (name of person) has done..." was revised to "...What the General Manager of the orchestra has done...".

Once the text was organized and pseudonymized, I highlighted and selected phrases from the participants in the research group session related to the topics

discussed regarding the process of an orchestra audition. These topics include the invitation letter and information, repertoire selection, pre-recording audition, audition day logistics, candidate evaluation, feedback provision, jury preparation, and the overall audition process.

To facilitate the analysis of the material using the PERMA model, I have constructed a table. The audition topics discussed are listed on the horizontal axis, while the PERMA elements (Positive emotion, Engagement, Relationships, Meaning, and Accomplishment) are listed on the vertical axis. (Fig. 2)

Additionally, information from the community research group that aligned with multiple definitions of the PERMA model was grouped together. This approach enabled me to clarify the affordances (Gibson, 1979) of the actions taken by the orchestra and identify areas for improvement in relation to various aspects of the PERMA model.

- Positive emotion, Engagement and Accomplishment. (PEA)
- Positive Emotion, Relationship. (PR)
- Positive Emotion, Relationship, Accomplishment. (PRA)
- Positive emotion. (P)
- Engagement, Relationship, Meaning. (ERM)
- PERMA as a whole

Table.1: PERMA model of flourishing. Author, adapted from Seligman (2011)

| PERMA Model Domains | |
|----------------------------|---|
| Positive emotion | Happiness, hope and satisfaction, information, relaxation, self-control, fairness, appreciation and flow. |
| Engagement | involved in challenging but attainable activities, leading to a sense of flow and enjoyment. |
| Relationship | fostering connections with friends and colleagues, bonding, trust and communication with the organization |

| | |
|-----------------------|--|
| Meaning | Sense of purpose, reason and personal value. Being part of something greater than oneself. |
| Accomplishment | pursuit of goals and achievements, nurturing resilience and determination. |

Table.2

| | <i>Invitation letter, info.</i> | <i>Repertoire selection</i> | <i>Pre-recording selection</i> | <i>Day of the audition</i> | <i>Evaluation</i> | <i>Feedback</i> |
|-------------------------|-------------------------------------|---------------------------------|------------------------------------|--------------------------------|-------------------|-----------------|
| <i>Positive emotion</i> | | | | | | |
| <i>Engagement</i> | | | | | | |
| <i>Relationship</i> | | | | | | |
| <i>Meaning</i> | | | | | | |
| <i>Accomplishment</i> | | | | | | |

This approach, utilizing thematic analysis in conjunction with Seligman's PERMA model, has allowed for a systematic and nuanced exploration of the audition process within professional orchestras. By categorizing and analyzing data through the PERMA model—focusing on Positive Emotion, Engagement, Relationships, Meaning, and Accomplishment—I have been able to pinpoint specific actions that enhance or detract from the candidates' audition experience. This method not only organizes the data effectively but also clarifies the affordances of various practices within the audition process. The insights gained through this approach are intended to guide ongoing and future efforts to improve the orchestral audition process, ensuring it supports the well-being and success of future candidates.

4.5 Research ethics

In conducting this research, I comply to the ethical research principles established by the Finnish Advisory Board on Research Integrity (TENK) in both 2019 and

2023. These standards guarantee that participants engage on a voluntary basis and retain the option to withdraw from the study at any point without experiencing adverse repercussions. These guidelines served as a foundational framework for ensuring the integrity and ethical conduct of the study. To initiate this study, I obtained a research permit from the municipal authorities of Helsinki, which is valid until December 2024. All participants were duly informed about the study and the significance of their involvement therein. Participants were provided with a confidentiality agreement and a data collection protection information.

To cultivate a safe and inclusive environment for group dialogue, I established a set of "safer space guidelines." These guidelines are designed to promote respectful communication, active listening, and empathy among participants. By adhering to these guidelines, I aimed to create a space where all voices are valued and heard, and where individuals feel comfortable expressing themselves without fear of judgment or discrimination. The guidelines foster a supportive and constructive dialogue that encourages mutual understanding and collaboration.

In conducting research, it is crucial to uphold ethical standards by cultivating virtues such as honesty, reliability, humility, and conscientiousness (Bos, 2020, p. 45). These qualities are foundational to maintaining the integrity of the research process and ensuring that findings are accurate, trustworthy, and meaningful. As a researcher, I strive to reflect deeply on every aspect of my findings, recognizing that careful consideration and ethical diligence are essential to contributing valuable and credible knowledge to the academic community.

It is important to prioritize ethical considerations when conducting research. In this case, choosing not to test the findings in a real audition situation to avoid potentially compromising a candidate's musical future demonstrates a commitment to ethical research practices. The study's findings can still provide valuable insights and recommendations for orchestras to consider implementing in future audition processes. By focusing on the broader impact and potential benefits for the industry as a whole, the study can contribute positively to the field

of music audition facilitation. Furthermore, as a professional musician myself, I have actively participated in auditions for this specific orchestra in the past. I have no plans to audition for this orchestra in the future, my interest in conducting research with this particular organization is purely academic and devoid of any personal gain as a future viola candidate.

In this research, the selection of literature played a crucial role in understanding previous studies and ongoing research related to the study's focus. The quality, relevance, and breadth of the literature were carefully considered, drawing from both national and international sources, including peer-reviewed research from global scholars and institutions. Various fields of expertise, such as music education, music psychology, (positive) psychology, culture and medical science, were explored to provide a comprehensive understanding of the subject matter. The chosen literature not only investigates the key issues under examination and current research tendencies but also pinpoints gaps in existing knowledge and studies.

5 Findings

In this chapter, I will present the findings that respond to my research question: In what ways could professional orchestras facilitate a more constructive audition process for their candidates? These findings not only highlight the current efforts made by the orchestra to improve the audition process but also suggest additional ways to enhance it, with a particular focus on the wellbeing and development of the candidates.

The findings of this analysis are grounded in both data-driven insights and the conceptual foundation of Seligman's PERMA model (2011), combined with Gibson's (1979) concept of affordances. Each phase of the audition process is examined through the affordance framework, highlighting how it influences Positive Emotion, Engagement, Relationships, Meaning, and Accomplishment. By merging these perspectives, the findings offer a holistic view of how orchestras can foster a more supportive and effective audition environment, ultimately enhancing both individual experiences and organizational outcomes.

The findings are organized into three main topics:

- Affordances optimizing audition preparation
- Affordances increasing sense of security and flow on audition day
- Affordances enhancing candidate development post-audition

These categories are designed to comprehensively address the various stages of the audition process, focusing on key areas where improvements can be made to enhance the overall experience for candidates.

5.1 Affordances optimizing audition preparation

The findings related to optimizing audition preparation cover key areas such as jury preparation, audition repertoire selection, invitation and confirmation letters, and the use of pre-audition recordings.

Jury preparation

The participants in the research identified several strategies to optimize jury preparation, aiming to ensure consistency, clarity, and fairness throughout the audition process. Key efforts included the implementation of pre-audition meetings and the standardization of processes to create a more efficient and positive experience for both candidates and jury members.

