

“Surrendering to the Musical Work”

**Exploring Meanings of Performing Western Classical Music
Ascribed by Three Violin Students in Higher Music Education**

Master's Thesis

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<p>“Surrendering to the Musical Work”</p> <p>Exploring Meanings of Performing Western Classical Music</p> <p>Ascribed by Three Violin Students in Higher Music Education</p>	<p>Pages</p> <p>61</p>
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<p>In this master’s thesis I examine the meanings violin students in higher music education ascribe to performing Western classical music. I also address how instrumental studies influence those meanings, and how students come to understand the artistic practise as a part of their personal and professional development.</p> <p>The study was guided by the following research question:</p> <p>What meanings do violin students in higher music education ascribe to performing Western classical music?</p> <p>In the conceptual framework, I suggest a working definition of <i>meaning</i> through the lenses of psychology, sociology, and philosophy. I examine the notion in the specific context of Western classical music, where music is construed as works, containing inner meanings. I explore the tensions between the authority of musical works and the artistic agency of a performer. Finally, I discuss how performance is studied in higher instrumental music education. The study is a qualitative case study. I gathered the data through theme-centred interviews with three violin students in the Sibelius Academy, University of Arts Helsinki. I conducted a systematic content analysis on the transcripts of the interviews.</p> <p>The meanings ascribed by violin students in higher music education convey their negotiations between self-expression and interpreting the meanings embedded in compositions, reflecting the composer’s intentions. Violin students entwine themselves with the artistic tradition of Western classical music, where performance is employed to preserve historical musical works. In higher music education, performance is a means to stretch instrumental skills beyond the immediate and thus enhance professional development. Professional violinists take on various roles, such as orchestra musicians, teachers, historians, and soloists. Different meanings are ascribed to performance depending on the role of the violinist. To conclude, the results indicate that in performing Western classical music, violin students find and create artistic, professional, communal, historical, practical, and spiritual meanings.</p>	
<p>Search Words</p> <p>Meaning, Performance, Western Classical Music, Higher Music Education</p>	

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1 Introduction

In this study I will research the meanings violin students in higher music education ascribe to performing Western classical music. As a child growing up in Australia, I started learning the violin at the age of five. I followed my elder brother to his orchestra rehearsals and was mesmerized by the organized sounds and honey-coloured varnish of the violins. The instrument kept me company as our family eventually relocated to Finland. By adolescence, I was immersed in the world of music. In addition to the violin, I was practicing the flute, the piano, and the voice; I was participating in choirs, orchestras, and chamber music groups. I loved the community, the pursuit of beauty, the challenge of it all. Studying music education at a university level seemed like a natural progression of my involvement. The violin remained my main instrument and interest.

As I progressed in my studies, I gradually became aware of some social issues regarding Western classical music. For example, it bothered me that I had hardly ever played music by female composers, especially in exams, and that the university of Sibelius Academy seemed indifferent about the matter. As I studied violin pedagogy, I began to reflect on the implications of promoting Western classical music in countries with colonial histories, such as Australia. As a result, in my bachelor's thesis I researched how the global music education movement El Sistema conceptualizes Western classical music as a vehicle for social change. I employed the companion lenses of critical theory and postcolonial theory to examine the results (Goesch 2020, 4). Through conducting the systematic literature review for the bachelor's thesis, I came across an abundance of previous research that resonated with my quiet discomfort with some aspects of Western classical music. Like Anna Bull (2019), I became wary of the artistic practice that seemed to shut out the concerns of the contemporary world and live happily on in the margins of the Western industrialized society.

In addition to social concerns, my studies in Sibelius Academy led me to consider the psychological well-being of students in higher music education. Performing music requires courage, vulnerability, and trust. Medicating feelings of unworthiness or doubt with excessive practise and an overall demanding relationship with the self is not uncommon. Because of the intimate nature of musical expression, harsh pedagogical practices rarely leave a student emotionally unharmed. Somehow, despite constant scrutiny and

criticism, a student must remain open, remain creative. “Surviving” higher musical education, in my experience, requires a robust sense of inner motivation. During my master’s studies I realized that if I am to, despite my qualms, fears, and concerns, keep joyfully and sustainably performing Western classical music *and* attempt to pass an authentic love for the artistic practice on to the next generation, I have to dig deeper, into the roots of meaning. Employing a critical approach is not an attack on the music itself; on the contrary, it is all in the interest of further cultivating the artistic practice. In this master’s thesis I have engaged in contemplating the essence, the demands, and values of performing Western classical music. What does it mean to perform Western classical music? Where are those meanings found and created? Who are we performing for? Why does it matter?

The performance of Western classical music is a well-researched area in the field of music education. Western classical music has had the privilege of being promoted as the height of human spirituality and intellect (Small 1998, 3). As our society progresses, research reflects a collective desire to rethink and reimagine the artistic practice with an elitist, sexist, racist, and classist reputation. There is an abundance of voices interrogating the practice through various lenses, such as critical pedagogy, feminism, post-colonial theory, and class theory. While important, the lens of social and critical theory leaves limited space for the philosophical considerations of a rich historical and musical tradition. Combing sociological aspects with a broad, multi-disciplinary approach to researching Western classical music reflects the breadth and depth of the artistic practice. (Bull 2019; Jorgensen 2020; Green 2017.)

To my knowledge there is no previous research about the meanings violin students in higher education ascribe to performing Western classical music. This research is therefore situated in an assembly of previous studies with overlapping key concepts. Closest in topic and context is the autoethnographic research of violinist Eeva Oksala (2018), where she explored how she developed as a performer of Western classical music. Her doctoral thesis contained reflections on her studies in Sibelius Academy. Oksala found that her execution-oriented approach towards performing in higher music education led to a deterioration of individual expression. (Oksala 2018, 6.) The doctoral thesis of Carl Holmgren (2022) also involved instrumental studies in higher music education. Holmgren considered how piano students and teachers in Sweden understand the concept of interpretation, which is closely related to meaning. Holmgren asserted that within higher music education, meaning is neither verbalised nor negotiated. His results suggested that instrumental

studies focus on the “how” instead of the “why”. (Holmgren 2022, 4-5.) Recently Anu Lampela (2023) proposed in her research article that reflexivity, the practice of examining one’s own feelings, reactions, and motives, should be further integrated into higher music education (Lampela 2023, 1).

In her research paper “Sense-making, Meaningfulness, and Instrumental Music Education” Marissa Silverman (2020) examined meaning as a fundamental premise of all instrumental music education. According to Silverman, the purpose of music education is to pursue eudaimonia - a life of significance and value to community and self. Through the contemplation of meaning the nature of teaching and learning a musical instrument can be examined. (Silverman 2020, 1-3.) Additionally Anneli Arho (2003) stated in her doctoral thesis that the meanings of artistic practices can be understood through exploring the experiences of musicians. Through a phenomenological study of the relationship between music and musician, Arho found that meaning is ascribed to music through years or decades of musical activity. (Arho 2003, 7-8).

Many previous studies have shown that in the tradition of performing Western classical music, the concept of musical works is integral to finding, creating, and understanding meaning. Performing music is essentially a means of communication. However, there is a pervasive idea that classical music is something complex and difficult to understand. (Bull 2019, 130.) In Western society, music exists as a composition, an artefact, even when it is not practised, performed, or remembered. When framed as works, music attracts object-like qualities. Musical works are believed capable of containing internal meaning, waiting to be expressed by a willing musician. As musical works are re-interpreted through time, they are made subject to variation and evolution. (Arho 2003; De-Nora 1986; Goehr 1992; Holmgren 2022; Lampela 2023; Leech-Wilkinson 2012; Small 1998; Östersjö 2008.)

In the light of previous studies, it is abundantly clear that the meanings of performing Western classical music cannot be adequately examined without including the concept of musical works. Therefore, I included musical works in the conceptual framework of this thesis. There seems to be a consensus in previous studies that meaning can and should be considered as an aspect of studying an instrument in higher music education (Holmgren 2022; Lampela 2023; Oksala 2018). In this thesis, I expanded on previous studies by focusing on meaning as it is understood and experienced by students. I limited the context to performance. I consider myself supported by Silverman (2020) and Arho (2003) when

I state, that being curious about the meanings violin students ascribe to their performing offers relevant information for the field of music education in a larger sense. I also believe that gaining detailed knowledge about the students experience is useful to institutions such as music universities (Mäkinen 2006, 117). Research has the potential to inform music teachers, which in turn impacts students, which eventually, possibly, influences the artistic practice and tradition.

Considering that classical music has moved to the margins of contemporary Western culture, the question of meaning, for students and teachers alike, is all the more acute (Small 1998, 3). In recent decades, the hegemony of Western classical music in music education has been called into question. As Jorgensen stated, “to love or not to love Western classical music is a profound and existential question for musicians and educators” (Jorgensen 2020, 1-2). Previous studies have advocated for instrumental studies of higher music education to adapt and change with the times (Bull 2019; Holmgren 2022; Lampela 2023; Oksala 2018). In this research, I have considered that the experiences of students may offer signposts for the direction of change. Music, albeit an abstract form of art, is always interpreted within the intersections of history, geography, and other concrete realities (Small 1998, 31). When a rich, historical tradition is in transformation, it is worth contemplating what to keep and what to leave behind (Jorgensen 2020, 3).

In conclusion, this thesis has been influenced and inspired by both my personal experience as a violin student and a substantial assembly of previous research. I have examined the process of finding and creating meaning, how it relates to a historical tradition, in an educational context where the artistic practice is developed into a profession. In this research, I have asked the question: What meanings do violin students in higher music education ascribe to performing Western classical music?

2 Conceptual framework

In this chapter I will present the conceptual framework for my thesis. Through this framework I will explain and interrogate the key concepts for this research. I will begin by examining the concept of meaning through the lens of psychology, sociology, and philosophy. I will explore the function of meaning and the process through which it is ascribed. I will propose a working definition for the concept of meaning. Next, I will introduce approaches to thinking about meaning in music. I will then discuss the phenomenon of music being synonymous to “works”. I will investigate the tradition of performing Western classical music. I will explore artistic interpretation and expression. I will then follow with a description of instrumental music studies. Lastly, I will examine how performance is integrated into higher music education.

2.1 Ascribing Meaning to Performing

2.1.1 A Working Definition of Meaning

Humans make sense of the world by finding, or creating, meaning. Experts of different fields, such as psychology, sociology, and philosophy have varying interpretations of the concept of meaning. Depending on the point of view, meaning provides understanding, purpose, value, community, and identity. (Silverman 2020, 2.)

Albeit an abstract concept, meaning holds great significance in practical life (Noguchi 2019, 1). Viewed through the lens of psychology, meaning is a function that provides comprehension. Meaning guides us to perceive the function of objects or actions. We know an instrument is to be played or a chair is to be sat on. Shared habitual responses connect themselves to certain elements. (Dewey 1933, 142.) This has proved useful in evolution – humans have survived by detecting meaning in their environment and using this knowledge to plan their behaviour (Thomas 2019, 5). In a more abstract sense, meaning presents itself as a confirmed idea or an established connotation. Meaning can be derived from symbols, narratives, assumptions, or beliefs. (Dewey 1933, 154.) The more subjective the meaning of any given target is, the less definite it becomes (Noguchi 2019, 17). Humans create meaning through the process of assimilating sensory stimuli into

existing cognitive structures (Irish 1993, 21). The essential element to grasping meaning is finding relationships between stimuli and existing knowledge (Dewey 1933, 125). Therefore, meaning is void without context (Noguchi 2019,1).

The process of ascribing meaning is iterative, it repeats itself as we interact with the world. Encountering stimuli is, either consciously or unconsciously, an experience. Experiences evoke a simultaneous affective and cognitive reaction. (Irish 1993, 8.) In simpler terms, we engage with the world through feeling and thinking (Silverman 2020,2). The immediate perception of an experience is either accepted or rejected. The gained information is then made into a personal symbolization and compared to references. (Irish 1993, 8.) Similarities in perceived meaning leads to synthesis, i.e., grouping stimuli into categories (Dewey 1933, 158). The ascribed meaning then affects the behavioral and physiological response. In the constant stream of stimuli, humans must discard some experiences as arbitrary or unimportant. The personal history of an individual affect the neural pathways that sort memories and form categories. Neural development is at its most rapid in the early years of life. The physical development of our brain is dependent on our experiences. Unused neural pathways slowly disintegrate and cease to exist. (Small 1998, 131.) Our cognitive structures affect the meanings we ascribe to newly gained information, all while the information influences and reshapes our cognitive structures. The meaning of an experience can therefore change over time. (Irish 1993, 27.)

