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Book review:

Learning and Teaching in the Music Studio. A Student-Centred Approach,
edited by **J. I. Pozo, M. P. Pérez Echeverría, G., López-Íñiguez, & J. A. Torrado**
(Springer, 2022).

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Almost two decades of interdisciplinary work by the Musical Knowledge Acquisition Research Group (GIACM) of the Faculty of Psychology of the Autonomous University of Madrid (Spain) has been compiled in the book *Learning and Teaching in the Music Studio. A Student-Centred Approach* (Pozo et al., 2022). This ground-breaking volume invites music teachers, advanced level music students, and researchers to embrace the paradigm shift towards student-centred learning by approaching the topic from a socio-cognitive constructivist viewpoint.

The book arises from the current existential crisis in instrumental music teaching, as the gap between the education provided and the competences needed is becoming increasingly wider and deeper. The way musicians are educated has remained unchanged for decades, if not centuries, while the graduates find themselves unprepared for the challenges of the real world, which expects a majority of them to become dedicated to teaching their instrument instead of being a professional soloist. Although the current system has many shortcomings, the idea of the authors is not to complain, but to offer alternatives to the current situation, and towards that purpose they have included a thorough overview of various research-based approaches to learning and teaching, which makes up the entire second part of the book. In this way the reader is given a comprehensive overview of the current situation, as well as numerous ideas for creating a more student-centred and constructivist-based classroom environment.

Among instrument teachers there is a widespread hesitation regarding any proposed changes to their work practices, which is often based on the assumption that those who propose

new strategies rarely teach themselves. *Learning and teaching in the music studio* has the potential to alleviate those doubts, as the 12 contributing authors are specialists in the fields of both psychology and music, and several also work as teachers in Spanish conservatories and schools of music. Advocating for effective and meaningful teaching, their goal is to promote learning strategies that students could also use in the absence of their teachers. Without any ambition to publish a handbook for music teachers or convince them to give up their current practices, the authors aim to improve the existing situation by questioning the accustomed conservatory model and contrasting it with an alternative pedagogical approach.

The first part of the book, *A New Mindset for Learning and Teaching Music*, offers a thorough introduction to the current state of music education in Spain and several other Western countries. Even though the authors have little positive to say in this respect, their supportive while somewhat sarcastic tone leaves readers optimistic regarding the numerous opportunities for improvement in the various fields of music education considered in this part. The discussion is opened by Guadalupe López-Íñiguez, Juan Ignacio Pozo, and María Puy Pérez Echeverría arguing the necessity for reforming music education to better prepare future musicians for the challenges of their work life. Juan Ignacio Pozo's "The psychology of learning music" sheds light on the teaching conditions that help students to manage their own learning processes, questioning the common function of teachers as the correctors of errors. While explaining the conflict between two different styles – traditional *versus* student-centred – where the first concentrates on learning the musical score (or "code") and transferring it to the instrument, and the other focuses on how the relationship between the student's actions and the instrument has a conceptual, personal, or aesthetic meaning and affects the sound produced, the author gently directs readers towards contemplating the true value and meaning of learning an instrument. In the same line, María Puy Pérez Echeverría continues with analysing teachers' conceptions and beliefs on learning and teaching music as factors that may hinder change in music classrooms, aptly pointing out that the debate is between the perception of needing a change and the fear of bringing it about. Juan Ignacio Pozo, María Puy Pérez Echeverría, Guadalupe López-Íñiguez, and Amalia Casas-Mas end the first part of the book with a chapter presenting an empirically validated system for the analysis of instrumental learning and teaching practices (SAPEA, for its initials in Spanish), which seeks to be an exhaustive tool for the observation of most activities taking place in instrumental music classes. The proposed multidimensional analysis includes not only verbal interaction between teachers and students, but also the instrumental actions – therefore differentiating between various types of activities and leading to the

breakdown of what happens in the classroom into different units of analysis to make observations as objective as possible.

After getting readers thoroughly acquainted with the theoretical and methodological principles upon which the book is based, the second part on *Learning and Teaching in the Music Classroom* is like a buffet of chapters catering to almost every taste and need, allowing a more specific look into different contexts of music education. For those interested in the development of children between 4 and 7 years of age, Anna Sorlí, Juan Ignacio Pozo and José Antonio Torrado explore the topic of children's intuitive musicality, which is often overlooked both in general education and in music schools. Contrasting the common way of teaching music, where the student is expected to perfectly execute the musical score before "adding" emotional qualities to the piece, several chapters stress the need to address the expressive dimensions of music from an early age. María Puy Pérez Echeverría and Cristina Marín debate the pragmatic and epistemic function of musical scores, pointing out the ridiculousness of excluding expression and meaning from words by paralleling scores with written texts. In a similar vein, Guadalupe López-Íñiguez and Juan Ignacio Pozo compare the effects of constructive *versus* direct teaching methods regarding initial learning of musical instruments at elementary levels of conservatories and music schools. According to their research, students of constructive teachers are highly motivated and have the ability to consider musical scores in a complex and holistic manner at an early age, suggesting the need to focus teaching more on the students and their learning processes rather than contents and outcomes. Continuing with the topic of expressivity in regard to learning instrumental techniques, José Antonio Torrado, Juan Ignacio Pozo, and María Puy Pérez Echeverría contrast the traditional approach with the expressivist, stating that although it is necessary to learn musical and instrumental codes and the actions leading to the desired sounds, it is also important to keep in mind that these are a means to an end, not the ultimate goal of music learning and interpretation. In line with this work, but approached from a distinct angle, Elisa Méndez and Juan Ignacio Pozo remarkably expand upon the idea of using composing as a means of teaching school-age children the communication and expression of emotions through music, which prompts the salient question – why is it so rarely used in today's music schools?