Pre-audition discussions were highlighted as essential for aligning jury members on evaluation criteria and expectations. By fostering collaboration, these discussions contribute to a more consistent and fair assessment process, ultimately leading to a more positive experience for candidates. Participant 2 described the strategies to improve the jury preparation process as follows:

the jury of the audition or the core group of the jury should probably meet beforehand, when they discussed this repertoire and really think through what they're looking for... I think that helps with the positive result for everybody...then to mirror that to really be specific what kind of qualities you're looking for, and how do you want to test them? Or how do you want to kind of see how candidates do those things, and then when there's kind of a clear idea of those things that you're looking for and then it's easier to kind of point out that these one or two excerpts are for this matter.

Standardization of the audition process was strongly recommended by the participants. This includes pre-planning and organizing key elements such as repertoire selection and audition scheduling. Establishing audition dates that do not conflict with performances allows jury members to focus entirely on the

candidates, reducing distractions and enhancing their engagement. Consistency in the audition structure from one event to the next was seen as crucial to prevent variability that could lead to confusion or unfair outcomes.

The participants advocated for pre-audition meetings among section members to discuss their specific expectations for candidates. This intra-jury communication helps ensure that the section's needs are clearly articulated and understood by the entire jury, fostering a more collaborative and unified decision-making process.

Jury fatigue was recognized as a significant challenge, particularly in long or demanding audition processes. To address this, the participants suggested rotating jury members to prevent burnout and ensure sustained engagement throughout the auditions. This approach not only enhances the quality of the jury's assessments but also contributes to a more positive overall experience for the panel. Participant 2 addresses fatigue of jury in this way:

I would also add the organizing of the audition to find the dates. That's really important. For these kinds of auditions that if there are 40 people on the first day, and then the orchestra has a concert in the evening, that's a terrible, terrible, terrible idea to even consider that. Because it's such a different work mentality that you have to have and we're not machines. That's really important to try to find the dates that would be free or no concert.

Lastly, the research participants stressed the importance of making jury members feel valued and respected. Careful planning of schedules and minimizing unnecessary burdens on the jury, such as overly demanding timelines, were recommended as ways to ensure that the jury remains focused, engaged, and committed to delivering fair and consistent evaluations.

Audition repertoire selection

The participants identified key efforts that could optimize the audition experience by focusing on the careful selection and communication of the audition repertoire. The group emphasized the importance of providing the repertoire to candidates well in advance, recognizing that ample preparation time is crucial for reducing anxiety (Kegelaers et al. 2022, pp. 185–186). It was recommended that the repertoire be balanced, offering a mix of musical challenges while remaining achievable, to engage candidates without overwhelming them. Participant 3 described that: “When you announced the position, yes, you put the repertoire there so then everybody has the time they want to have to kind of work through it”.

Participant 1 explained it in this way:

You have to make it possible for them to learn it by picking repertoire that is short enough and not demanding where it like takes up all their time. But you also can't like spoon people because they have to be so interested in the position that they do the job.

One of the primary strategies proposed by the research participants was to ensure that communication surrounding repertoire, and the audition structure are clear and accessible to the candidate. Providing candidates with comprehensive logistical details and clear expectations ahead of time was seen to foster a positive relationship (Seligman, 2011, pp. 20–22) between the orchestra and the candidates.

By utilizing modern communication methods, the participants believed that candidates would feel more supported and informed, thereby improving their overall audition experience and enhancing their connection with the auditioning organization. Sharing details such as the order of audition rounds ahead of time was seen as a way to enhance candidates' sense of preparedness and reduce stress. Furthermore, the group highlighted the importance of designing repertoire that is compact, clear, and directly relevant to the position (e.g., tailored to specific

instrumental sections like high or low brass), to avoid unnecessary confusion and maintain candidate engagement.

They also emphasized that thoughtful repertoire selection should reflect an understanding of the candidates' potential, rather than imposing rigid benchmarks. This approach was recommended as a way to signal to candidates the qualities that the orchestra values, making the process more meaningful for both parties. By establishing clear evaluation criteria tied to specific repertoire selections, the research group believed that orchestras could focus the audition process more effectively and better identify the right repertoire for the audition. Participant 3 explains it in this way:

Choosing the pieces that are kind of for that position as we have low brass players or high brass players, and there are pieces that are quite telling if you technically can handle that position or requirements. So, starting point is that not to put too much stuff into the repertoire.

Even with two concertos or a concerto and a specific piece and a list of 10 basic orchestra excerpts you can pretty sure know what that person is capable of offering to you.

Audition invitation and confirmation letter

The research participants identified several key strategies to optimize the audition invitation and confirmation letter, aiming to create a more supportive and effective experience for candidates. These recommendations focus on clear communication, inclusivity, and strategic timing to reduce candidate stress and foster a positive relationship between the candidates and the orchestra.

The group believed that clear and transparent communication is critical to optimizing the audition process. Providing detailed information in both the invitation and confirmation letter—such as audition schedules, expectations, and logistical details—was seen as essential for reducing candidate anxiety and

making them feel secure and respected. They stressed the importance of providing specific details about each round of the audition, including the repertoire to be performed. This clarity helps candidates stay engaged and mentally prepared, enabling them to focus more effectively on their performance (Kenny, 2011, p. 291). Participant 1 addressed that in the following way:

there's like a document of expectation that was printed out or send an e-mail to their candidate. like, you'll show up to this, at this time we will do a lottery system this way. like all the stuff that we have in our process is explained, very kind of like point by point. And then the candidate can come in and they feel like they understand the process before they come in... I think that would make a see-through system for the candidate...

To ensure consistency and clarity, the group advocated for standardizing communication across all sections of the orchestra. They observed that variations in how different sections handle invitations can create confusion and inconsistency, and recommended a more unified approach to improve the overall experience for candidates.

The group also proposed including contextual information in the invitation, such as details about the orchestra's history with certain composers or specific pieces. This approach was seen as a way to add meaning to the audition process, helping candidates better understand the significance of their performance in relation to the orchestra's identity and artistic goals. Participant 2 pointed it out by saying:

but if there is like for example, if somebody doesn't know that we have a long history of Sibelius symphonies, if we have foreign candidates, then maybe there could be a sentence: Our orchestra has been premiering these symphonies a lot, and we have a long history with Sibelius music, and this is one of the biggest horn solos in one of the symphonies, and that's why it is included in this audition.

they highlighted the importance of providing detailed information at the right time, such as sharing the audition rounds and expectations about a week before the event. This timing was seen as crucial for helping candidates mentally prepare and approach the audition with confidence, ultimately leading to a smoother and more positive experience.

Finally, the group recognized the importance of cooperating with educational institutions. Inviting students to participate in auditions provides them with valuable experience and contributes to the future development of young musicians. Participant 5 shared this information with the group:

especially for the tutti auditions, we have invited more or less all students who are still at the Sibelius Academy, that has been cooperation with Sibelius Academy to have their students to have the chance to train for it because you can't really train it unless it's a real situation.

Use of Pre-recording audition in audition processes

The participants have identified several key findings regarding the use of pre-recorded video auditions in the audition processes for orchestras and similar institutions.

One of the key benefits of pre-recorded auditions is the increased accessibility it provides to candidates from diverse backgrounds and geographical locations. Allowing candidates to submit their performances remotely removes many of the logistical barriers associated with traditional in-person auditions. Candidates no longer need to bear the costs of travel, accommodation, or scheduling conflicts, thus making the audition process more inclusive. Additionally, the use of digital platforms such as Muvac has streamlined the submission process, simplifying the way candidates submit materials such as CVs and videos.