Established researchers on the topic of meaning suggest, that the human ability to ascribe meaning is a neurological phenomenon (Dewey 1933, Irish 1993, Small 1998). Marissa Silverman (2020) expands on this foundation by asserting, that it is the interactions of the brain, the body and the environment that allow for human cognition. Ascribing meaning is therefore not “brain-based”, but is rather embodied, enacted, embedded, and extended (Silverman 2020, 1). We come into contact with the world through “embodied” involvement in time and space. Without it, we could not make any literal sense of ourselves or others. Life is experienced through “enaction”, through engaging as selves in the world. We come to understand our existence by participating in life. As a result, we are “embedded” into our environment, we become a part of it, and it becomes a part of us. Our sense of self is “extended” into the world through the intricate interconnection of brain, body and environment. (Silverman 2020 1-2.) All of these aspects provide a more comprehensive understanding of how meaning is ascribed in and through life. Silverman argues that human consciousness and personhood cannot be explored as a separate entity, because it

is through the enmeshment with the world that we come to exist in the first place (Silverman 2020, 3).

How can we then begin to ask, what does *something* mean to *someone*? According to Meaning frame theory, meaning can be examined through frames of reference. Noguchi (2019) proposes three frames: agent-to-self, agent-to-purpose, and agent-to-others. These three frames evaluate the meaning of any given target through describing how it impacts the relationship between the agent and their inner self, their purpose, or others. (Noguchi 2019, 1.) The agent-to-self frame asks: what does this target mean to the inner self? Is this target compatible with personal values? (Noguchi 2019, 4.) Contemplating on meaning enables humans to make sense of their inner life (Klinger 1977, 10). Similarly to external stimuli, emotions are signals we recognize through a frame of reference. We learn to identify feelings through the meaning ascribed to them through a cognitive process. (Irish 1993, 8.) The agent-to-self frame examines these inner processes. Integrity is developed through leaning towards behaviour consistent with personal values (Noguchi 2019, 8).

In addition to providing comprehension and understanding, meaning is essentially a system of motivation. The agent-to-purpose frame describes how a target influences the decisions and actions of an agent, which in turn reveals ascribed meanings. This frame explores questions such as: does this target provide the agent a sense of purpose? How is the agent motivated to act? (Noguchi 2019, 8). This frame is useful, because living a life with purpose has an enormous impact on emotional wellbeing (Klinger 1977, 4). People tend to gravitate towards meaningful activities and away from those which feel senseless or arbitrary. It is through the contemplation of meaning that we can examine the nature and value of our work. We may discover the underlying motives for our courses of action. (Silverman 2020, 3.) The third frame, agent-to-others, demonstrates the relation between the target and their community. This frame illustrates the possible meaning(s) of our actions in relation to other people and society at large. The relationship works both ways – our actions have meaning to our community, while we experience meaning through being of value to our community. In this way, meaning is a social phenomenon. (Noguchi 2019, 10.)

From a sociological point of view, ascribing meaning is a practice that knits social and cultural groups together. Although each individual engages in the process of ascribing

meaning in unique ways, members of a shared social group tend to share values. Socially constructed values are, sometimes coercively, passed on to future generations. (Small 1998, 131.) Shared assumptions about the world are reinforced by institutions such as schools or conservatoriums (Small 1998, 134). Meanings can be deduced from social expectations, but an individual can also reject a prevailing standard. (Klinger 1977, 4). An individual may experience societally valued accomplishments as unimportant (Noguchi 2019, 10). The degree to which an individual accepts shared assumptions is, to a certain degree, a matter of choice. At any rate, the individual cannot ascribe meanings entirely independently (Small 1998, 134). How we make sense of the world is composed through a dialogue between the individual and the various social groups we belong to. Families, friends, nations, religious organizations, political parties, universities, and other associations all serve to influence our perception of meaning. We tend to hold memberships to a multitude of groups simultaneously. As we move through our daily interactions, our social identity fluctuates and adapts. We can ascribe different meanings to the same target depending on our social context. Our process of ascribing meaning, or making sense of the world, is complex and even contradictory. (Small 1998, 131-132.) The meanings socially constructed within a group can be in dissonance with those constructed in another. Dissonance can also exist within the individual. As we combine individual and societal values, altruistic and egoistic motives tend to merge. (Derpann 2012, 1.) Processing reality and ascribing meaning can thus be a convoluted, multifaceted, and fluid process.

The quest to understand the “meaning of life” is central to the tradition of Western philosophy. In Ancient Greece, Socrates maintained the proposition that “the unexamined life is not worth living”. (Silverman 2020, 7). From the perspective of philosophy, meaning considers essential nature and purpose. Meaning is an explanation, an interpretive framework through which to view a phenomenon. Through contemplating meaning, humans make sense of reality. In other words, meaning is the information a person needs for a phenomenon to be intelligible. (Thomas 2019, 1-5.) The search for meaning can also create opportunity for self-discovery (Lamont 2012, 577). The practice of sense-making can be employed to define what is valuable (Silverman 2020, 5). Thomas (2019) argues that asking about meaning is essentially asking about origin, purpose, impact, or value. When asking: “What is the meaning of X”? We are in fact asking questions such as “How has X come to exist? What has X resulted in? What purpose does X offer? How is X valuable, and to whom? (Thomas 2019, 12-13.) We may engage with these questions unconsciously, as our internal mental processes engage with the external world.

Something can be meaningful to an individual, even when it is not consciously evaluated as such (Small 1998, 131). However, perceiving life as generally coherent and intelligible supports a sense of existential meaning (Thomas 2019, 5).

In addition to the traditional question of the meaning of life, philosophy is concerned with what meaning can bring *to* our lives (Silverman 2020, Thomas 2019). The concepts of “having a meaning” and “being meaningful” are related, but different. Having meaning exists in a binary, but being meaningful can be experienced in various degrees. “Meaningfulness” measures both the quantity and quality of the meanings ascribed to something. (Thomas 2019, 13-14.) Aristoteles and other philosophers have considered a “good life” one that is flourishing with meaningfulness for the benefit of the community at large (Silverman 2020, 7). The individual experience of meaningfulness occurs when a person is engaged in pursuit of what makes sense to them. This may require long-term efforts to overcome obstacles (Thomas 2019, 15). In contrast, meaninglessness is experienced as emptiness or incomprehensible chaos, as lack of purpose, value, direction, and sense (Silverman 2020, 6). Meaningfulness, like meaning, can be explored through questioning origin, purpose, impact, and value. Several variables can be legitimately regarded as a type of meaning. For example, a phenomenon which is a culmination of centuries of work by thousands of different people will be arguably more meaningful than a phenomenon with an *origin* in a passing whim. However, a passing whim might have a more meaningful *impact* in the future. Overall, meaningfulness is relational, depending on the context and concerns of the appraiser. (Thomas 2019, 14-17.)

In conclusion, this thesis will explore meaning with a broad definition of the word, as a psychological, sociological, philosophical, and later, cultural phenomenon. Meaning will be interpreted through the assembly of answers that questioning origin, impact, purpose, and value provides.

2.1.2 Does Music Begin Where Language Ends? Ways of Thinking about Meaning in Music.

In Western culture, music is pervasively conceptualized as capable of containing internal meaning, waiting to be expressed. Music is simultaneously regarded as impossible to be described in words. (DeNora 1986, 84.) This brings us to a dilemma. How can musical meaning be defined if it escapes the confines of language? Does music, in the words of

Jean Sibelius, really begin where language ends (Robinson 2018, 9)?

In the tradition of Western classical music, meaning is framed as the composer's intention, hidden behind the surface of sound (Östersjö 2008, 62). This framework is most explicit in the aesthetic theory known as formalism. Its creator, Eduard Hanslick, argued that music must be an autonomous entity, separate from the rest of the world. The meaning of music is in the music itself. Hanslick maintained that music does not represent anything; it is "pure music", tonally moving form. (Östersjö 2008, 43.) Another popular aesthetic theory, expressionism, approaches music as the communication of emotion. Music is thought to behave like language, alluding directly to its meaning (DeNora 1986, 84). Musical meaning is found in the inner workings of the work, waiting to be revealed through scientific examination. The musical structure is dismantled into theme, rhythm, and harmony. These are considered the most relevant components in order to grasp meaning. (Robinson 2018, 2.) However, musical meaning can also be explored through the narrative potential of the composition. Certain works of Western classical music are essentially composed novels in which the plot of the narrative dictates the structure of the music. Analysis of musical meaning can thus be conducted through comparison to the narrative source. (Robinson 2018, 9-10.)

From a sociological perspective, musical meaning appears to be a social construct. While interacting with music, most people do not entertain a purely theoretical analysis, as formalists or expressionists might hope. It is typical human behaviour to become emotionally engaged. (Robinson 2018, 15.) Experiences of connecting emotional meaning to music arguably proves extra-musical meaning possible (DeNora 1986, 84). Musical meaning is found through the connections it forms with other aspects of life. The emotional reaction to a musical work offers suggestions for the meanings the music holds. Imagination enables and expands this very human experience. (Robinson 2018, 6.) Music becomes symbolic of emotions, images, narratives, and ideas. However, the limitations of semantics challenge the empiric investigation of these ascribed meanings. It is simply difficult to put them into words. Between music and language, there is no exact correlation or direct translation available. (DeNora 1986, 84.) Even when a musical motif is an obvious symbol for an extra-musical meaning, it is open to subjective interpretation. Investigation of musical meaning should therefore take into consideration the context of both the composition and the performance. (Robinson 2018, 3-5.) It is not just the musical work itself, that affects the meanings it comes to hold. As the musical work lives on in evolving

historical and cultural contexts, it's meaning is in a perpetual state of renewal (Östersjö 2008, 60).

2.2 Performing Western Classical Music

2.2.1 Introducing the Concept of Musical Works

Within Western societies, music is commonly synonymous to “works” (Arho 2003, 8). Over time a composition, a piece of music, attracts object-like qualities (Leech-Wilkinson 2012, 3). Music exists as an artefact even when it is not practiced, performed, or remembered (Goehr 1992, 2). The location of the musical work is complex - to exist it doesn't need to be played or heard (Östersjö 2008, 101). A work of music cannot be reduced to a particular score, recording or performance (Arho 2003, 253). Therefore it can be concluded that the nature of musical works is allographic. Allographic works share an identity through the composition but are brought to life in different instances (Östersjö 2008, 33). The same musical work may for example be performed around the world in wildly different manners, with an ultimately shared identity. As a concept, musical works come to exist through social discourse and individual experience (Arho 2003, 255). Personal relationships with particular works are formed when the music is connected to one's own life (Robinson 2018, 9). Discussing musical works involves discussing a wide phenomenon: the experiences, ideas, emotions, and assumptions we attach to the music.

In the tradition of Western classical music, a musical work is the outcome of a two-phase process. In the first phase, the musical work is conceived through the creative activity of the composer (Goehr 1992, 2). In the second phase, the performer reproduces the work by interpreting the score (Leech-Wilkinson 2016, 325). This traditional model of construction and reproduction represents a unidirectional creative process (Östersjö 2008, 54). The composer's intention bestows a pre-existing frame of meaning onto the musical work. The composer is placed as the highest authority on how the work should be performed. (Arho 2003, 257.) The score represents the composers' intentions and therefore regulates the performance as the primary source of information (Östersjö 2008, 55). The advantage of the score is that it is tangible and permanently available, unlike temporal and fleeting performances or sounds. The score can be referred back to over years, decades, or centuries. This is why notation has had such an impact on the development of the tradition of Western classical music. (Östersjö 2008, 75.) Musicians, musicologists, and

music theorists often discuss works and interpret the intentions of the composer by dissecting the score (Leech-Wilkinson 2012, 1). In current times music can be stored in multiple ways, for example recordings and videos, which has gradually redistributed the authority the score holds over musical works (Östersjö 2008, 112). Recordings reveal how limited the information contained by scores is (Leech-Wilkinson 2016, 326). Certain recordings may now hold a regulative function, in essence dictating how a work “should” be performed (Östersjö 2008, 61). Nonetheless, to understand how works became music, the significance of notation must be acknowledged.