Regarding the more mundane aspects of music learning, José Antonio Torrado, María Puy Pérez Echeverría, and Juan Ignacio Pozo address the topical theme of this decade by delving into the use of Information and Communications Technologies in chapter "Learning music through ICT". Although advances in technology have affected every teacher and student in music education, especially during recent years, we have little knowledge of how to put that

into use. In this chapter, the authors have suggested ways to use ICT in the music classroom so that it would contribute new qualities instead of merely underpinning the traditional methods with new measures. Turning to the timeless issue of evaluation, Aránzazu González and Alfredo Bautista question the purposes of assessment, as teachers are invited to rethink and improve their feedback on students' learning process. Although the arguments for reconsidering the assessment criteria are strong, a far more intriguing but only casually mentioned topic is the idea of teaching deontology and responsibility. Undoubtedly an extensive theme, it could have been elaborated a little more to leave the reader some hints regarding the ethics of teaching to ponder on.

While most of this book has dealt with issues concerning individual lessons, the chapter "From Individual to Cooperative Learning" shifts focus to analyse the characteristics of ensemble lessons. Here, Lucas Baño and Juan Ignacio Pozo discuss the problems of cooperation in rehearsal practice of chamber music groups and point out the teacher's role in fostering authentic cooperation of group work use, which entails genuine co-construction of the emotional significance of a musical piece. In "The Choir Conductor: Interpreter or Maestro?" Maravillas Corbalán Abellán discusses the choir conductor's professional role – whether they identify as an interpreter or a "maestro" – and proposes that in a rehearsal which serves as a learning environment (for example, amateur choirs) the conductor is both musician and teacher at the same time, whereas with professional singers the conductor acts almost exclusively as a musician, giving direct and precise instructions to the singers on technical and interpretative aspects. One could question whether the choice really is between one or the other approach, as guiding professional singers towards the mutually desired outcome resembles any other teaching process and, in that case, the author seems to suggest that professional work as a conductor automatically means having a direct teaching style. Could constructive conductors really be non-existent on a professional level?

Concluding on a somewhat rebellious note in "Learning Outside the Music Classroom: From Informal to Formal Learning as Musical Learning Cultures", Amalia Casas-Mas outlines the features of classical, flamenco, and jazz music cultures. Non-formal and informal environments have several observed benefits over the (formal) classical culture, most notably students' very high intrinsic motivation, as their enjoyment from making music inspires learning and excelling, which should offer plenty of food for thought for everyone in the field of classical music.

The journey of getting acquainted with the principles of student-centred learning ends with part three: *Teacher Training, Innovation and Research*. First, Amalia Casas-Mas and

Guadalupe López-Íñiguez address the deficiencies in Western music education mentioned in the previous chapters of this book, while also calling attention to issues such as the gender gap in the education sector and the rate of student drop-out. They suggest well-reasoned and specific improvements regarding both pre-service and in-service teacher training, and this chapter is thus strongly recommended reading material for every music educator and curriculum developer. The final chapter, by the book's editors Guadalupe López-Íñiguez, María Puy Pérez Echeverría, Juan Ignacio Pozo, and José Antonio Torrado, offers a compendious summary of all the topics addressed above. For a busy reader, this could serve as a commented version of the table of contents, so approaching the book in an unorthodox manner by starting from the very end might be worth considering.

Although some editorial hiccups slightly disturb the otherwise clear and understandable message of the authors, the occasional disjointed tables or textual blemishes do not affect the generally positive impression. As a bonus, from time to time the reader might quite unexpectedly find some encouraging comments from the authors, which reveal their good-humoured and benevolent attitude. In conclusion, the book has successfully overcome the mythical challenge of being both research-based as well as easily readable, and it is surely an invaluable addition to the bookshelves of every music teacher and student.

Reference

Pozo, J. I., Pérez-Echeverría, M. P., López-Íñiguez, G., & Torrado, J. A. (eds.). 2022. Learning and teaching in the music studio. A student-centred approach. Springer. Landscapes: The Arts, Aesthetics, and Education, vol 31. Springer.