Invitations to submit pre-recorded auditions can generate excitement and anticipation among candidates, as they see these opportunities as potential steppingstones to further stages in the audition process. The flexibility of pre-recording allows candidates to prepare and present their performances in their own time and environment, reducing the pressure of live auditions. This flexibility fosters a sense of empowerment and ownership over their audition experience. Furthermore, the possibility of advancing from video submissions to live auditions or guest performances creates a sense of progression and accomplishment, which motivates candidates to engage more fully in the process.

The research group highlighted the importance of ensuring fairness in the pre-selection process. One suggested method to achieve this is to focus solely on the audio component during the initial review of pre-recorded videos as if the jury would have a screen. This approach can help mitigate biases related to appearance, gender, or other non-musical factors, allowing candidates to be evaluated primarily on their musical ability (Golding and Rouse 2000, p. 737). This emphasis on fairness not only improves the overall audition experience but also fosters trust between candidates and the organization. Participant 2 expressed it in this way:

The pre-audition recording just crossed my mind, as you (1) said, that you had the videos of the pre-audition and then your attention started to go to the picture at some point, so would it be possible to like just listen to the audio? It is sent to the audition as a video and sound but then in the audition you (5) the person to see and the committee just listens...then at least the pre-recording would be also kind of considered fair.

The research participants' findings underscore the significant benefits of incorporating pre-recorded video auditions into the audition process. Increased accessibility, enhanced fairness, transparency, and the potential to discover hidden talent make this approach a valuable tool for both candidates and orchestras.

5.2 Affordances increasing sense of security and flow on audition day

The findings of the community-based research group (participants) show that by creating a secure and supportive environment for candidates on the day of auditions candidates would probably have a better overall experience. Several key areas were identified where improvements could be made to help candidates feel more at ease, reduce stress, and foster a sense of accomplishment.

One significant suggestion was the elimination of the lottery system traditionally used on the day of auditions to determine the playing order that takes place about 30 minutes before the start of the first audition round. The participants found that this system introduces unnecessary stress and anxiety, which can negatively impact candidates' performance (Lehmann, 2007, pp. 147–149). Removing this element would allow candidates to focus more on their preparation and approach the audition with a clearer mindset, ultimately leading to a more positive and composed emotional experience. Participant 3 point it out in this way: “The biggest thing I think that puts you under the most stress in the audition is the lottery just before the audition. that is one of the things that should be absolutely discarded from the process.”

The provision of private rehearsal spaces was also highlighted as a crucial factor in reducing pre-audition anxiety. These rehearsal rooms give candidates a place to practice in private, helping them feel more comfortable, and appreciated by the organization. The ability to rehearse in a calm and quiet environment directly contributes to positive emotion, which can lead to better flow in performance (Kenny, 2011, p. 291). Participant 5 explains how it is done in their audition process:

There have been a few auditions, let's say 40 invited guests. We will have always the groups as many rooms as we have available, so we have a

maximum of 15 rooms available or rehearsal rooms that everyone will get their own rehearsal room.

Logistical support was another essential aspect identified by the participants. It is not enough to provide candidates with comprehensive information well in advance of the audition day, such as detailed schedules, expectations, and repertoire requirements, but having a person from the organization such as the audition producer to logistically support uncertainties throughout the audition day. This level of preparation and attention to the candidate fosters a more positive emotional environment by helping candidates feel confident and oriented thus reducing the anxiety associated with the unknown on the audition day.

The findings underscored the importance of stress management and consideration for candidates during auditions. Allowing adequate breaks between audition rounds, typically 15 to 20 minutes, was recommended to help reduce stress and give candidates time to mentally prepare. This practice reflects a genuine concern for candidates' well-being and emotional state, recognizing that rushed transitions between rounds can be overwhelming and mentally exhausting.

An important point was raised during the discussion addressing the process of jury voting during the audition. They emphasized the importance of maintaining anonymity in voting processes, which helps mitigate personal biases between jury members and supports a fairer outcome. This also promotes a more positive emotional atmosphere among jury members by reducing potential tensions related to subjective decision-making.

Additionally, respecting candidates' effort was highlighted as an essential part of fostering a positive audition experience. The participants noted that committees generally allow candidates to play through their pieces, even if the performance is not outstanding. This approach demonstrates an understanding of the effort and distance candidates may have traveled to audition, emphasizing fairness and

respect for their commitment, which in turn contributes to a more positive and respectful audition process. Participant 5 explains how the committee gives the chance to the candidates to play, in this way:

Depending on the committee and somehow of the toughness of the chairperson, we don't want to listen if he or she is s***, we don't listen to it. But most of the time, nine times out of 10, I think they let them play till the end. I think just the idea someone has come all the way from Korea to Helsinki and then you get a 10 second chance instead of listening to you for 1 1/2 minutes, why not?

The findings also emphasized the importance of creating a safe and encouraging space for candidates during the audition. The research participants raised the question of whether the jury's mentality should shift from being pressure-driven to being more supportive. They suggested that the goal of the audition process should be to provide a platform where candidates feel safe to perform at their best. Participant 2 was addressing this by raising a question:

I would really think about that audition day. What's the mentality of the jury? Is it testing? Do you really want to put the people under pressure, or do you want to give them a platform that they can actually feel safe and try to do their best under the circumstance that we are giving them?

For instance, in later rounds, allowing the candidates to choose the order of the pieces played in the round and giving candidates a second chance to replay certain sections coupled with constructive feedback from the jury—such as adjustments to tempos or styles—could alleviate pressure, enabling candidates to correct mistakes, engage more fully, and better showcase their abilities. This approach can foster a notion of self-control, and a growth mindset, therefore helping candidates improve throughout the audition process and achieve a greater sense of accomplishment.

The social environment was another area of focus. The group recommended creating a comfortable and socially supportive atmosphere where candidates could relax, interact with others, or find privacy as needed. The presence of amenities such as board games and comfortable quiet waiting areas was seen as beneficial in fostering a positive social experience. This supportive environment helps candidates feel more connected to the audition process and allows them to build relationships with one another, reducing the sense of isolation. Participant 5 explains the facilities that exist in their auditions to create a supportive environment for the candidates:

We have amounts that are manageable. The candidates all fit in our rooms. In our facility there's the couch, there is massaging chair. People can play chess, whatever there, and you see, obviously they many times, many of them know each other and they just hang out and someone wants to be alone in the and they can do it because they have their own room.

Visibility and acknowledgment of candidates were also identified as key factors. The participants stressed the importance of ensuring that no candidate feels invisible, particularly those who advance to later rounds. This acknowledgment helps candidates feel seen and valued, which can give deeper meaning to their participation in the audition process.