Notation as a system is not impartial or transparent. On the contrary, it serves to divide musical elements into primary and secondary categories. Notation serves as a filter that prioritizes certain musical elements. In Western classical music, these priorities have traditionally been pitch and duration. (Östersjö 2008, 37.) Notation enabled Western classical music to develop distinctive features such as polyphony and counterpoint (Östersjö 2008, 76). However, there are qualities that notation fails to describe or quantify. Among these un-notated qualities are timbral elements. Timbre defines the colour, texture, or quality of a musical sound. During the classical period, dynamics and other expression markings became increasingly popular. The metronome was invented, and beginning with Beethoven, composers were able to suggest accurate tempi for performance. (Östersjö 2008, 36.) During the 20th century, the amount of performance directions in a musical score increased considerably (Leech-Wilkinson 2016, 325). Contemporary composers often pass the limitations of notation by adding written instructions to musical scores. As the precision of notation developed, so did the demand for fidelity towards the work. (Östersjö, 41). Western classical music began to imagine itself as a written culture, rather than an oral culture. The shared assumption that notation contains all the information for how the music should sound, was born (Leech-Wilkinson 2016, 325). Therefore, the development of the notation system has played a crucial part in forming the concept of music as works. These two ideas: the score as the musical work and musical work as the product of the composer complete each other. (Östersjö 2008, 41.)

The history of Western classical music is to an extent a story of how the concept of works was established (Östersjö 2008, 38). The theories around the concept have evolved over time. If musical works are equated to objects that are interpreted through performance, Western classical music can rightfully be described as a preservatory culture, engaging in enforced delusion (Leech-Wilkinson 2016, 326). There are other, more forward-thinking

approaches. Musical works can be understood as a cultural construct, where tradition is just one piece in the puzzle of co-creation. The score is a trace of the creative process rather than an accurate depiction of the intentions of the composer. (Östersjö 2008, 70-73.) The event of composing is greatly influenced by the historical and cultural context of the composer (Östersjö 2008, 60). Performers have always, and continue to, do a significant part of the meaning-making in music (Leech-Wilkinson 2016, 326). Therefore, it is reasonable to argue that musical works are created over time through the negotiations of multiple agents. These agents include but are not limited to the composer, the performer, the instrument, and the tradition. (Östersjö 2008, 58.) A modern approach to Western classical music does not disregard the intentions of the composer as irrelevant to interpreting the musical work (Lampela 2023, 1). However, the composer's intention should not be equated to the meaning of the musical work. Perhaps meaning is revealed little by little as the work is reconsidered over time. (Östersjö 2008, 58.)

2.2.2 The Tradition of Performing Western Classical Music

In the tradition of Western classical music, performing is the act of presenting musical works to an audience (Holmgren 2022, 47). Performing takes place in a concert, which is regarded as a special occasion (Östersjö 2008, 74). The performer is isolated from the audience through emotional and social distance (Kingsbury 2001, 115). The etiquette surrounding a performance of classical music has remained consistent for generations. Social etiquette includes the silence of the audience, the applause at appropriate times, and the bows. Performers are also expected to wear formal, modestly elegant attire and stay in one place during the performance. This etiquette can be experienced as repellant or deterring to unfamiliar audiences. (Lehmann et al. 2007, 169.)

A performance is the audible result of engaging with history, the musical work in living form. The practice of retrieving art from the past on to the stage is considered emblematic to the tradition of performing Western classical music (Holmgren 2022, 48). In the ritual of performance, the musician is obligated to employ advanced technical skills to offer the audience authentic and intimate interpretations of musical works (Lampela 2023, 1). Musical works are repeated or reproduced in and through performance. In the chain of performances the past is nudged along, ever further into the present. The historical context and the work itself are subject to continuous change, and so the tradition evolves. (Östersjö 2008, 97-98.) With time, the work may disinherit some of its original meaning

and gain new layers of significance (Nerland 2007, 45). Musical works that are thought to have a correct interpretation were demonstrably performed quite differently a century ago (Leech-Wilkinson 2016, 326). This continuing life of a musical work has complicated implications on the demand for historical authenticity. Performances are often evaluated on their ability to stay true to the score and tradition. However, even a “failed” performance is an embodiment of the musical work. Performance is a part of the growth, development, and ultimately *life* of the work. (Östersjö 2008, 70.)

In his doctoral thesis, Östersjö (2008) considers how the tradition of Western classical music informs or controls performance. The development of notation has had an enormous effect on the “job description” of a musician (Östersjö 2008, 41). Musicianship was not always divided into the performer and the composer (Lampela 2023,1). The composer as a distinct profession didn’t emerge until the 18th century. As a result, musicians became the interpreters of musical works. With time, this decreased the agency of the performer over the meaning of the musical work. (Östersjö 2008, 41-42.) The tradition of performing Western classical music evolved into a collaboration with an often-dead composer, who’s intentions are interpreted from notation and aural tradition, with guidance from teachers and recordings (Leech-Wilkinson 2016, 326). With a living composer, it is sometimes possible to verbally discuss the work and give feedback both ways (Östersjö 2008, 113). Still, the margins for creative freedom have arguable thinned over the centuries. Östersjö argues, that performers are now required to spend their efforts on the preservation of musical works. (Östersjö 2008, 50).

The persistent belief that it is somehow possible to know how a musical work should sound is integral to the entire system of Western classical music (Leech-Wilkinson 2016, 326). Meaning ascribed to musical works influences and informs performance (Nerland 2007, 45). However, a performance is not just communication of the art, it is a work of art in itself (Östersjö 2008, 98). When performances are considered works in their own right, a performance of a score essentially contains two works. Musical works can be referred to with the performers name attached, i.e. Pekka Kuusisto’s Sibelius Violin Concerto. This manner of speech holds space for shared agency. (Östersjö 2008, 112). Our understanding of a musical work is developed through performances (Leech-Wilkinson 2016, 326). Therefore, the divide between the agencies of performer and composer is often blurry or artificial. For example, the performance of a work may require a degree of improvisation, cadenzas, or embellishments (Östersjö 2008, 113).

Another considerably effective agent in the creation of a musical work is the instrument (Lampela 2023, 1). Within the tradition of performing Western classical music, the performer must develop proficient skills in playing an instrument (Bull 2019, 70). The instrument may be the performers own voice, or an external object designed for the production of sound. The musical identity of a performer emerges through interacting with the instrument. The musical instrument provides “resistance” which the performer must learn to interact with. Most violinists do not build their own instruments. Therefore the sound of a performance is actually greatly influenced by the luthier. (Östersjö 2008, 49-50.) In this way, both the instrument and the luthier are joined in the co-creation of a musical work in a performance. There are also examples of musicians who have innovated and reconstructed their instruments, taking further ownership and agency over the sound (Östersjö 2008, 51).

2.2.3 Interpretation and Expression

Interpretation as an artistic practice emerged with the concept of music as works. Music must exist pre-performance in order for interpretation to be necessary. Interpretation is regarded as the process of ascribing meaning to a musical work. In practice, interpretation refers to multiple different musical activities. (Östersjö 2009, 68-72.) In the tradition of Western classical music, interpretation can be divided in to two main activities: discourse-on-music and discourse-in-music. Discourse-on-music refers to the professional practice of critically analyzing, or interpreting, the work of the composer (Holmgren 2022, 48). Interpretation is perceived as an x-ray, a process of trying to reveal the essence of the musical work (Östersjö 2008, 60). The process may include comparing different editions of scores, such as *urtext*. Analysis may reveal the available scores to be imperfect or incomplete (Östersjö 2008, 54). An interpretation of a musical work is also informed by knowledge of tradition, performance practice and the musico-historical context of the work. Additional influence may be drawn from architecture, dance, literature, and visual art. (Holmgren 2020, 116) Discourse-on-music informs the modern-day classical musician about the styles and traditions of different time periods (Holmgren 2022, 47). Through interpretation, a classical musician may develop a personal relationship with the musical work (Lampela 2023, 1).

Discourse-in-music refers to interpretation as performance. Occasionally the word performance is even used interchangeably with interpretation. In the tradition of Western classical music, the composer's intentions are interpreted through a performance (Holmgren 2022, 46). Interpretation expands on the score and adds to that which is left undetermined. Traditionally the musical work is regarded as a stable entity, providing ever-evolving interpretations (Östersjö 2008, 59). A performance may be regarded as the amalgamation of all the practice the musician has engaged in (Bull 2019, 90). Performances reflect analysis, even when the analysis is conducted in an intuitive or unsystematic manner (Östersjö 2008, 72). On a practical level, interpretation may concern the shaping of phrases, the levels of dynamics and the placement of emphasis. The musician essentially makes decisions on how they want the work to sound. Interpretation is important while practicing a musical work, and it continues during a performance. (Östersjö 2008, 80-81.) Interpretation is not a linear process of constructing an objective truth (Holmgren 2020, 110). A holistic approach to interpretation involves *thinking-through-practice*, in which the process of ascribing meaning continues as the performer interacts with the musical work (Östersjö 2008, 81).

The practice of interpretation can be unconscious. Performers interpret music through informed intuition, which develops as the performer is enveloped in the musical tradition. The intuition of a performer may function independently from language as bodily knowledge. (Östersjö 2008, 77.) An interpretation of a musical work is always temporary, limited by the context of the performer, their knowledge, skills, and imagination (Holmgren 2020, 110). Interpretation is employed to benefit the performance. A performance is considered good when the performer skillfully interprets the meanings of the composer. It is a common notion that an interpretation which surpasses the boundaries of "good taste" can distract from a good performance. (Holmgren 2020, 116.) Performers must find a balance between talentless lack of interpretation and disrespectful, obnoxious expression (Holmgren 2020, 119). There are examples of composers, i.e. Ravel and Stravinsky, who have claimed that interpretation and expression are unnecessary (Östersjö 2008, 45). A performer should simply play what is written in the score, and not interfere with the art of the composer (Leech-Wilkinson 2016, 326). In classical music, the aesthetic of "rightness" and "correctness" is, to this day, highly valued (Bull 2019, 90).

Performing Western classical music is measured in both loyalty to the score and creative expression. The negotiation between the performer and the tradition is a defining characteristic of Western classical music (Östersjö 2008, 104). This characteristic creates tension and diversity in the professional field. In recent decades, the field of Western classical music has shifted to favour standardization and commercial success. The exponential growth of accessibility to recordings has resulted in a remarkable decline in differences of interpretation. Performances increasingly resemble recordings. (Holmgren 2022, 51.) The recording industry has exposed how interpretations of musical works evolve over time. The score, of course, remains the same, but interpretations are subject to change. This phenomenon fundamentally challenges the existence of “correct interpretations” in the tradition of performing Western classical music. (Leech-Wilkinson 2012, 1-3.)

Expression is the performer’s reaction to the freedom within the composition. The performer may express their artistry, knowledge, imagination, emotion, or personhood through a series of decisions within specific parameters such as tone, dynamics, tempi, or intonation (Holmgren 2022, 46). Within certain parameters, the musical judgement and taste of a performer can reign free. Expression therefore exists within a predetermined set of possibilities (Leech-Wilkinson 2012, 2). When discussing freedom of expression, the intent of the composer is drawn out as an authority. Personal expression should not clash with the intentions of the composer (Holmgren 2022, 47). However, the intentions of the composer are *de facto* subjective interpretations. (Leech-Wilkinson 2012, 2) Additionally, the intention of the composer could be for the performer to be as much as possible, original (Holmgren 2022, 49). Personal authenticity in performance is created through a certain truthfulness, an artistic integrity. Performance may reveal the emotional range of a performer. Musical meaning is not a literal representation of emotional life, but rather a general depiction of the landscapes of emotions, some yet unvisited. Musical expression therefore requires a capacity for imagination. (Östersjö 2008, 103.)

2.2.4 Instrumental Studies in Higher Music Education

Higher music education is traditionally conducted through instrumental studies (Silverman 2020, 2). The aim of instrumental musical studies is to learn what is necessary to perform or teach the skill to the next generation (Lehmann et al. 2007, 165). In the tradition of Western classical music, mastering a uniform sound production is commonly emphasized. The goal is to learn to play “well” (Östersjö 2008, 49). Through instrumental

musical studies the student learns to judge their playing as correct and incorrect, for example, whether their sound is in or out of tune (Bull 2019, 73). The main focus of higher music education should arguable be to encourage the student to express their musical ideas and identity. Concentrating on developing a personal, rather than a perfect sound can strengthen the student's agency as a performer. (Holmgren 2022, 68).

