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## **Music Majors And Meditation Practice: A Phenomenological Study**

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MUSIC MAJORS AND MEDITATION PRACTICE: A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY

by

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Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements

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Performance

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Accepted by:

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## **Abstract**

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to examine undergraduate and graduate music majors' perceived experiences while learning and practicing a meditation technique. Guiding research questions included: 1) How did meditation practice alter participants' thoughts related to music performance? 2) How did meditation practice influence participants' perceived Music Performance Anxiety (MPA) symptoms? 3) What aspects of meditation practice did participants find most/least helpful in perceived reduction of negative MPA symptoms? 4) How did meditation practice influence post-performance self-evaluation? 5) What influence does meditation practice have on participants during performance preparation? Six music majors were selected as participants and data was collected through interviews, a focus group, a post-performance group discussion, participant journals, and an open-ended survey. Three themes emerged regarding participants' perceived experiences while learning and practicing a meditation technique: 1) shifting attitudes about performance, 2) personalizing the meditation practice, and 3) experiencing increased awareness. Participants observed changes regarding how they approached music performance and music performance preparation that influenced their perceived MPA symptoms.

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## Chapter One

### Introduction

Music performance anxiety (MPA) affects many musicians, from amateur to professional.<sup>1</sup> For those who experience MPA, anticipation of an upcoming performance or audition may trigger physiological and psychological fear responses.<sup>2</sup> Some responses to MPA including poor concentration, rapid heart rate, tremor, sweating, and dry mouth may have a significant negative impact on a musician's ability to perform.<sup>3</sup> Positive effects of MPA have been observed, as a moderate level of anxiety may result in optimal performance.<sup>4</sup> In a 1987 study of MPA, Nagal found 92% of music students experience performance-related anxiety and 62% felt that their performances were negatively affected by this anxiety.<sup>5</sup> Common treatments of MPA utilize a variety of strategies, including drugs ranging from beta-adrenergic blockers to cannabis, behavioral therapy such as systematic desensitization and meditation, and cognitive-behavioral therapy including attention training and visualization.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Glenn D. Wilson and David Roland, "Performance Anxiety," in *The Science and Psychology of Music Performance: Creative Strategies for Teaching and Learning*, ed. Richard Parncutt and Gary E. McPherson (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 47.

<sup>2</sup> Lacey Hutchison Marye, "A Survey of Music Performance Anxiety: Definition, Causes and Treatments" (Diss., University of South Carolina, 2011), 2.

<sup>3</sup> Robert A. Tamborrino, "An Examination of Performance Anxiety Associated with Solo Performance of College-Level Music Majors" (Diss., Indiana University, 2001), 4.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 3.

<sup>5</sup> Lorraine Hough McCoy, "Musical Performance Anxiety Among College Students: An Integrative Approach" (EdD Diss., Northern Illinois University, 1998), 23.

<sup>6</sup> Wilson and Roland, "Performance Anxiety," 51-54.

Tamborrino examined the incidence of performance anxiety among college music majors in a 2001 questionnaire-based study. More than half of respondents reported “an absence of self-confidence, self-control and overall comfort in their performance experience.”<sup>7</sup> Through quantitative analysis, Tamborrino revealed a weak positive correlation between high performance anxiety and daily emotional changes ( $r=.203$ ,  $p<0.01$ ), suggesting the importance of stable emotional health in managing MPA.<sup>8</sup>

In 2011 Marye reviewed common treatments used to ameliorate negative symptoms of MPA, including cognitive-behavioral therapies, pharmacological treatments, and alternative treatments.<sup>9</sup> Cognitive-behavioral therapists concentrate on decreasing MPA symptoms through practices such as systematic desensitization, attention training, behavior rehearsal, stress inoculation, and relaxation techniques.<sup>10</sup> Pharmacological treatments for MPA may include benzodiazepines, beta-adrenergic blockers, tricyclic antidepressants, or selective serotonin reuptake inhibitors (SSRIs).<sup>11</sup> For persons who may not have access to cognitive-behavioral therapy or who prefer to avoid pharmacological treatment, alternative treatments for MPA may be used. These include physical exercise, diet management, homeopathy, acupuncture, and meditation.<sup>12</sup>

The use of meditation as a treatment of MPA has a limited history of rigorous academic inquiry. In a 2001 small-sample quantitative study on the effects of meditation on MPA, Chang found support for the hypothesis that meditation may aid in anxiety reduction. Chang’s data analysis found that the meditation group in the study “had a

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<sup>7</sup> Tamborrino, “An Examination of Performance Anxiety,” 88; *Ibid.*, 137.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 140.