Moreover, the findings address the importance of recognizing candidates' contributions beyond just their audition performance. The group discussed the need for internal advocacy within the orchestra for candidates who may have underperformed due to nerves but have shown potential in the past. This approach underscores that the audition experience is about more than just technical proficiency—it's also about recognizing and valuing candidates as individuals, which can provide a more meaningful experience for both candidates and orchestra members. Participant 5 explains the process in place:

...if it's behind the screen and someone really you know of has played three years in the orchestra, you know you want them to advance and they, you know, mess up behind the screen, terribly nervous. And after the voting I tell, OK, for the next round, these will advance and these people will go home. Then the section can pion out," well, hey, but we would like this person to advance, although he or she didn't get points". So, they have like Vito.

Finally, the participants highlighted that providing rehearsal opportunities can enhance candidates' sense of positive emotion, accomplishment, and readiness. Allowing candidates to rehearse with a pianist before the audition helps them refine their performance and eliminates the uncertainty of playing with an unfamiliar accompanist. This preparation can foster a sense of self-control, reduce anxiety, and support psychological preparation (Kenny, 2011, p. 291) thus promoting a more fluid and confident performance.

In summary, the findings indicate that by focusing on reducing stress and creating a supportive and inclusive environment, orchestras can improve the audition experience for candidates. These strategies help foster a sense of security, confidence, and flow, ultimately enabling candidates to perform at their best and feel valued throughout the audition day.

5.3 Affordances enhancing candidate development post-audition

The findings reveal that placing an emphasis on structured evaluation criteria and delivering meaningful feedback can enhance the support provided to candidates for their post-audition development. By utilizing a structured evaluation form, the audition process becomes more consistent and transparent, allowing jurors to align on expectations and criteria in advance evaluation. Furthermore, feedback, especially when it is thoughtful, specific, and delivered constructively, plays a role in helping candidates reflect on their performance, identify areas for improvement, and prepare for future opportunities.

Evaluation

Participants in the study highlighted the role of structured evaluation criteria in building consistency and fairness during orchestra auditions, observing how these actions can create affordances that support candidate development post-audition.

One key insight was that introducing a structured evaluation form such as Russell's model (2015) contributes to more consistent and transparent decision-making. By discussing the evaluation criteria in advance, the audition committee can align on expectations, which was seen as reducing ambiguity and fostering a fairer and less stressful process for candidates. As feedback can be very subjective (Barry, 2009, p. 250), participants noted that this alignment is particularly valuable for promoting a sense of equity, as it ensures that all candidates are judged against the same standards.

Additionally, some participants recommended that using the evaluation form as an optional tool, rather than making it mandatory, allows for flexibility. This approach still offers structure and guidance to jurors who prefer it, while accommodating different evaluation styles, thus promoting a positive audition environment. Participant 3 addresses how this can be done in the audition:

What I find really interesting, would be this kind of form that 1 had, and based on this form as well or this system that the section and maybe some key principles around we've discussed beforehand what they're looking for and then let know the panel on the second day, and discuss about that. Make this kind of form that has all these things. Then give it to them who want to use it but it wouldn't be a must.

Another participant's finding highlighted how structured evaluation forms can potentially enhance engagement throughout the audition process. Visual tools, such as forms with checkmarks or stars, along with the combination of open-ended sections, make it easier for the jury to track and remember key details about each candidate. This approach ensures that no important observations are overlooked, and potentially leads to more informed and accurate final decisions. Ultimately, these structured tools were thought to contribute to a fairer and more satisfying audition process for all parties involved. Participants 2 and 3 address how this could be implemented in the audition:

No. 2: When they are mentioned and you can see them on the form, you can actually make a star... Then it's visual also for the jury members to kind of remember... They can kind of start to mirror better towards yeah, towards the wishes of the section. I'm a visual person, that would help me.

No. 3: ... Having a kind of a form you can take before the audition when you go to the jury where you have 25 Candidates and for every single one you can maybe have a little more detailed... you have check mark something and then maybe an open row in the end you can put something more if it needs something.

Additionally, they suggested that keeping the curtain up for most rounds (until fewer than five candidates remain in the audition) helps maintain engagement by ensuring that the focus stays on musical performance rather than appearance, (Golding & Rouse, 2000, p. 737) further reinforcing a fairer and more inclusive process.

Participants acknowledged the challenges posed by the limited time available during auditions, particularly when musicians prefer extended trial periods to assess a candidate's fit within the orchestra. They suggested that the evaluation form can help bridge this gap by providing a more thorough and structured assessment of each candidate within these time constraints. By capturing

detailed observations, the form allows jurors to develop a clearer understanding of a candidate's potential fit within the orchestra, even without the benefit of an extended trial period.

Participants also emphasized that structured evaluation criteria can create a sense of meaning in the audition process. A standardized evaluation form ensures that specific excerpts and skills are systematically assessed, which helps to prevent any aspect of a candidate's performance from being overlooked. This systematic approach brings added significance to the audition by demonstrating that every part of the performance is valued.

Additionally, participants suggested that previous experience in the orchestra could be recognized and valued during evaluations, adding further meaning to the candidate's contributions. By acknowledging both past involvement and current performance, the jury can offer a more comprehensive evaluation that reflects the full scope of the candidate's abilities and history with the orchestra. Participants 1 and 2 explain it in this way:

No. 1: What's interesting is to have the audition committee write down from that form or from some kind of standardized form, like each excerpt and what it brings out. If we could have XX's for each excerpt, that could be interesting and also can indorse form.

No. 2:" The jury would also value the work that you have, if you have been working in the orchestra before and so they would value that time as well."

Finally, participants observed that a detailed evaluation form facilitates the creation of accomplishment for both jurors and candidates. The structured nature of the form enables jurors to provide more meaningful feedback, which helps candidates reflect on their performance after the audition.

Feedback to Candidate

The participants emphasized that providing feedback to candidates that did not progress forward in the audition, can be emotionally challenging for both the jury and the candidates. To mitigate this difficulty, they suggested that written feedback is often preferred over face-to-face interactions. Written responses would allow jurors to offer more thoughtful and constructive feedback without the immediate pressure of a personal encounter, creating a more positive and supportive experience for candidates. However, participants also cautioned that feedback must be delivered carefully—harsh or poorly communicated feedback can have negative emotional impacts, underscoring the need for considerate and empathetic communication. I am explaining it in this way:

Tal: I do think when you have 40 people and let's say 30 of them, of course, did not pass. I think, emotionally it's demanding to come to each one and say something face to face. You don't have the time; you don't have the patience and written feedback in that sense is a better option.

Participant 5 also addressed this matter:

The feedback..., it seems to be really harsh on musicians. It's really visible straightforward, but very often you're trying to make it so much nicer. Yeah. And then feedback to the candidates, that's the thing that, like I said, it's done a bit differently all the time. But surely much easier after a day to type it down than after 5 minutes to be face to face.

Regarding engagement, participants observed that not all jury members are equally comfortable or willing to provide feedback. In many cases, the responsibility for delivering feedback is assigned to specific individuals, such as the concertmaster or those who are particularly skilled in offering it kindly and constructively. This approach helps ensure that feedback is given by those who are most engaged with the process and who can deliver it in a way that supports the candidate's development. Encouraging participation from individuals who are

comfortable with this task was seen as crucial for maintaining engagement and ensuring that candidates receive helpful and constructive responses. Participant 5 expresses this in this way:

I feel most of the committee don't want to give feedback. It's most of the time given or ask, you are the concert master who gives the feedback...Active people for example, like in the second violin, who is a really nice person and surely, he's capable of giving nice feedback. You know, you choose most of the time the people who are willing to do that and partially what we can do is then remind please be gentle and point out the you know, encourage them and things like that.