In the tradition of Western classical music, instrumental studies are typically carried out as one-on-one lessons (Lampela 2023, 1). In the master-apprentice model the teacher embodies the knowledge as they pass on the required skills. Musical works are taught through a process of trial, error, and correction (Bull 2019, 80). The teacher guides the student towards the "correct" interpretation of a musical work, essentially mediating the interaction between the composer and the performer. (Holmgren 2020, 123.) Of course, teachers cannot actually know what the composer intended decades or centuries ago – their advice relies on personal preferences and experience (Leech-Wilkinson 2016, 327). Instrumental studies target various musical areas, such as technique, interpretation, expression, sight-reading and memorization (Lehmann et al. 2007, 165). How a student comes to understand these concepts will ultimately affect the way they perform music. The teachers' influence on the development of the student is therefore significant (Lampela 2023, 1). Harmful, unreasonably demanding pedagogical practices may be accepted if they advance high musical standards (Bull 2019, 71).

The further the student progresses, the more they tend to value their independence. Instrumental studies in higher music education should foster artistic autonomy (Lampela 2023, 1). Autonomy is cultivated through developing overarching principles for interpretative decisions, instead of fixating on solutions for each particular parameter. An exploratory approach where different options are considered in good measure enables greater freedom. (Holmgren 2020, 116-121.) In the context of studying the violin, this might manifest as for example, learning the principles of fluid and appropriate use of the bow instead of an authority figure prescribing and enforcing "correct" bowings. The instrument is not a passive entity, it demands a personal attention (Bull 2019, 71). The resistance of the instrument, the challenge it provides, is an important facet of musical studies (Östersjö 2008, 115). In instrumental musical studies, a student plays their instrument so frequently it enters their peripersonal space and becomes, in a sense, an extension of their body (Silverman 2020, 6). Personhood is formed through the actions that we repeatedly engage in. When an external object becomes a part of the cognitive system, it also

integrates into the sense of self (Silverman 2020, 7).

Professional musicianship requires high levels of involvement from a young age (Lehmann et al. 2007, 180). Years, if not decades, of practice is a pre-requisite to being accepted into higher music education (Bull 2019, 179). The demand for long-term commitment and diligent practice continues as students strive to “make it” as a professional musician (Oksala 2018, 29). The aesthetics of Western classical music demand high levels of accuracy and technical proficiency (Bull 2019, 71). Research indicates that musicians tend to identify with their profession and may experience difficulty separating from their work in comparison with people in other careers (Lehmann et al. 2007, 180). In her doctoral thesis Oksala (2018) argues that compulsive practicing is prevalent among students in the Sibelius Academy. The number of hours spent in a practice room is used as a measure of success. There are considerable risks to a quantitative approach to practicing, including physical repetitive strain injuries and psychological damage. Students may attempt to keep a clear conscience or gain confidence through maintaining a certain number of hours of practice. Practicing for the sake of practicing may be an attempt to escape the fear of abandonment or failure. Over-practicing may, in the end, have a detrimental effect to musical development and performance. (Oksala 2018, 27-31.) Instrumental studies in higher music education should promote and not damage student health; encourage, not dismiss the creative decisions of aspiring musicians, even if they veer outside of what is deemed “correct” (Leech-Wilkinson 2016, 326).

2.2.5 Performance in Higher Music Education

Higher music education aims to produce a high quality and quantity of musical performance (Lehmann et al. 2007, 173). However, there seems to be a pervasive agreement in Western classical music that artistic performance is an outburst of the innate character of the performer, and therefore it is difficult to teach. Teaching performance is regarded as the most demanding and evasive aspect of higher music education. (Holmgren 2022, 67). Authentic, meaningful artistic expression is not regarded as an outcome of education, but a prerequisite for it (Holmgren 2020, 120). Expression is free-er when the performer is not overly concerned about technical demands. However, teaching mere technical proficiency does not sustain creative, expressive, and liberating performance. (Lehmann et al. 2007, 173.)

Performance is, first and foremost, learned through performance. (Lampela 2023, 1). The student's selfhood is supported and developed in and through performance (Holmgren 2022, 68). Violinist Eeva Oksala expressed concerns over the quantity of performance opportunities for students in Sibelius Academy. In order to develop robust professional performers, there should be more than a few class concerts or exams in an academic year. (Oksala 2018, 34-36.) Artistic performance demands philosophic and aesthetic consideration. A student cannot develop personal expression through mimicking a renowned artist, talented peer, or respected teacher. Honing artistic performance requires serious amounts of listening to concerts and recordings, teacher's guidance, practice and thought. (Holmgren 2022, 50-51.) Engaging in self-reflection and considering natural inclinations can be powerful tools in becoming acquainted with personal artistic expression (Lampela 2023, 2).

The student's relationship with performance impacts their academic, professional, and personal life. When ascribed positive meanings, performance is an opportunity for musical exploration and self-expression. When ascribed negative meanings, performance is a dreaded moment of exposure (Arjas 2002, 121). Problems with performance anxiety can have a detrimental impact on the quality of life of a musician. Oksala argues, that performance coaching should be an innate part of music education from the beginning. Too often issues regarding performance are addressed when symptoms of severe anxiety have already developed. Previous studies maintain, that offering performance coaching courses in higher music education is beneficial for the student's long-term health and success. (Oksala 2018, 34-36). Performance coaching is useful when navigating the demands of higher music education. It is an impossible task to cover everything in the limited time of one-on-one instrumental lessons (Lampela 2023, 2).

Performance coaching addresses extra-musical elements of preparation. Visual information provided by the performer is proven to contribute to the communication of musical meaning. The behavior of the performer affects the listeners. Bodily movements can be employed as a tool for expression, for example emphasizing significant moments with grand gestures. Facial expressions communicate an immense amount of information, even across cultures and language barriers. They can either enhance or deter from the meaning a performer is trying to convey. (Lehmann et al. 2007, 169-173.) However, it is rare that students think about possible body movements or facial expressions when practicing for their performance (Lehmann et al. 2007, 165). An aspect of performing Western classical

music more often emphasized in higher musical education, is the requirement of memorization. Learning a piece of music “by heart” requires diligence, which is perceived as dedication and mastery by the audience. Memorization may lead to a performer experiencing a degree of ownership over the music as the it flows out from the memory into the audience. (Lehmann et al. 2007, 173-174).

3 Methodological choices

In this chapter I will present my research task and research question. I will describe the methodological choices for this research. I will relate the research process: the data gathering and analysis, and the schedule for the entire research. Finally, I will engage in ethical considerations.

3.1 Research Task and Question

The task of this research was to examine the artistic practice of performing Western classical music. I intended to analyse how instrumental studies are experienced on a university level through considering the concept of meaning. Therefore, I examined how students understand the origin, impact, purpose, and value of the artistic practice. I researched subjective insider-knowledge as I explored the meaning making processes of students in higher music education. In this case, the institution of higher music education was the Sibelius Academy, University of Arts Helsinki. The research question was developed to provide clarity, a precise frame through which to examine the meandering field of the artistic practice (Williamon et al 2021, 3). I used the research question as a reference point throughout this study. The research question was:

What meanings do violin students in higher music education ascribe to performing Western classical music?

3.2 Qualitative Case Study

I selected the qualitative case study as the method for this thesis. The decision was directed by the intent and purpose of this research (Silverman 2000, 1). The aim of this research is to gain a deeper understanding of the meaning's violin students in higher music education ascribe to performing Western classical music. I seek to generate detailed information of the meaning-making processes of three violin students. My endeavour is to research the perspectives of the interviewees with a method that allows for the complexity of human experience. The case of this study is the meanings that three violin students in higher music education ascribe to performing Western classical music.

Qualitative methods are an appropriate choice when researching the subjective experience of a performing musician. In this thesis, each violinist offered a different perspective on social reality. Qualitative methods aim to discern different perspectives with as much depth and nuance as possible. The goal is to explore the individual way the participant experiences the world. (Williamon et al 2021, 31-33.) While each participant brought a unique perspective, this research sought to find both commonalities and differences within the data. As Silverman notes, data can contain descriptions of feelings, experiences, and attitudes. In other words, qualitative methods prioritize subjectivity over objectivity. Rather than generating numerical information, qualitative methods are a means to gain understanding. (Silverman 2000, 3.) The data typically consists of words and/or images. According to Williamon and others, researchers can take an active part in generating data, for example by conducting interviews. (Williamon et al. 2021, 31.) My own experiences and persona were therefore involved in the process of collecting and analysing the data. For example, my experiences as a violin student both consciously and unconsciously informed and inspired the questions I knew to ask in the interviews.

Qualitative research questions are designed to be relatively open in order to invite nuance and depth. In this study, I researched *what* meanings violin students ascribe to performing Western classical music. The nature of the question allows for an assembly of answers (Thomas 2019, 14). When employing qualitative methods, the researcher employs their own persona, knowledge, and expertise to create the research question and collect and analyse the data (Williamon et al. 2021, 32). In this way, qualitative research also offers a perspective into how the researcher perceives the world (Gomm et al. 2000, 63). Qualitative methods feature adaptable designs. This means that the research question or data collection methods may be developed during the research process. In this thesis, the research question was developed during writing the conceptual framework. The research question then informed the choice of method and strategy.

The research strategy employed in this master's thesis is a qualitative case study. With this research setting, it is fitting to focus on the perspectives of a few selected individuals. Case studies offer the opportunity to vicariously experience the unique situations of others (Gomm et al. 2000, 62). To generate nuanced and in-depth information, it is necessary to limit the case that is studied (Gomm et al 2000, 2). By implementing boundaries, the

research can provide in-depth information on a specific topic. To increase validity and reliability, it is necessary to disclose the criteria for the selection of the case (Eskola & Saarela-Kinnunen 2015, 183). This thesis takes on characteristics of an intrinsic case study, because the subject itself is the primary interest (Williamon et al 2021, 37). I collected and analysed data through a detailed investigation on the meanings the violin students ascribe to performing Western classical music (Williamon et al 2021, 36). This case was selected through a combination of personal interest and the academic requirements of Sibelius Academy.

3.3 Research Process

3.3.1 Collecting Data

I collected the data for this research in three in-depth, theme-centred interviews (Hirsjärvi & Hurme 2001, 47). I began the data collecting process by generating criteria for the interviewees. The objective of the interviews was to collect data with which to answer my research question (Williamon et al 2021, 130). Therefore, the most important criterion was to find violin students with something to say about ascribing meaning to performing Western classical music. I concluded that it would help if my interviewees performed actively as violinists. I also required the interviewees to be at the tail-end of their studies, so that they might have gained a substantial amount of experience upon which to reflect. After generating the criteria, I began to think of possible interviewees (Hirsjärvi & Hurme, 2001, 83). As a violinist myself, I had a pool of colleagues to contemplate on. I chose to approach three, based on my inkling that they might be interested in sharing their thoughts on the topic. All three interviewees violin students completing their master's degree in the Classical Music Department in Sibelius Academy. They are of similar age, but there are two genders represented (Mäkinen 2006, 104).

I had a previous collegial or friendly connection with all three interviewees, which made approaching them with the request of taking part in this study rather natural. Each interviewee agreed enthusiastically. All three interviews were conducted in the month of October in 2022. One of the interviews was held in-person, two were held online for logistical reasons. I chose theme-centred interviews because it seemed to facilitate the most freedom in the interaction (Williamon et al 2021, 133). It might have been strange to conduct formal, structured interviews with people I was already familiar with. I also

wanted to provide the interviewees the opportunity to talk about their lives in a rich and detailed manner. I wanted to be able to pause on themes that each interviewee found meaningful. Instead of specific questions, I chose a list of predetermined themes (Hirsjärvi & Hurme 2001, 47-48). Each participant answered in their own words and manner of talking. I encouraged the participants to speak freely, so interview was unique. We did however cover all the predetermined themes with each interview.

The data for this research consists of the transcribed interviews of three violinists completing their masters in Sibelius Academy. I have considered each interview as an equal part of this data. The aim was to gather data on their perspectives on the meanings of performing Western classical music (Williamon et al 2021, 130). Each interview examined the students' path to becoming a violinist. They reflected with vulnerability on their relationship to performance. They shared their ideas about Western classical music and the role it has played in their life. The conceptual framework I had worked on before the data collection process served me as I guided the conversations around and through the research question (Williamon et al 2021, 139). Each interviewee described their life and work through a personal lens. They would emphasize ideas and observations that were especially meaningful to them. Each interview ended with contemplating the meanings of performing Western classical music.