The research participants also noted that preserving professional relationships is an important consideration when providing feedback. In some orchestras, feedback is delivered anonymously through an audition producer, which helps avoid potential conflicts or negative reactions. This anonymous approach allows jurors to provide honest feedback while protecting personal relationships and preventing biases from influencing the process. By keeping feedback anonymous, the jury can focus on supporting the candidate's growth without risking personal tensions or misunderstandings. Participant 2 explains how it is done in their audition process and why:

It's handled through our audition producer. In our auditions, at least in woodwinds, people don't want to give direct feedback, because that has caused some shitstorms in the past. It's kind of handled anonymously, and so the feedback doesn't come from one certain person.

The value of feedback was further emphasized in its ability to create meaning for candidates. Constructive feedback (Hattie & Timperley, 2007, p. 87), they suggested, offers significant value by providing candidates with clear, actionable insights into their performance, such as intonation or technical execution. Participants suggested that using a standardized form for feedback could help

ensure that all candidates receive detailed and useful insights. This type of feedback goes beyond superficial comments and guides candidates in improving for future auditions, which supports their professional development. Participant 3 addressed this in this way:

I think what can be done is keeping the feedback always to specific things that if you can single out that the intonation was not good, you had quite a lot of passages that were a bit too sharp. That is specific feedback that can help the candidate...having a form where you can easily check out some things that you can give feedback to the candidates.

Overall, the findings highlight that structured evaluation criteria and thoughtful feedback processes can significantly improve both the experience and outcomes for candidates during orchestra auditions. By fostering consistency, fairness, and engagement, these practices help jurors make more informed decisions while also supporting the candidates' professional growth. The use of structured forms, visual tools, and considerate feedback mechanisms ensures that candidates receive meaningful insights into their performances, enabling them to identify areas for improvement and enhancing their chances of success in future auditions. Ultimately, these actions create a more positive, constructive, and equitable audition environment for all participants.

Feedback from candidate

Research findings from the participants show that asking for candidates' feedback can play a pivotal role in fostering engagement, creating meaning, and eliciting positive emotions throughout the audition process. The sense of agency can enhance their overall engagement, as the audition process is no longer viewed as a one-sided evaluation but as a more dynamic interaction where candidates' perspectives matter. The ability to contribute suggestions for improvement can instill a sense of purpose and ownership, which translate into more engaging participation. Participant 2 was suggesting what question could be included in the feedback form:

would there be a kind of a space for us to ask the candidate, how would you make audition better, the system? Do you have suggestions to make audition system better? because everybody knows it's so weird and it's and there's no other way.

Participant 4 reflected on the benefits of such a form:

Yeah, I think it's very healthy for us always. Even we think we have a good audition structure already, and I think it's very good to scrutinize them a little bit. That we don't just act with our assumptions that everything is OK.

The participants acknowledged that the current audition system has limitations and that finding a better approach may require input from those with firsthand experience—namely, the candidates themselves. Moreover, participants believed that the orchestra audition process could become more meaningful if candidates felt their feedback directly influenced and improved the system. This would lead to a more personalized, human-centered approach, potentially fostering a greater sense of engagement, meaning and ownership among participants.

6 Discussion and Conclusions

This study explored the actions taken by orchestra audition panel members and organizations to create a more constructive and psychologically safe environment for candidates throughout the audition process, as well as potential actions that could further enhance this supportive atmosphere. Orchestral auditions have long been identified as a primary source of overwhelming anxiety for musicians, which can negatively impact both their performance and overall well-being (Kenny et al., 2014, p. 19). By using the PERMA model and the concept of affordances, this study analyzed how logistical decision-making by orchestras and audition producers takes candidate well-being into account during the audition process. The findings indicate that adjustments made by orchestras and organizations can have a significant impact on the audition environment, supporting candidates' development and mental health, by reducing MPA (Kenny, 2010, p. 433) therefore elevating their sense of self-control and eventually increasing performance flow (Csikszentmihalyi, 1997, p. 36).

6.1 The PERMA model as an analytical framework

The application of thematic analysis aligned with Seligman's PERMA model has provided a structured and insightful approach to analyzing the audition process within professional orchestras. By systematically categorizing and examining the data through the lens of PERMA's elements—Positive Emotion, Engagement, Relationships, Meaning, and Accomplishment—this study identified key areas where orchestras excel and where improvements can be made to enhance the audition experience for candidates. The use of the PERMA model as both a guiding framework and analytical tool has deepened the understanding of the audition process and highlighted the specific actions taken by orchestras that can contribute to a more constructive and supportive audition environment. These insights are crucial for informing strategies to create a more positive and

psychologically safe audition environment, ultimately contributing to the well-being and success of the candidates.

As an analytical tool, PERMA can and should be used to examine how audition environments impact candidates, particularly from their own perspective. By focusing on the five elements of PERMA, the model offers a comprehensive framework to assess how these factors influence candidates' experiences during auditions. This approach allows for a deeper understanding of how specific audition environments and actions either support or hinder the psychological safety and overall well-being of participants.

Table 3 combines data from **Tables 1** and **2** (see subchapter 4.4, Data analysis). It illustrates how the PERMA model can serve as an analytical framework to understand how logistical and pedagogical considerations in orchestra auditions influence various elements of a candidate's well-being. Additionally, this table provides recommendations for improving the audition process to enhance candidates' overall experience and well-being.

Table 3. A combination of tables 1 and 2

| | | |
|------------------|---|---|
| Positive Emotion | Happiness, hope and satisfaction, information, relaxation, self-control, fairness, appreciation and flow. | A comprehensive and thoughtfully designed audition process is essential. The invitation and confirmation letter should provide extensive information regarding the audition, including the date, time, location, and details about the use of screens, as well as whether a lottery system or pre-assigned playing times will be implemented. Additionally, the facilitating orchestra should strive to provide individual warm-up rooms and designated quiet areas on the day of the audition to enhance the candidates' experience. |
| Engagement | involved in challenging but attainable activities, leading to a sense of flow and enjoyment. | The jury should carefully curate the repertoire list before announcing the vacancy. It should be a concise yet comprehensive selection that candidates can adequately prepare within a three-month timeframe. Including the selected pieces for the first |

| | | |
|----------------|---|--|
| | | round in the confirmation letter could help improve task focus and enhance performance flow. |
| Relationship | fostering connections with friends and colleagues, bonding, trust and communication with the organization | Creating designated quiet spaces for candidates to interact while waiting for their turn to play. Assigning staff members to communicate with candidates throughout the audition process to offer support on various matters related to the audition. |
| Meaning | Sense of purpose, reason and personal value and being part of something greater than oneself. | Creating an anonymous feedback form for candidates to complete after their audition allows them to contribute to improving the audition process, giving them a sense of purpose and personal value. Recognizing that each audition constitutes a significant experience for the candidate, it is important to consider its implications for subsequent auditions. This understanding facilitates the development of a learning pathway for the musician. |
| Accomplishment | pursuit of goals and achievements, nurturing resilience and determination. | Providing constructive feedback based on a detailed evaluation of the candidate audition can support the determination and resilience that are needed to continue pursuing the goal of winning an orchestra position. |

6.2 The value of affordance framework in addressing the research question

The affordance (Gibson, 1979) framework proved invaluable in addressing the research question: In what ways could professional orchestras facilitate a more constructive audition process for their candidates? By focusing on the environmental factors that shape candidates' experiences, the framework helped uncover specific strategies that orchestras can use to improve each phase of the audition process. It emphasized the importance of designing auditions not just as assessments but as experiences that support candidates' emotional well-being, engagement, and professional growth.