I recorded all interviews on a digital recorder. I transcribed the interviews mostly word-for-word but left out a few parts where the conversation veered greatly off-topic (Hirsjärvi & Hurme 2001, 140). This was an approach I had considered before the interview. I wanted the atmosphere of the interview to be as free as possible, to encourage the interviewees to speak their mind openly (Hirsjärvi & Hurme 2001, 103). I specifically asked them not to be worried about going off topic, in hope that they would not censor themselves pre-emptively. What might have felt unnecessary to them could turn out to be interesting to me. All three interviews felt very relaxed and open. In my opinion this made the interviews feel less formal, which may have aided in generating in-depth data (Williamon et al 2021, 130). It was encouraging for me as a researcher to receive such enthusiastic answers to my questions.

I decided to conduct the interviews in Finnish, since it is the mother tongue of all my interviewees. It was important to me that the interviewees could express themselves as freely and completely as possible. Having grown up in a bilingual home, moving between

these two languages in research is natural. I transcribed the interviews word for word in Finnish. After transcribing, I listened to the recordings several times to check the accuracy of the transcript (Williamon et al 2021, 235).

3.3.2 Analysing and Interpreting the Data

Qualitative analysis is a systematic, interpretative, and creative process. Conducting analysis is a search for meaning, a quest to understand the participant's perceptions. In-depth analysis requires a systematically designed and documented process (Williamon et al 2021, 232). I employed thematic content analysis as the method for this research. The method seeks to generate key themes by identifying meaning in data collected from various participants (Williamon et al 2021, 236). I conducted the method through a three-part process of description, categorization, and combination (Hirsjärvi & Hurme 2001, 145). Sirkka Hirsjärvi and Helena Hurme (2001) argue that the analysis process is compromised if the researcher does not first become thoroughly acquainted with the data. I therefore began the analysis by printing out the transcripts and reading through them several times. I restrained myself from making hasty conclusions. I wanted to remain open to new or unexpected knowledge that might emerge from the data (Williamon et al 2021, 232). After the initial immersion, I began to engage with the data in an increasingly active manner. I approached the data with questions such as who, what, when, how, and where. (Hirsjärvi & Hurme 2001, 143-145.) I kept asking each paragraph: what is the participant implying about the meanings of performing Western classical music here? I paid attention to the observations the interviewees made about their environments and situations. I examined which events they found relevant to describe. I observed the continuums, contradictions, transitions and turning points described in the data (Hirsjärvi and Hurme 2001, 143).

As I read and re-read, I began to detect certain themes and patterns. I kept referring back to the research question. I broke the data down into small segments by annotating the printed transcripts with a colour co-ordinated system (Williamon et al 2021, 237). As I annotated the transcripts, it became clear to me that there were certain re-occurring themes. Most obviously I noticed that the violin students ascribed both artistic and professional meanings to performance. However, I also observed several meanings which seemed more philosophical, communal, or personal. I began to identify these categories as other meanings of performance. Hirsjärvi and Hurme (2001) maintain that

categorization allows the qualitative researcher to identify the important and central themes from a large amount of data. Categorization provides clarity. (Hirsjärvi & Hurme 2001, 147.) I was making observations of the categories in both Finnish and English. As I composed the first draft of the results, I organized the categories into English. In this way, the translation process was an integral part of coming to understand the data, not a separate task. The choice of categories must be supported by both the data and the contextual framework of the research. The process involves engaging in logical reasoning. The criteria for the categories can be informed by the research question, the research method, the contextual framework, the data and finally, the intuition and imagination of the researcher (Hirsjärvi & Hurme 2001, 148).

In this thesis, the primary criterion for categorization was that they emerge bottom-up from the data towards answering the research question (Williamon et al 2021, 237 - 239). I approached the data through the lens of meanings the violin students ascribe to performing Western classical music. I then began to separate different strands of thought and began to group them together based on commonalities. This created categories, which I placed into a chart. As Hirsjärvi and Hurme (2001) suggest, I then examined each category and considered whether it is essential. I inspected whether any categories exclude or overlap one another. I investigated whether the categories are supported by the contextual framework and whether each category contains a comprehensive amount of data. I reviewed the significance of each category and considered their worthiness in the research (Hirsjärvi & Hurme 2001, 149). I re-read the transcripts to check whether the categorization process had been consistent and reliable throughout the data (Williamon et al 2021, 239).

The final phase of data analysis was finding commonalities and consistencies between the categories and forming relevant combinations for themes (Hirsjärvi & Hurme 2001, 149). The combinations can be named after theoretical concepts or accurate descriptions of the phenomenon (Hirsjärvi & Hurme 2001, 150). I went through the chart of the categories, grouping them into combinations while engaging in reflectivity and reflexivity. When I arrived at combinations that most effectively engaged with the data, the research question, and the contextual framework, I named the combinations under themes (Williamon et al 2021, 241). In qualitative research, the deductive stage of data analysis does not result in a hypothesis on causes and effects. The aim of analysis is to understand the multifaceted nature of the research topic and create a framework for the data to be in

dialogue with the conceptual framework. Qualitative research requires reflectivity (Williamson et al 2021, 233). The categorized data should be filtered through the reflective thought-process of the researcher (Hirsjärvi & Hurme 2001, 150). The researcher is required to question emerging combinations, continuously checking that they are aligned with the data and considering alternative interpretations (Williamson et al 2021, 233). I assigned a month to analyse the data. Exploring different categories and combinations is time-consuming but invaluable for the quality of the research (Williamson et al 2021, 241). Below I have inserted an example from the chart I made during the thematic content analysis.

Table 1. Thematic content analysis

Category	Combination	Theme
Improvement by performing regularly during studies	Performance as a practice to develop skills	Meanings related to Professional development

The aim of qualitative analysis is to inform a credible interpretation (Hirsjärvi & Hurme 2001, 151). Any given text can be interpreted in various ways. The validity of qualitative research is not thwarted by the multiple nature of reality. It is, however, important to disclose the decisions regarding interpretation (Hirsjärvi & Hurme 2001, 152). This includes but is not limited to making the reader aware of the positionality and personal biases of the researcher (Williamson et al. 2021, 232). Only through transparency a reader can come to trust the interpretations. In this thesis, I have employed a conceptual framework to discuss the results. Through this practice the data can be connected to wider concepts and ideas (Williamson et al. 2021, 32). My goal was to draw from my knowledge and insight as a violinist while simultaneously refraining from only interpreting the data through my own experience and persona (Williamson et al. 2021, 233). Interpretation is a multidimensional process that involves not only the researcher, but also the interviewee and the reader. The interviewee interprets the questions, the researcher interprets their answers, and the reader interprets the research. The text can therefore be interpreted through the meanings the researcher is trying to convey and the meanings the text holds for the reader (Hirsjärvi & Hurme 2001, 151). There may well be a multitude of credible

interpretations (Mäkinen 2006, 92). The social meanings of research topics are revealed through interpretations. In qualitative research, interpretation is conducted throughout the process (Hirsjärvi & Hurme 2001, 152).

3.3.4 Research Schedule

Autumn 2021	The process of deciding on the topic of research and suitable method. The first meeting with my supervisor, professor Marja-Leena Juntunen on the 28th of October.
Spring 2022	Presenting a draft of the schedule. Producing a preliminary version of the conceptual framework. Defining the research question.
September 2022	Editing and refining the conceptual framework. Composing questions for interviews. Booking interviews with three violin students.
October 2022	Conducting three interviews. Transcribing the interviews. Presenting my work in seminary.
November 2022	Writing the chapter on methodology. Analysing the data. Writing the results.
December 2022	Moving on to conclusions. Revising the conceptual framework.
January 2023	Writing a chapter on further research. Editing, refining, and adjusting the work as a whole. Writing the introduction. Thesis examined by the opponent on the 26.1.
February 2023	Final editing, polishing the work. Deadline 13.2.2023.

3.4 Ethical Considerations

In this thesis I am committed to integrity in all aspects of the research process. I have investigated the guidelines for ethical review in human sciences (TENK 2019). I have approached the literature I refer to with sincere respect. I have not in any instance portrayed the work of others as my own. I have cited the source material in an appropriate manner, in accordance with the practises of the science community (Mäkinen 2006, 128). I acknowledge that my thesis would not exist without the generations of researchers that have come before me.

Ethical considerations were a constant presence during the interview process (Williamon et al 2021, 141). From the beginning I have strived to interact respectfully with my interviewees. I recognize their right to privacy and anonymity (Mäkinen 2006, 146). I have regarded their experiences and opinions with great esteem. As I enquired whether the interviewees would consider taking part in this research, I described the topic, method, and schedule. I disclosed all the necessary information. All interviewees consented and committed to the research willingly. I reminded all interviewees that they were entitled at any point to withdraw their participation. In several instances, I enquired whether they had any questions or concerns. (Hirsjärvi & Hurme 2001, 78-88.) I have expressed my gratitude for their time and effort. I recognize that without their generosity in sharing their thoughts and experiences, I would not have been able to complete this thesis.

During the interviews, I endeavoured to hold space for the interviewees as they articulated their responses (Hirsjärvi & Hurme 2001, 121). I ran two practice interviews with friends to prepare myself for the task (Williamon et al 2021, 145). I wanted to become accustomed with the situation, so that I might be more present and competent as I conducted the actual interviews. I developed a practise of letting the interviewee think and answer in peace (Williamon et al 2021, 150). I became aware that I had to build my tolerance for silence and deny the impulse to respond with my own thoughts. I encouraged the interviewees to let me know if at any point they had trouble understanding my questions (Hirsjärvi & Hurme 2001, 116). I transcribed each interview word for word, but I did not signify pauses or emphasize exclamations (Ruusuvuori & Nikander 2017, 427). During the transcribing process I left out a few strands of conversation which were significantly far from the topic of research. In these ways I have already performed conscious and unconscious decisions about the contents of the data.

I have approached the experiences and opinions of my interviewees with deference to the sensitive nature of the topic (Hirsjärvi & Hurme 2001, 115). Ascribing meaning is intrinsically connected to our personality, our experiences, everything that has made us. Therefore, the topic is one that reflects personal values. The interviews offered a glimpse into the inner world of each individual. This is to me the crucial ethical consideration of my work. I have tried to approach all experiences with equal interest and consideration. I have, to the best of my abilities, recounted the results as objectively as possible in the following chapter. However, in the end, I am unable to entirely remove myself. Traces of my subjective perspectives are surely found throughout the thesis. I have strived to engage in reflexivity. Reflexivity prompts the researcher to consider how their assumptions impact the process of collecting and analysing data (Williamon et al 2021, 233). The researcher is compelled to pay attention to their personal influence on the research and document it as a part of the study.

In Finland, the world of Western classical music is a small one. In this study I have disclosed that all three interviewees are violinists, completing their masters' studies in Sibelius Academy. I was compelled to consider whether a knowledgeable reader might be able to recognize an interviewee from the results. The interviews contained recounting of personal experiences and events. I have, to the best of my abilities, left out any information that might reveal an identity (Mäkinen 2006, 148). I presented each interviewee with a form, detailing the issues of confidentiality and consent (Williamon et al 2021, 140). Each interviewee had time to read the form. They all agreed to the contents on record at the beginning of each interview. In the form I promised to delete the recordings after submitting my thesis (Mäkinen 2006, 120).

4 Results

In this chapter I will report the results of my research. I will present the themes I found through the systematic content analysis and suggest key findings for the research question. I will from now on refer to the participants as V1, V2 and V3. In this case, the letter V stands for violinist.

4.1 Meanings Related to Artistry

4.1.1 Performing Musical Works

Performance is the artistic practice of presenting musical works to an audience. The artistic contributions of composers are appreciated through performance. Violin students regard musical works as a significant contributor to the meanings they ascribe to performance. Meaning is frequently synonymous to the composer's intention, which is held as an authority over interpretive decisions. Violin students maintain respect for the composer as an artistic value.