In applying the framework, the study highlighted how orchestrating affordances for Positive Emotion (e.g., reducing anxiety through clear communication), Engagement (e.g., thoughtful repertoire selection), Relationships (e.g., feedback and inclusivity), Meaning (e.g., aligning repertoire with the orchestra's values), and Accomplishment (e.g., fair evaluation processes) can create a more positive audition environment. This perspective allows orchestras to approach auditions comprehensively, recognizing that each element of the process contributes to the overall experience and to the candidates' professional journey.

In sum, the affordance framework illuminated practical ways for orchestras to reimagine the audition process. By adopting candidate-centered practices that promote PERMA dimensions, orchestras can create an audition environment that not only attracts talented musicians but also fosters a positive, supportive experience that aligns with broader organizational values. This holistic approach has the potential to benefit both candidates and orchestras alike, enhancing individual experiences and fostering a stronger, more inclusive artistic community.

6.3 Enhancing the audition experience and fostering positive emotion

Based on the findings, improving the orchestra audition process not only benefits individual musicians but also enhances the overall audition experience for the orchestra itself. Clarifying audition goals, attracting the desired caliber of musicians, and ultimately refining the audition process can lead to more successful outcomes for both parties.

For a musician seeking a position in an orchestra, the audition process often involves multiple auditions, each audition serving as a valuable learning experience for the next one. Viewing each audition as part of a continuous learning journey can build confidence and foster the positive emotions needed to

sustain resilience throughout the process. According to Seligman's (2011) theory of positive emotion, cultivating emotions such as hope, joy, and flow can significantly enhance one's ability to cope with challenges and maintain motivation. In the context of orchestra auditions, this research indicates that orchestras fostering positive emotions in candidates can be achieved by promoting flow, hope, and satisfaction, as well as providing clear information, opportunities for relaxation, a sense of self-control, fairness, and genuine appreciation. Whether an audition is successful or not, it contributes to the musician's development, making it essential to approach each audition as a crucial step in a broader pedagogical journey. This perspective helps maintain motivation and encourages perseverance, which are vital for sustaining resilience throughout the often-challenging audition process (Seligman, 2011, chapter 8).

Through participation in multiple auditions, candidates gain valuable experience and exposure to various audition processes, which can either contribute to or hinder their overall performance and confidence. Repeated exposure allows candidates to become more familiar with the demands and expectations of auditions, potentially boosting their self-assurance and adaptability. However, inconsistent or negative audition experiences may have the opposite effect, undermining their confidence and affecting their ability to perform at their best. Additionally, the opportunity to engage in various auditions enables individuals to refine their techniques, receive constructive feedback, and continuously improve their craft, further enhancing their chances of success in future auditions.

This exposure can contribute to the growth and development of aspiring performers in the highly competitive realm of orchestral auditions. Acknowledging the orchestra's responsibility in the development of individual musicians is paramount for the growth and success of each musician. By recognizing this accountability, orchestras can create an environment that nurtures and supports musicians' growth, providing them with opportunities to showcase their talents and refine their skills through auditions.

6.4 The role of engagement and relationship throughout the audition process

The findings of this study show that the audition process for the job-seeking musician begins the moment the orchestra's audition announcement is published. The language and details in the advertisement are crucial in influencing a candidate's decision to apply. Clear and comprehensive information allows potential candidates to make informed decisions about whether to pursue the opportunity based on the job description. This initial communication is essential for attracting and engaging qualified applicants.

It is important to recognize that preparation time for an audition varies among candidates. Therefore, when inviting candidates, it is vital to consider these differences and ensure that the provided audition materials—such as the list of excerpts, solo pieces, and logistical details—are aligned with the preparation time available. This thoughtful approach fosters a positive relationship (Seligman, 2011, pp. 20–22) with candidates and enhances their overall audition experience.

Audition day can evoke a complex blend of excitement and anxiety for candidates, often leading to significant MPA, as noted by Kenny (2012, p. 19). In the context of orchestra auditions, crafting an environment that nurtures flow (Csikszentmihalyi, 1997, p. 36) during performance can play a vital role in reducing MPA. Research exploring the interaction between challenge, skill balance, and MPA reveals that a musician's perceived skill level influences their experience of flow and anxiety. For lower-skilled musicians, flow may occur more consistently, regardless of task complexity, which correlates with lower anxiety levels. In contrast, more skilled musicians may feel increased anxiety when performing simpler pieces, as this allows their cognitive focus to shift to more analytical processes, which can disrupt the flow state (Fullagar et al., 2013, p. 250). Therefore, in auditions, it is essential to calibrate the difficulty of tasks to challenge higher-skilled performers while reducing opportunities for distraction,

which can hinder performance and heighten anxiety. This approach aligns with Dietrich's theory of "transient hypofrontality" (Dietrich & Stoll, 2010), where a temporary reduction in higher cognitive activity facilitates flow, and with distraction theory (Beilock & Carr, 2011; Lewis & Linder, 1997), which explains how irrelevant thoughts can interfere with performance and amplify anxiety. By thoughtfully structuring auditions to enhance flow by minimizing distractions and optimizing task complexity, performance quality can improve, and MPA can be effectively managed.

A supportive environment, which includes elements such as knowing the repertoire for each round in advance, familiarization with the audition room, opportunities for pre-audition rehearsal with a pianist, access to individual warmup rooms, and designated quiet areas, can help reduce MPA. These conditions enhance the likelihood of candidates entering a state of "Flow" during their performances hence increasing engagement (Seligman, 2011, pp. 16–17) in the audition process and one's performance.

6.5 The role of meaning and accomplishment in auditions

One of the key insights from this study is the importance of incorporating the concepts of Meaning (Seligman, 2011, p. 17) and Accomplishment (Seligman, 2011, pp. 18–19) into orchestra auditions. By guiding candidates to find significance in their audition experiences through growth, learning, and self-improvement, rather than solely focusing on the outcome, orchestras can foster a more supportive environment. Acknowledging the efforts and achievements of all candidates, regardless of the final result, cultivates a culture of accomplishment. This approach encourages candidates to recognize their strengths and areas for growth, thereby fostering a more fulfilling audition journey where personal development is valued alongside the goal of orchestra placement. An elaboration on this idea is as follows:

1. Shifting the focus from outcome to process:

Traditionally, auditions have been viewed as high-stakes events where the primary focus is on securing a position. This outcome-centric approach can create significant stress and anxiety for some candidates, often leading to a narrow focus on achieving success at any cost. By incorporating meaning and accomplishment, the audition process can be reframed as an opportunity for personal and artistic growth. Candidates are encouraged to view the audition not merely as a test of their current abilities but as a valuable learning experience that contributes to their overall development as musicians.