According to the participants, practising for a performance requires taking on the role of a researcher. The aim is to reveal the composer's intentions. Building a logical interpretation through understanding the meaning of the work is the basis for preparing for a performance. V2 noted that the meanings ascribed to the work influence all the technical and physical aspects of playing. Therefore, interpretation is an active ingredient of practicing, not a final coat before a performance. The violin students stressed the importance of the score as the primary source of information. The score effectively contains the meaning of the musical work. V2 stated that a performer must attempt to "immerse" themselves in the score to understand what the composer has meant with each marking. Performance exhibits what the violinist has understood about the intention of the composer. The violinist's capacity for informed decision-making is on display. Loyalty to the score is construed as a form of respect towards the composer. V1 stated that a violinist must "agree to the terms of the score". This traditional approach to performing Western classical music is explicitly encouraged in higher music education, as portrayed in the following extract:

During the bachelor's studies it was constantly repeated that the score is not a mirror. The score is not a mirror. The score is not a mirror. It was repeated so many times (...) The gist was that you must be relentlessly humble and always respect the music.

(Violinist 1)

Asserting that the score is not a mirror implies, that the highest authority in forming an interpretation is the often-dead composer. The performer should not use the score as a “mirror” for their own impulses or desires, but rather submit to a respectful interpretation. V1 expressed, that a musician interpreting a work is “a servant or slave to that music”. This idea of somehow serving music, serving composers, serving tradition, was a repeating theme throughout the interviews. The meaning of performing Western classical music is to be a vessel through which the art passes. Essentially the violinist exists between the work and the audience as an interpreter. V2 described performance as the art of “making other people visible”. This linear understanding of the transfer of meaning is represented in the Figure 1 below.



Figure 1. Linear transfer of meaning

V2 noted, that the linear transfer of meaning, however prevalent, is “just one way” of looking at the moment of performance. Other approaches to performance are explored further in following chapters.

Another significant influence on the meanings of performance are the personal relationships violin students develop with musical works. In the context of performing Western classical music, certain works can follow you through your career. V2 describes this phenomenon as “living with a work”. Selecting repertoire is a part of growing into an independent musician in higher music education. V3 recounted a sense of intimacy with the composer if the musical content or historical background happens to “click with your

persona”. Choosing repertoire outside of the “canon” can be a form of individual expression. Reviving works from composers that may have been overlooked during their own time is artistically fulfilling. A positive and healthy relationship to a musical work is the basis for a successful performance. On the other hand, all participants stated performing works that aren’t particularly enjoyable is an unavoidable part of the profession. It is considered unprofessional to let disliking or feeling distant from a musical work affect a performance.

4.1.2 Performance as Self-Expression

Violin students experience performing Western classical music as a meaningful way to express their musical selves. The results indicate that the demands for authentic self-expression and loyalty to the composer are seemingly contradictory. Curiously, all participants reported experiencing freedom within the boundaries of the score. It seems that the violin students find meaning in interpreting and expressing the beauty they find inside the boundaries of historical musical works.

All participants emphasized the importance of a personal interpretation while performing Western classical music. The interpretation is the expression of the violinists’ artistry. In the following excerpt V2 explains, that even while remaining respectful towards the score, it would be deceitful to pretend that your persona does not influence the performance. The self cannot be completely obscured.

In the end, you are you, and you are here today. The music is coming through you.
(Violinist 2).

Therefore, performance is understood as an expression of self. Higher music education aims to increase the accuracy of expression by developing instrumental skills. All participants affirmed performance as a means to express musical ideas, emotions, preferences, experiences, and opinions. In the context of Western classical music, creative performance usually exists within a composition. V2 described working within the boundaries as “colouring in what is left out in the score”. This implies that the score, due to the limitations of notation, requires creative imagination. V1 noted, that even though they respect the composer, they tend to conduct interpretative decisions based on unconscious intuition. Imagination and intuition are useful when deciding for example the timbre of

sound that the work requires. Expressive and dynamic markings must also be interpreted because they require different approaches in works of different time periods. A marked forte can be majestic, aggressive, joyful, solemn, or anything in between. In this way, the performer de facto adds to the composition. V3 stated that performance is an opportunity to present the musical ideas that arise during practise. All participants described imagining colours, pictures, landscapes, personal experiences, or emotions as a way to connect with the atmosphere of the work. According to V2, performing with a personal touch is especially necessary when playing a famous musical work, otherwise “I don’t see why I should play it at all”.

Performing Western classical music requires a balance between authentic self-expression and loyalty to the tradition. Even when performers stay loyal to the composer, they may end up with vastly different interpretations, and so the tradition remains versatile. V1 stated that the growing demand for individuality in the age of personal branding threatens the traditional approach to classical music. The balance may tip to favour more flamboyant, hyper-individualistic interpretations. According to V1, a soulful performance serves the score, not the ego of the performer. All participants agreed that authentic performance requires acceptance of the fact that others may not agree with your interpretation. Performance requires vulnerability. The performer must risk being critiqued or rejected. In the following excerpt, V3 expresses that the subjectivity of personal taste is evident in the multitude of opinions regarding how any given work should be performed.

Essentially you can do whatever you like, as long as it sounds good. But the thing is, there are many different opinions on what sounds good and what doesn’t. (...) You have to decide for yourself.

(Violinist 3)

Taking the risk of critique, rejection, or failure, requires substantial inner motivation. The results suggest that performing Western classical music is often inspired by love. A love for the violin, for beauty, community, and history. V1 described performance as a way to live out their love for music. V3 stated, that they have simply been innately curious about the violin since childhood. There is an element of inexplicability in devoting such a tremendous amount of time and effort to honing a rather niche skill. Through practice and performance, the violin students weave themselves into a historical tradition, applying their persona and experiences to music created by others. As portrayed in the following

excerpt, V2 finds meaning in the ability to nudge musical works along, further, and further into the present.

It's spiritual music. It is as potent today as it was back then. (...) The meanings do not become lighter. Of course, they change with time, but if the core is beautiful, it remains beautiful.

(Violinist 2).

4.2 Meanings Related to Professional Development

4.2.1 Performance as Achievement

Violin students regard performing Western classical music as a means for professional development. The results indicate that violin performance is a skill-based artform. Achievement can be a positive motivator for developing skills for a professional career in performance. However, conflating personal worth with success exacerbates performance anxiety. Medicating feelings of unworthiness or doubt with excessive practise is an unsustainable approach to professional development. Pursuing excellence at any cost should not be encouraged by pedagogues in higher music education.

All participants reported negative effects of regarding performance as achievement. Developing a goal-oriented mindset from a young age has a detrimental impact on the students ability to enjoy music. V1 admitted, that upon considering the ultimate meaning of performance, they realised that “a lot of it has had to do with wanting to be accepted.” This implies that performance can be a means to seek validation. Performance is a moment to prove yourself, to conform to expectations of being a talented violinist. This mentality contributes to performance anxiety, as shown by the following excerpt:

I have always experienced nerves (...) But I have felt like I have to perform. I have to succeed. I have to be good.

(Violinist 1)

Developing a healthy relationship with performance is important for the sustainability of a career. A degree of separation between the performance and the self is necessary.

Otherwise, according to V1, a “bad performance” pushes their “whole life off kilter”. Being aware of the fact that the success of a performance contributes to the trajectory of a career can be cumbersome. V3 described how self-consciousness has led to performance anxiety feeling “heavier”. Being preoccupied with achievement may have a counterproductive influence on the quality of the performance. A fixed mindset accelerates performance anxiety, which contributes to negative experiences. V1 attributes “not caring too much” as way to enjoy performance more. Being open towards the result of the performance can create a sense of freedom.

Being a performing violinist is by default a merciless career choice, because of the constant evaluation of skill. According to V1, in the professional world “the audience has the right to criticize you”. Unsurprisingly, musicians are at high risk for depression, anxiety, and burn-out. One would think that the aim of higher music education is to equip violin students for the psychological strain of the profession. However, the results revealed that some violin students are taught their emotional experience is unimportant. What matters is how they perform. Two participants described being told by a teacher, that “no-one is interested in how you feel, people come to listen to you play.” This implies that performance is somehow regarded as an object, a result of practice. The music is valued more than the human performing it. V2 bluntly stated, that the atmosphere in the Sibelius Academy violin department can be toxic. V1 asserted, that the manner in which violin students are educated is sometimes “inhumane”. Lack of compassion is construed as means of improving performance. For example, performance is championed as a reason to abuse your body with excessive practice. Prescribing amounts of practise hours is a curiosity of violin pedagogy, which in addition to being unhelpful for professional development, may lead to repetitive strain injuries. V2 argued, that a young violinist does not need to be advised to “play until their fingers bleed”.

Performing Western classical music is most obviously an achievement in the context of exams and competitions. Participants listed limited choice in repertoire and manner of performance as contributing factors. V2 reported, that exams “don’t feel like concerts” because of their inherent formality. Considering that exams are the final destinations of instrumental studies in higher music education, it matters whether exams are construed as a measure of skill rather than an expression of artistry. V1 described performing in an exam as a means of fulfilling certain standards in the following excerpt.

There are restrictions when you perform classical music in the world of universities. In exams you are required to play certain works like this and this and this. There's a standard for how to do it correctly.

(Violinist 1)

However, all participants also reported positive aspects of ascribing achievement to performance. Preparing for a concert is a culmination of effort, through which violin students can challenge themselves. V1 experiences “achieving bigger and better things” as sustenance for motivation. A successful performance is a source of enjoyment, which carries the student onward. V3 described performance as a means to stretch their abilities beyond the immediate. The repertoire for the violin is often technically demanding. In the following excerpt, V3 maintains that performing specifically Western classical music is a method of improving instrumental skills.

Through classical music it's possible to access nourishing repertoire. This genre in particular is very educational.

(Violinist 3).

4.2.2 Performance as a Profession

Violin students develop their professional abilities in and through performance. Performance is ascribed different meanings, depending on the role in which the violinist is operating. Violin students are aware that being a professional requires a wide array of skills, including artistry, historical knowledge, and technical skill. As they venture into the professional arena, violin students learn to approach performance as an increasingly routine task.

Professional violinists take on various roles, such as orchestra musicians, teachers, historians, and soloists. Different meanings are ascribed to performance depending on the role. All participants described developing a wide skillset during their studies, in preparation for the professional world. V3 noted that in different situations, different skills are emphasized. In the data from the interviews, three aspects of violin performance were most prominent: art, history, and technique. This triad is pictured in the Figure 2 below:

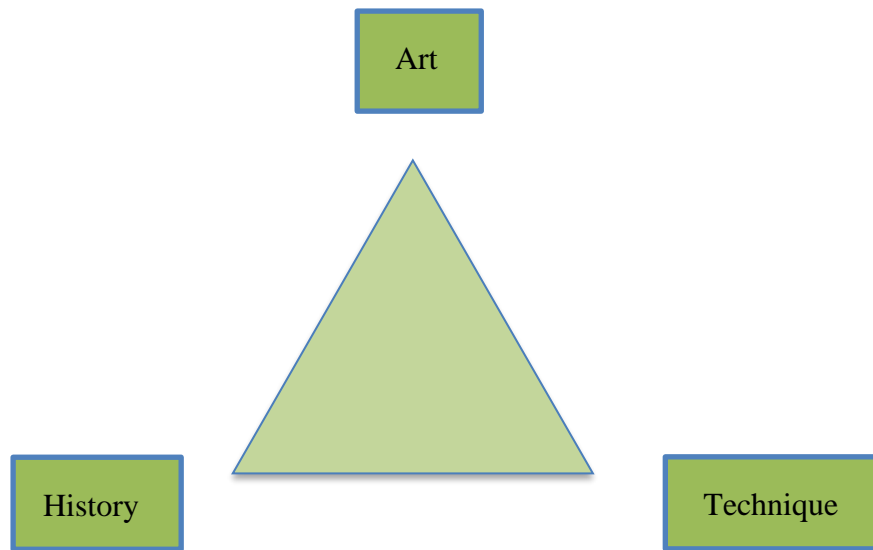


Figure 2. Three aspects of performance

These three aspects: history, art, and technique, influence the meanings violin students ascribe to performance. The tradition of Western classical music requires a performer to embrace a sensitivity towards history. As V1 described, a musician “is the servant of written music.” Art refers to the demand for artistic expression. When in the role of a soloist, artistic expression is a prominent feature of performance. V3 stated, that “as a soloist, you must shine.” However, there is no brilliant artistry without technique. In the following extract V1 explains how concentrating on the technical aspect of playing enables and encourages an artistic performance.

You have to somehow bypass your own enjoyment, because particularly as a violinist, performance requires such fine motoric skills. It’s somehow miniscule. If you perform with too much feeling, the craft may suffer.

(Violinist 1).

V2 maintained, that playing the violin is “definitely a form of craftsmanship”. Violin students regard technique as highly important when working in an orchestra or as a teacher. The role of a violin teacher is to pass on the skill to future generations. While playing in an orchestra, the meaning of performance is offering technical skill for the benefit of a

greater entity. The violinist does not need to actively engage in meaning-making, because decisions about interpretations are made by the conductor.

When I was younger, I thought that if I study the violin, I have to choose a role. Being a soloist or orchestra musician or chamber musician... You can't be everything, in this life you have to always choose. I still think that you have to choose, I think it's important to choose your why. Because when the why is really clear, everything else falls into place.

(Violinist

2)

Violin students experience some amounts of pressure to decide, which role they should strive for. In the excerpt above, V2 describes the process of searching for the meaning of their career as a violinist. A possible solution for finding your role as a violinist is contemplating, which aspects of performance are most meaningful to you.

Violin students regard performance as an opportunity for professional development. In higher music education it is important to perform for the sake of gaining experience and honing skills. V3 stated that performance should almost be mundane, or at least a very natural part of life as a musician. Performance anxiety increases when opportunities for exposure are limited. All participants agreed that higher music education has a responsibility to provide adequate performance opportunities for their students. This indicates that there is a demand for studies to prepare violinists for the professional world. A certain matter-of-factness is ascribed to performance. As V3 stated, "there's really nothing that special about it". The meaning of performance becomes increasingly professional as studies advance. Concerts become deadlines. V1 described how the pace of practicing becomes faster. Instead of a year of preparation, you might have a month, "and then you play it". The industry of classical music revolves around acquiring new performances through successful former performances. Performing is a means of career advancement and becomes financially motivated, as V1 states in the excerpt below:

You have to learn to view performance as work. You realize that you don't have a choice. That's how you get money.

(Violinist 1).

4.3 Other Meanings

4.3.1 Performance as a Communal Experience

Performing Western classical music is understood as a communal experience both in the short and long term. Violin students expressed that in the moment of performance the audience contributes to their sense of meaning. Performance is by nature a social activity. All participants contributed their success to high quality in music education, which indicates that even solo performance is a group effort. The violin students regarded their teachers as highly influential in the process of finding and creating meaning. Performing historical works expands our temporal reality as it enables connecting with past generations. The historical meanings of performance contribute to a communal experience.

All participants expressed, that meanings ascribed to performance are socially constructed. Meaning is understood as something that is discovered, created, and experienced together with the audience and/or co-musicians. Performance is framed as an act of giving, a means to bring joy to others. V3 asserted, that a performer is expected to provide a meaningful experience for the audience. Meaning is non-verbally expressed through *how* the music is performed. This suggests that the audience interprets the performance. V2 stated, that speaking with the audience before playing can communicate the meanings traditionally ascribed to a work. This influences the experience, as described in the excerpt below.

I try to keep my performances as interactive as possible by communicating essential knowledge of the work. I want to give the audience something to look for. (...) Then we can try to experience the meanings of the work together.

(Violinist

2)

Performance is a communal experience in the sense that it cannot be accomplished alone. V2 described, that practicing feels vastly different to performing because of “the energy that the audience provides”. Performance is a unique interaction, where each audience contributes to the experience of meaning.

The results indicate that in the context of Western classical music, the audience makes decisions about attending a concert based on the works that will be performed. Members

of the audience can therefore have pre-existing ideas and opinions about the meanings of a performance. This is especially true when famous works of the canon are played. However, V2 argued that assuming anyone in the audience “can simply hear what the composer meant” is magical thinking. Similarly, V3 said that an audience member who is less familiar with Western classical music will receive the performance differently than an experienced attendee. However, even while being highly educated, people usually come to concerts to enjoy the music, not analyse the composition. All participants suggested that how a performance is received is greatly influenced by individual circumstances. This suggests that the meanings ascribed to performances are highly situational.

All participants expressed that performing Western classical music is the result of an enormous group effort. Successful performances are not created in vacuums. V3 emphasized the importance of being able to experience the meanings of performance in musical community. As the violin students reflected on their journeys, they all mentioned the importance of families, friends, and teachers. All participants had begun playing the violin by the age of five. They have practiced and performed diligently for years before entering higher music education. V2 described performance as something that has been “built together” during their upbringing. A sense of community is ascribed even to individual performance. Through performance, the violin students take part in the musical community. V3 expressed how impactful teachers are in the process of ascribing meaning to performance. Each teacher brings along new perspectives from which you can “take something with you”. The voices of the teachers stay with you long after you have moved on, guiding interpretive decisions in practice.

Furthermore, performing Western classical music is understood as a communal experience with past generations. V3 regarded playing historical works as a way of experiencing life beyond their immediate situation. Performance expands the limitations of time and place. All participants regarded their artistic work as a continuum of a historical tradition. Performing musical works has historical significance. V2 regarded the tradition worth preserving because it “teaches us such valuable skills”. In the following excerpt, V2 describes how through engaging with Western classical music, they connect with and learn from the past.

We can learn so much from the people who came before us. Those who made this music before us. It's a language. And by learning the language, you're connecting with history. (Violinist 2)

4.3.2 Performance Philosophy

The meanings ascribed by violin students in higher music education describe their inner world – their reasons, ambitions, or philosophy behind the art of performance. The question of *why* violin students perform is complex, multifaceted, and sometimes paradoxical.

All participants ascribed a level of uncertainty to the meaning of performing Western classical music. V1 described wondering, whether there is any sense in spending their life picking up “that wooden block every day”. Instrumental studies in higher music education can feel like an irrational pursuit. Becoming a violinist requires hard work, but that doesn't exclude the co-incidental nature of starting to play an instrument in the first place. All participants described becoming a violinist as something that has happened *to* them, due to musicianship running in the family or other influential circumstances. Nevertheless, performing classical music has now become a meaningful part of their life. V1 described that at its best, performance can bring a sense of purpose to existence. In the following excerpt, V1 describes how performing Western classical music seems to be driven by an inner need that is difficult to explain.

I sometimes wonder why I do this. I have to. I don't have to. I feel unwell when I can't play. But I sometimes I feel unwell when I do.

(Violinist 1)

Meaning is a source of motivation. V2 asserted that “the creation of meanings is crucial for continuity.” Understanding the purpose and value of performing encourages endurance in the face of obstacles and setbacks such as rejection or injury. The tendency to standardize performance in higher music education is at odds with developing a personal performance philosophy. V3 noted, that performance should be a source of “never-ending contemplation”, because the nature of meaning is temporary. Instrumental studies in Western classical music prioritise the result of a performance, instead of the philosophy behind it. It seems to V1 that “it doesn't matter what you think, it only matters how you sound.” A contemplative approach to performance is not necessarily encouraged. V2

stated, that during their studies they continuously questioned *why* they were expected to play or perform in a certain manner. V2 described that “it felt like a secret, or that maybe nobody had the answer.” In contrast, V3 experienced that the Sibelius Academy offered plenty of opportunities for reflecting on performance.

Performing classical music for an audience requires vulnerability. V1 stated, that performance reveals something about who we are as a human, not just as a musician. The violinist is seen and heard through performance. All participants expressed that a performance never fails to reflect their mental state. Performance has a way of revealing our strengths and weaknesses. You cannot escape from the stage. Being in a healthy relationship with yourself, the musical work, and the violin is a prerequisite for a successful performance. According to V2, when the partnership with the instrument and the musical work is stable, “the music can flow through you”. V1 described that when they are in a good mental state, performance feels more natural and structured. When feeling unstable, performance feels chaotic and the meanings of the musical works blur. In the excerpt below V3 also describes, that they ascribe different meanings to performance depending on their mental state.

Different mental states give different answers (...) If you're nervous and self-conscious, what you find important in performance is X. If you're feeling more positive, it will be Y.

(Violinist 3)

This suggests that performance allows or demands coming into contact with yourself. Unhealthy or negative thought patterns tend to surface during performance. On the other hand, a positive mentality can be strengthened through performance. V2 argued that this is especially true while playing the violin, because the instrument is in such close proximity to the performer. The violin rests between the collarbone, chin, and left hand. V1 stated that the violin is an “inhumane instrument” that requires enormous self-discipline. The violin is a demanding agent for the student to reckon with. However, the technical challenges of the violin are a rewarding aspect of performance. The relationship with the instrument may fluctuate between love and hate, but the goal is to experience the violin as being on the same team. In the following excerpt, V2 describes that in an optimal performance the violin is not a threat or a subordinate, but an equal partner.

In the best scenario the violin is an extension of yourself. When you play, you can't hide behind it. You can't step in front of it. You have to be in partnership with your instrument. It's your voice.

(Violinist 2)

All participants expressed that performance promotes both mental and physical well-being. Connecting with the violin in and through performance is an embodied experience. Playing the violin is a holistic practice when the whole body resonates with the instrument. V1 stated, that performing classical music when playing at their best relaxes their entire body. The unique high generated by playing well, both in practice and performance, is addicting.

The results suggest that violin students value Western classical music because it encourages the performer to decenter themselves. All participants regarded the musical work as the center of the performance. According to V1, a performer should strive to "let go of their ego". This is curious because performance is also regarded as an expression of a self. V2 noted, that when they manage to focus completely on the meaning of the work, they "free something within". In the excerpt below V1 described that the best performances are those where they manage to forget themselves.

When you surrender to the work you have no time to think about how you are presenting yourself. It's incredible how sometimes on stage, you simply forget yourself. But I rarely get into that headspace, because of the amount of work it requires. Everything has to be just right.

(Violinist 1)

Being able to shift your focus onto an external entity during performance can be liberating. It helps avoid the stress induced by excessive self-consciousness. V2 described this mindset as "not being in the way of yourself". Being self-conscious and having high expectations can lead to paying disproportionate attention to small mistakes during a performance. When focusing on the music, V3 maintained that it is "easier to let things go". The practice of decentering yourself in performance is considered a valuable life lesson, as described in the following excerpt.

Performing classical music is so educational because you are not the only one in the centre. The value of the performance doesn't just come from the fact that it's you who are doing it. You have to let go of your ego and learn important skills for life. (...) Performing keeps us close to ourselves and close to natural, universal things. It teaches commitment and the ability to be present. It teaches us to listen.

(Violinist 2)

V2 regarded performance as an educational practice. This suggests that a performer is both giving and receiving as they play on a stage. Violin students experience that performance teaches important extra-musical skills, for example the ability to commit and be present. V3 asserted, that the tradition of Western classical music guides the violin students towards a respectful attitude towards the art of others. V1 stated that the challenging nature of performing with the violin “keeps you humble”. Therefore, the meaning of performance is connected to a meaningful life in a broader sense. There seems to be something fundamentally *human* in performing music. V2 described it as “connecting with larger ideas, eternal concepts, without being able to let go of yourself”. This implies that performance can offer spiritual and philosophical meanings for violin students in higher music education.

5 Discussion

In this chapter, I will discuss the results. First, I will consider how the conceptual framework aids in interpreting the results. I will then examine the reliability and validity of this study. Finally, I will present some ideas for further research.

5.1 Conclusions

In this thesis, I have asked and answered the question: What meanings do violin students in higher music education ascribe to performing Western classical music? The results indicate that through performance, the violin students find and create artistic, professional, communal, historical, practical, and spiritual meanings. I found, as Marissa Silverman (2020) before me, that instrumental studies can be *instrumental* in pursuing a meaningful life (Silverman 2020, 2).

The artistic meanings that the violin students ascribed to performing Western classical music revealed how “embedded” we are into our cultural landscape: we become a part of it, and it becomes a part of us (Silverman 2020, 2). The concept of the musical work is so entangled into the artistic practice, it was impossible to pull threads of meaning without it. As Holmgren suggested, it seems that in the tradition of Western classical music, performing is understood as the act of presenting musical works to an audience (Holmgren 2022, 47). This assumption is, in the light of both previous studies and my results, enthusiastically reproduced in higher music education (Holmgren 2022; Lampela 2023; Leech-Wilkinson 2016). It is worth considering the extent of which students are free to ascribe meanings independently from the historical tradition. Western classical music is neither a neutral nor an indefinitely predisposed entity – it interacts with the values of those who play it while bringing its own qualities (Bull 2019, 71).