2. Fostering a growth mindset:

When candidates are guided to find meaning in the audition experience, they are more likely to adopt a growth mindset. This perspective emphasizes the importance of effort, learning from challenges, and recognizing that abilities can be developed over time (Lehmann, 2007, pp. 54–59). In this context, auditions become a platform for self-discovery and skill enhancement, where candidates are encouraged to identify their strengths and areas for improvement. This shift in focus helps reduce the fear of failure and promotes resilience, as candidates learn to view setbacks as opportunities for growth rather than as definitive judgments of their worth.

3. Cultivating a Supportive Audition Environment:

Acknowledging the efforts and accomplishments of all candidates, regardless of the final outcome, is crucial in creating a supportive environment. This approach recognizes that every candidate brings something valuable to the table, whether it be their unique interpretation of the music, their commitment to preparation, or their courage in participating in the audition process. By acknowledging these efforts, orchestras can help candidates feel valued and respected, which can lead to a more positive and fulfilling audition experience.

4. Balancing Personal Development with Professional Goals:

While the ultimate goal of an audition may be to secure a position within an orchestra, the inclusion of meaning and accomplishment ensures that personal development is also valued. Candidates who focus on growth and learning are likely to experience a deeper sense of fulfillment, regardless of the outcome (Adams, 2019, pp. 25–26). This balanced approach helps to sustain long-term motivation, as candidates recognize that their journey as musicians is ongoing and that each audition is an important part of that journey.

5. Creating a Culture of Accomplishment:

When orchestras emphasize the importance of meaning and accomplishment, they contribute to a culture that values continuous improvement and personal achievement. This culture can have a ripple effect, influencing not only the candidates but also the wider musical community. By fostering an environment where growth and effort are recognized and rewarded, orchestras can help to cultivate a new generation of musicians who are resilient, reflective, and committed to lifelong learning.

This approach of incorporating Meaning and Accomplishment not only has the ability to enhance the well-being (Seligman, 2011) and development of individual musicians but also contributes to a more positive and sustainable culture within the musician community.

6.6 Research participants' feedback and future directions

Feedback from research participants highlights the importance of establishing general guidelines for conducting auditions that are rewarding for both candidates and jury members. Participants emphasized the need to improve the audition process and to enhance the effectiveness of those serving on the jury. This suggests a clear need for orchestras to seek support in refining their audition practices.

Engaging professional facilitators—experienced musicians with firsthand audition experience and expertise in areas such as MPA, Positive Psychology, and Music Pedagogy—can play a crucial role in enhancing the audition process. These specialists can help orchestras develop practices that benefit both the candidates and the ensemble, ensuring a process that supports the growth and success of all involved.

To the best of my knowledge, this is the first study to specifically focus on orchestra audition environments. Through a comprehensive literature review, I identified a significant gap in research on the audition process, underscoring the need for further investigation. This study, being qualitative and conducted with a single orchestra, provides insights into one particular audition setting. However, to gain a more complete understanding of orchestra auditions and uncover broader areas for improvement, future research should incorporate quantitative methods, comparative studies, and diverse analytical tools. This expanded approach will offer a more comprehensive view of how audition processes can be optimized across different contexts.

This research explored how orchestras can improve the audition experience by creating a more supportive environment that enhances the sense of security and well-being for musicians. Specifically, it examined how the audition environment and logistical decisions made by the facilitating orchestra can reduce Music Performance Anxiety and foster flow. The findings emphasize that orchestras have numerous opportunities to improve the audition process by considering candidates' wellbeing and pedagogical development. Logistical adjustments at each stage can create a more constructive environment, resulting in reduced anxiety, a more positive experience for candidates, and a more effective audition process for the orchestra.

To ensure the trustworthiness of this research, I grounded it in an extensive, interdisciplinary literature review spanning fields closely related to music

psychology and music pedagogy. This approach integrates insights from diverse sources, establishing a strong theoretical foundation. My lifelong experience with orchestral auditions—as both a candidate and observer—also adds practical depth and authenticity to the study. To further enhance rigor and quality, I used the PERMA model (Seligman, 2011) and affordances (Gibson, 1979) framework as guiding lenses; PERMA aligns with the study’s psychological and pedagogical dimensions, while the affordances framework offers a context-specific view of opportunities and constraints in musical settings. Throughout the writing process, my work was continually reviewed and refined with input from my advisor and peer students, ensuring clarity, rigor, and scholarly integrity.

While orchestras play a pivotal role in shaping a supportive audition environment, candidates must also take responsibility for their own growth. Musicians should not rely solely on external conditions but actively work on self-improvement and self-care to optimize their performance. By addressing both institutional efforts and individual responsibility, auditions can become more conducive to performers achieving their highest potential.

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Appendices

Appendix 1: Consent form

Participant Consent Form

PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM

Title of the study: Better in Tune- Towards constructive facilitation processes of orchestra auditions.
Location of the study: Tal Riva Theodorou, tal.theodorou@metropolia.fi, Helsinki Metropolia University of Applied Sciences. Supervisor: Sanna Kivijärvi, sanna.kivijarvi@metropolia.fi

I, _____, have been invited to participate in the above research study.

The study examines the actions of the members of the orchestra's audition evaluation panel and related organisations with the aim of answering the question of how a professional orchestra could develop a more constructive and psychologically safer audition process for prospective musicians.

I have read and understood the written participant information sheet. The information sheet has provided me sufficient information about above study, the purpose and execution of the study, about my rights as well as about the benefits and risks involved in it. I have had the opportunity to ask questions about the study and have had these answered satisfactorily.

I have had sufficient information of the collection, processing and transfer/disclosure of my personal data during the study and the Privacy Notice has been available.

I voluntarily consent to participate in this study. I have not been pressurized or persuaded into participation.

I have had enough time to consider my participation in the study.

I understand that my participation is entirely voluntary and that I am free to withdraw my consent at any time, without giving any reason. I am aware that if I withdraw from the study or withdraw my consent, any data collected from me before my withdrawal can be included as part of the research data.

By signing this form I confirm that I voluntarily consent to participate in this study.

If the legal basis of processing personal data within this study is a consent granted by the data subject, by signing I grant the consent for process my personal data. I have right to withdraw the consent regarding processing of personal data as described in the Privacy Notice.

Date

 Signature of Participant

The original consent signed by the participant and a copy of the participant information sheet will be kept in the records of the researcher. Participant information sheet, privacy notice and a copy of the signed consent will be given to the participant.

Appendix 2: Thesis agreement

Thesis Agreement

⁽¹⁾ Any conflict between the annexed research permit or thesis plan and this Agreement shall be governed by the provisions set out in the annex.

⁽²⁾ The time frame for an action research thesis is between 1.5 and 2 years, depending on the degree program.

⁽³⁾ The Cooperation Partner shall make available to the Student the information and materials necessary for the conduct of the Thesis in accordance with the Thesis Plan.

⁽⁴⁾ The guidance of the Cooperation Partner may include participation and support in the evaluation of the Thesis in terms of the process's efficiency, usability and success.