The results of this thesis do not reflect only the inner worlds of the students, but also the values of higher music education. Embeddedness is especially poignant in institutions, where shared assumptions are reinforced (Small 1998, 134). The participants frequently described performance as servitude – presumably a linguistic relic from the time that musicians served the church or the court. A relic, among many, that is passed on in one-to-one tuition, from one generation to the next. Violin students described musical works in

much the same terms as Goehr (1992) did, thirty years ago. An ideal performance was regarded as one where you can forget yourself and surrender to the musical work. The element of being a part of history, sharing in the art of humans long gone, was considered a meaningful part of performance. I noticed, that as Thomas (2019) had described, meaning was found in origin, in conceptualizing classical music as a cultural heritage, worthy of preserving (Thomas 2019, 4).

I found that though the violin students value the authority of the composer, through performance they *intend* to express themselves. The students created nuanced meanings within restrictions, a practice sometimes referred to as “colouring in the score”. The results indicate that in the context of Western classical music, personality is expressed through interpreting the musical work. As Östersjö (2008) and Holmgren (2012) suggested, artistic expression is explored within certain parameters. These parameters are then tinkered with in practice and performance (Lampela 2023, 2). However, what I did not find in previous studies is the self-reported freedom that the violin students in this study experienced through being loyal to the score. It seems that the violin students connected performance to a practice of decentering the self. Curiously, the students simultaneously depicted performance as a way to expand and explore their emotional life, their imagination and intellect. From this I conclude that meanings can, as Small (1998) suggested, exist in convoluted, even paradoxical multitudes.

I approached this topic with the inkling that the violin students would regard performance as a means of professional development. It had not occurred to me that through developing their artistic practice in instrumental studies they were in fact developing themselves. The aesthetic ideals in Western classical music require investing great amounts of effort over an extended period of time. The participants of this study have been consistently working towards professional performance since childhood. Performance, in a sense, is a culmination of all that effort. It displays societally valued traits such as commitment, diligence, self-discipline, concentration, and courage. Anna Bull (2019) asserted that “playing well” is an enticing mode of self-improvement, because of its potential to lead to praise and social recognition (Bull 2019, 90). Similarly, the results of this study suggested that performing Western classical music can be a means to seek social validation. In the context of classical music, hard work is often disguised behind the smoke screen of “talent”, which creates questionable implications for the performer (Holmgren 2022, 67). The difference is between being celebrated for who you *are* instead of what you *do*. I wonder

whether the mystification of artistic work may exacerbate conflating success in performance to personal worth.

Ascribing meanings of achievement and personal development to performance impacts violin students in several ways. The results suggest that on one hand, achievement can provide meaningful purpose. In simple terms, concerts are a motivating deadline for practicing. On the other hand, conflating personal worth with achievement can have a detrimental impact on the wellbeing of students. According to the results of this study, an unhealthy relationship to achievement can be enabled or even provoked by higher music education. Classical music supplies institutional support for creating a demanding relationship with yourself (Bull 2019, 90). As the participants reflected on the meanings they ascribe to performance, they divulged details of pedagogical situations that had resulted in emotional and psychological, or even physical harm, since teaching a student to practice excessively will in many cases result in repetitive strain injuries. Like Holmgren (2022), I also found that because instrumental studies are conducted as one-to-one teaching, the impact of accepted practice in lessons cannot be emphasized enough. The belief that excellence can be effectively achieved through lack of compassion is a pedagogical relic, another display of the conservatory culture of Western classical music. It seems to me that teachers and composers seem to hold a hierarchical authority, which softens if the students reach a certain threshold of ability. Oksala (2018) discovered that she had to relearn her approach to performance after graduating. The participants in this study reported re-evaluating their “why” as a response to increasing pressure during their years in higher music education. As students grow in artistic independence, performance is ascribed increasingly professional meanings – it is, after all, work.

The meanings ascribed to performance can be mundane: financial gain, advancing studies, completing an exam, playing for fun. Performing Western classical music can be simple – you follow the notes on the score, adding acceptable dynamic phrasing, with an instrument so familiar that it settles unconsciously into your arms. Even concerts, as elevated as they seem, can feel ordinary to a seasoned musician. However, in this study I found that when the violin students took some time to pause and reflect on the meanings they ascribe to performance, they found really beautiful things to say. It seems, as Silverman (2020) suggested, that instrumental studies provide potential for a meaningful life. Violin students can achieve musical enjoyment, flourishing creativity, communal wellbeing, and a deepened sense of self (Silverman 2020, 8). Through performance the

students reach out into the world while also encountering uncharted territories within themselves. Through performance, violin students experience failures and victories, trials, and errors. In my opinion, performance is an act of great courage. The participants described performing Western classical music as a teacher. It is an entity that challenges them to face their fears, ambitions, and emotions.

The practice of performing Western classical music knits the students into their historical, social, cultural, and geographical context. Violin students come to belong to a tradition and a community through participating in performance. As Östersjö (2008) rather fervently maintained, the moment of performance is a collaboration of a multitude of agents. Picture a violin student on stage playing, for example, the Sarabande from Partita n. 2 in D minor by Bach. What influences the sound that pours out into the hall? There is the mind, body, and perhaps soul, of the student; there is the musical legacy of the German composer, who passed away in 1750; there is the luthier who carved the violin from a tree, the horse that provided the hair for the bow (Östersjö 2008, 49-50.) There are the teachers, the teachers of the teachers; the generations of musicians; the peers; the friends; the parents and caretakers. There is the audience, without whom the performance would not be a performance at all. As Small (1998) suggested – even when performing alone, performance is a community practice.

In conclusion, I would like to consider the knowledge and understanding that these results provide to the field of music education. As one participant argued, considering meanings is absolutely crucial for the longevity of an artistic practice. The music education philosopher Jorgensen (2020) alluded to the same argument when she considered whether to love or not to love Western classical music as an educator (Jorgensen 2020, 2). By strengthening the capacity of students to contemplate on meanings, we are encouraging independence of thought and sustainable creativity. It is important for educators to promote a healthy attitude towards performance and to encourage aspiring musicians to have ideas of their own (Leech-Wilkinson 2016, 326). It is also useful to have a robust vocabulary to advocate for the funding, or sometimes mere existence, of arts. The question “why should we have music education?” can be addressed with some of the meanings that performing music holds for both individuals and communities.

5.2 Reliability

Amongst the ethical considerations of research are validity and reliability (Hirsjärvi & Hurme 2001, 185). I will first consider whether the methodological choices were valid in regard to the research question. I will then examine the reliability of the results.

In this study, I have explored the meanings violin students in higher music education ascribe to performing Western classical music by conducting a qualitative case study. The aim was to discern different perspectives with as much depth and nuance as possible. A qualitative case study is a valid choice when researching how an individual experiences the world. (Williamon et al 2021, 31-33.) I therefore am of the opinion that this research can offer valid results. However, the extent of accuracy with which this research represents the phenomenon it claims to display has some limitations. In this study, I could not display the entire collected data for the reader to make their own conclusions. It is common practise to only display persuasive extracts that somehow underline a chosen theme (Silverman 2000, 10.) While the research question was rather open: *what* meanings do violin students in higher music education ascribe to performing Western classical music? I was challenged to, through systematic content analysis and interpretation, group meanings together in order to generate presentable results without losing depth and nuance along the way.

The nature of qualitative case studies can be perceived as anecdotal (Silverman 2000, 10). In this study, I have aimed to provide reliable examples of a phenomenon. The reliability of a qualitative case study is increased by the clarity of the researcher. Fragments of data, such as snippets of interviews, should not be framed as representative of the entire phenomenon (Silverman 2000, 11). It is important to be explicit with the limits of the results (Hirsjärvi & Hurme 2001, 186). The process of choosing interviewees is an obvious limitation – whose voice am I amplifying, whose story will be heard? It was tempting to interview violinists in various different points in their life, children, and professionals alike. In the end, I chose to limit the interviewees to the confines of higher music education, in order to gain deeper knowledge of performance in that specific context.

In the results, I chose to present contradicting and unclear meanings. One example is how the violin students reported finding greater expressive freedom through being loyal, or even submissive, to the score. I did not explain the contradiction away. In general, I found

through this study that meanings often present themselves as both/and rather than either/or. Performance can be both beautiful and mundane, motivating and anxiety-inducing. I acknowledge that ascribed meanings fluctuate with mood, circumstance, and well-being, among other things. Humans adjust to their context and change with time – the interviews might have generated different data on another day or even in a different space (Hirsjärvi & Hurme 2001, 186).

The reliability of a qualitative case study is also affected by the nature of interpretation. Even when an interview is clearly recorded and diligently transcribed, it is the researcher that deciphers the data (Hirsjärvi & Hurme 2001, 186). The reliability of interpretation can be weakened by a failure to account for pauses and overlaps in speech. Though seemingly trivial, they may be crucial in the process of forming an understanding of what the interviewee means (Silverman 2000, 10). Even though everything one writes is in some sense incomplete, I believe that the results of this study are a reliable account of the meanings that the three violin students ascribed to performance at the moment of the interview, and as such provide a valid and reliable window into the phenomenon in general.

In this thesis I have approached the meanings violin students ascribe to performing Western classical music with curiosity, care, and respect. In the introduction I voiced my motivation for deciding on this research topic. I felt that if I am to, despite my qualms, fears, and concerns, keep joyfully and sustainably performing Western classical music *and* pass an authentic love for the artistic practice on to the next generation, I had to dig deeper, into the roots of meaning. Employing a critical approach was in the interest of further cultivating the artistic practice. This research process did not resolve all my issues, but it deepened my understanding of *why* I choose to continue. For months, this thesis has been flowing in and out of my mind, gently leading me to voice meanings I haven't known how to.

5.3 Future Research

Research can and should address issues that require change (Williamon et al 2021, 3). As mentioned in the introduction, Western classical music has had the privilege of being promoted as the height of human spirituality and intellect (Small 1998, 3). As a result, the performance of Western classical music has become a well-researched area in the field of music education. However, in recent years the progress of society has created a need to rethink and reimagine the artistic practice with an elitist, sexist, racist, and classist reputation (Bull 2019; Jorgensen 2020; Leech-Wilkinson 2016). There is an abundance of perspectives through which to reconsider the artistic practice. In my opinion, conducting future research through the lens of critical theory is vital for both the future of Western classical music and the field of music education at large. Through critically inquiry Western classical music could become relevant for more diverse audiences, could offer more than comfort for the already comfortable, and could promote equality, innovation, and radical creativity (Leech-Wilkinson 2016, 326).

In this study I explored the meanings violin students in higher music education ascribed to performing Western classical music. I generated the data through conducting three theme-centred interviews with master's students at the university of Sibelius Academy. During the process, several options for future research came to mind. Firstly, I noticed that students are embedded into the tradition of Western classical music from a very young age. Future research could therefore explore the meanings children ascribe to performing Western classical music. My personal experience and observations in this study suggest that problems with performance anxiety usually emerge in adolescence. However, the glorification of child prodigies may increase the pressure to be successful at an even younger age. Pressure is exacerbated by narrow, exclusionary ideals of excellence (Bull 2019, 186). I am frankly worried about children in high-demand elite music education. The demands in one-to-one tuition are high as they are with the range of technical and artistic skills to develop (Lampela 2023, 1). Teachers may not have the capacity or time to address psychological well-being and philosophical meaning-making. I would like to explore whether developing a curriculum for performance coaching for children could prevent performance anxiety, increase well-being, contribute to a sense of meaning, and in these ways, sustainably improve the results of music education.

Secondly, I am interested in further exploring performance studies in higher music education. I suggest examining the possibilities and consequences of freeing the performance of classical music from moral obligations to the tradition. I observed, as Holmgren (2022) did before me, that instrumental studies greatly influence the meanings violin students learn to find and create. The performance of Western classical music as a part of personal and professional development is shaped in and through music education. Therefore, it is important to examine the values that higher music education enforces. As Leech-Wilkinson (2019) argued, it seems that teachers and examiners along with the imagined presence of the often-dead composer create a policing system that enforces certain interpretations of meanings (Leech-Wilkinson 2019, 1). Future research could explore the meaning-making processes that take place in instrumental studies through a combination of observing one-to-one tuition and interviewing teachers as well as students. Thirdly, I am curious about how meanings ascribed to performing Western classical music change over time. A longitudinal, perhaps autoethnographic study on the development of a student could in my opinion offer a valuable insight into the artistic practice and perhaps challenge the traditional authority of the musical work. The data could consist of videos of performance and observations about emotional and cognitive processes.

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