3. Results and access rights to results

Notwithstanding what is possibly agreed between the Student and the Cooperation Party in the employment agreement or otherwise, the Intellectual property rights in the Thesis belong to the Student. The Student hereby grants to the Cooperation Partner a parallel and perpetual right of use of the intellectual property rights in the basic results of the Thesis, including the right to modify and redistribute the results. No compensation shall be paid for the assignment of the right of use. Intellectual property rights include all intangible rights including but not limited to patents, trademark, copyright, design rights, utility model rights, geographical indications and plant breeding rights.

In the event, in connection with the Thesis, the Student creates any intellectual property rights or inventions of significant economic value, the Cooperation Party's right to use such intellectual property rights requires a separate agreement with the Student.

4. Publicity and confidentiality

All theses are public by the decision of the Ministry of Education and Culture in Finland. Any information provided by the Cooperation Partner to the Student and to the Supervisor in connection with the Thesis process and the evaluations of the Theses are public. Theses are published according to Metropolia's instructions.

When publishing the results, the Cooperation Partner must state that the results have been produced in cooperation with the Student, and the name of the Student in accordance to good practice (Section 3(1) of the Finnish Copyright Act). The use of the Metropolia's name or any other logo for commercial purposes is not permitted without the prior written permission of Metropolia.

If the Cooperation Partner discloses any confidential information to the Student in connection with the Thesis process, such information must always be clearly identified as confidential and the Student must be instructed how the information can be used in the Thesis and that it must not be included in the Thesis. The student undertakes to keep confidential any information received which is clearly identified as confidential.

5. Processing of personal data

Please select one of the following options by marking the checkbox in front of that option, in the event neither of the alternatives are selected, it is assumed that no personal data will be processed.

Personal data will be processed in the context of Thesis process. The processing of personal data is subject to Annex 1 or is covered by a separate agreement/document (e.g. research permission).

No personal data will be processed in the context of Thesis process.

6. Liability and limitation of liability

The Student is responsible for writing the Thesis. The Student will follow the principles of good research practice and the professional ethical guidelines of the field under the guidance of Metropolia and the Cooperation partner. The Student shall submit the Thesis as is, without guarantee or warranty of its accuracy or suitability for the needs of Cooperation Partner.

The responsibility of Metropolia and the Supervisor is limited to the supervision of the Thesis to meet the Thesis criteria within the resources allocated for supervision. The Parties shall not be liable for any indirect or consequential damage caused to the other Party. The Student's liability is always limited to 1.000 euros.

7. Termination of the contract and force majeure

The Student may terminate this Agreement for a good cause by giving notice in writing to both the Metropolia and the Cooperation partner as soon as possible.

Thesis Agreement

This Agreement is made in identical copies for each of the signatory parties.

| Date | Name of the party | Signature |
|------|-------------------|-----------|
| | | |
| | | |
| | | |

Appendix 3: Helsinki city research permit

Helsinki city research permit



City of Helsinki
Culture and Leisure Division Cultural services

Minutes

1 (2)

6 February 2024

Culture Director

Section 14

Research permit: Improvement of audition processes at the [REDACTED]

HEL 2024-001351 T 13 02 01

Decision

The Culture Director decided to grant Tal Riva Theodorou a research permit for her thesis *Improvement of audition processes at the [REDACTED] Orchestra*. The research permit is valid until 31 December 2024.

Grounds

The study examines the actions of the members of the orchestra's audition evaluation panel and related organisations with the aim of answering the question of how a professional orchestra could develop a more constructive and psychologically safer audition process for prospective musicians. The thesis will be done for Metropolia University of Applied Sciences.

The research material will be collected through group interviews and observations. Anonymised archival materials from auditions of the [REDACTED] Orchestra, such as invitation and response letters and emails, will also be used.

The research material will be protected against unauthorised access with a username and password, and identifying information will be deleted at the analysis stage. The keeping of the register will be the responsibility of the research permit holder. All data, recordings and transcripts containing identifying information will be destroyed once the study is completed.

The research permit holder undertakes not to use the information obtained to harm or degrade the client or a member of the client's staff or their relatives, or to harm any other interests protected by a confidentiality obligation, or to disclose the personal data obtained to any third party.

The research permit holder is obliged to provide an electronic copy of the completed research report to the Culture and Leisure Division free of charge. The report or a link to a downloadable file must be sent to the email addresses listed under *Additional information* on the research permit. Alternatively, the report may be submitted as a hard copy to Culture and Leisure Division, PO Box 51400, FI-00099 City of Helsinki, Finland.

Helsinki city research permit

City of Helsinki
Culture and Leisure Division
Cultural services

Minutes

2 (2)

6 February 2024

Culture Director

Additional information

Mikka Haimila, Special advisor, tel. +358 9 310 28739
miikka.haimila(a)hel.fi
Orchestra Manager, tel. [REDACTED]

Appendices

- 1 [Research permit application 18 January 2024 \(secret, Act on the Openness of Government Activities 621/1999, section 24, subsection 1, paragraph 21k\)](#)
- 2 [Research permit application 18 January 2024, research plan \(secret, Act on the Openness of Government Activities 621/1999, section 24, subsection 1, paragraph 21 k\)](#)
- 3 [Research permit application 18 January 2024, consent 1 \(secret, Act on the Openness of Government Activities 621/1999, section 24, subsection 1, paragraph 21k\)](#)
- 4 [Research permit application 18 January 2024, consent 2 \(secret, Act on the Openness of Government Activities 621/1999, section 24, subsection 1, paragraph 21k\)](#)

Appeal

Instructions for requesting an administrative review, Culture and Leisure Committee

Extracts

Extract
Applicant

Attachment to the extract
Instructions for requesting an administrative review, Culture and Leisure Committee

For information

Contact person

Appendix 4: Invitation to orchestra musicians

Invitation letter to orchestra musicians

Dear Musicians of the [REDACTED],

My name is Tal Riva Theodorou and I am a student in the CRASH master program of Metropolia University. My background is in music performance (viola) and also in DEI consultancy for cultural organisations.

You can find more information about me here:

[linkedin.com/in/tal-riva-theodorou-she-her-2b489921a](https://www.linkedin.com/in/tal-riva-theodorou-she-her-2b489921a)

I am conducting research about the process of auditions for orchestra position and how orchestras can consider the wellbeing of the candidates when conducting auditions. My supervisor is Dr. Sanna Kivijärvi (lecturer at SIBA and Helsinki UNIArts)

The research will include 3 sessions of 2.5 hours, a total of 7.5 hours of participatory dialogue during the months of March and/or April. We will discuss about topics such as: Invitation letters, audition environment and feedback. The research will be conducted in English.

Dates and times:

27.3 at 10-12:30

5.4 at 11- 13:30

19.4 at 13-15:30

The meetings will take place in one of the office spaces of the orchestra in [REDACTED]

To my extensive knowledge this kind of research has not yet been done. Your insights and collaboration can contribute for a better understanding of audition settings and enable change for future auditions. All names and private Data will not be included in the research (you will stay anonymous).

The group should have a minimum of 4 orchestra musicians, preferably one from each big instrument group (strings, woodwinds, brass and percussion), and a maximum of 6 musicians.

If you have further questions and/or would like to take part in the research, please don't hesitate to reach out by email or phone.

Looking forward for your participation!

Best regards,

Tal Riva Theodorou

tal.theodorou@metropolia.fi