<sup>9</sup> Marye, “A Survey of Music Performance Anxiety,” 31-33.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 34-38.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 42-47.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 49-56.



significant reduction in state anxiety as compared to pre-performance anxiety, whereas the control group did not.”<sup>13</sup>

In 2004 De Felice collected and examined research on a specific kind of meditation, mindfulness meditation (MM), and the possible use of MM in treatment of MPA. De Felice suggested performers may “achieve emotional balance, to be more confident and to have a better experience” through practice of MM.<sup>14</sup> Mindfulness meditation practitioners focus on a single thought at one time, using their breath “to bring attention to the practice.”<sup>15</sup>

Baker examined the influences of meditation on anxiety in a 2012 study of college freshmen and sophomores. Participants were divided into three groups, a distraction meditation (D-M) group, a coherent breathing group, and a control group with reading assignments. Participants learned their assigned techniques in a single-day workshop and were then instructed to practice their respective techniques daily for three weeks. The coherent breathing practice required 20 minutes of daily practice, while the D-M meditation practice required 10 minutes of daily practice.<sup>16</sup> Participants in both the meditation and coherent breathing groups exhibited greater reduction in stress and anxiety along with improved holistic wellness compared to participants in the control group.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Joanne Chiung-Wen Chang, “Effect of Meditation on Music Performance Anxiety,” (EdD Diss., Columbia University, 2001), 59.

<sup>14</sup> Maluh Guarino De Felice, “Mindfulness Meditation: A New Tool for Understanding and Regulating Musical Performance Anxiety – An Affective Neuroscientific Perspective,” (Diss., University of Miami, 2004), 31.

<sup>15</sup> De Felice, “Mindfulness Meditation,” 53.

<sup>16</sup> Baker, “Does Daily Meditation or Coherent Breathing Influence Perceived Stress,” 43.

<sup>17</sup> Nancy Coyne Baker, “Does Daily Meditation or Coherent Breathing Influence Perceived Stress, Stress Effects, Anxiety, or Holistic Wellness in College Freshmen and Sophomores?” (Diss., Boston College, 2012), 66.

Marye describes meditation as a non-pharmacological method capable of treating negative symptoms of MPA.<sup>18</sup> Meditation techniques have been shown to enable reductions in stress and anxiety.<sup>19</sup> A better understanding of how meditation techniques enable musicians to manage negative symptoms of MPA may allow future researchers to design well-targeted studies.

### Purpose

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to examine undergraduate and graduate music majors' perceived experiences while learning and practicing a meditation technique.

### Guiding Research Questions

1. How did meditation practice alter participants' thoughts related to music performance?
2. How did meditation practice influence participants' perceived MPA symptoms?
3. What aspects of meditation practice did participants find most/least helpful in perceived reduction of negative MPA symptoms?
4. How did meditation practice influence post-performance self-evaluation?
5. What influence did meditation practice have on participants during performance preparation?

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<sup>18</sup> Marye, "A Survey of Music Performance Anxiety," 55-56.

<sup>19</sup> Chang, "Effect of Meditation," 59; Baker, "Does Daily Meditation or Coherent Breathing Influence Perceived Stress," 66.

## Operational Definition

### **Meditation**

Meditation is an ancient self-regulatory strategy. A wide variety of approaches to meditation developed over the long history of the practice. All meditation practices train the practitioner to bring the mind “under greater voluntary control.”<sup>20</sup> Walsh offers a broad definition of meditation in *Journal of Humanistic Psychology*:

Meditation refers to a family of practices that train attention in order to bring mental processes under greater voluntary control. This control is used to cultivate specific mental qualities, such as awareness, concentration, joy, love, and compassion. The aim of these practices is deep insight into the nature of mind, consciousness, and identity and the development of optimal states of psychological well-being and consciousness.<sup>21</sup>

Some of the earliest known meditation practices, taught by the Buddha approximately 2,500 years ago, have been maintained in roughly their original forms. Currently, many people secularly practice meditation as an aid for stress management and relaxation.<sup>22</sup> Meditation training typically reveals that “our usual consciousness is filled with a continual flux of subliminal thoughts, internal dialogue, and fantasies.”<sup>23</sup> The fluctuation of this usual consciousness, the mind, serves as a central focus of most meditation techniques.

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<sup>20</sup> Roger Walsh, “Meditation Practice and Research,” *Journal of Humanistic Psychology* vol. 23, no. 1 (Winter 1983): 19-20.

<sup>21</sup> Walsh, “Meditation Practice,” 19.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 21.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 23.

## **Chapter Two**

### **Related Research**

#### **An Examination of Performance Anxiety Associated with Solo Performance of College-Level Music Majors**

Robert A. Tamborrino (2001)

Tamborrino used survey data collected from college music majors to examine how students approach performance-related anxiety management. Tamborrino also surveyed music performance faculty members. Through data analysis, Tamborrino revealed the pervasiveness of MPA among music students and faculty. As a result of these findings, Tamborrino declared the need for more research in non-pharmacological MPA management techniques.<sup>24</sup>

### **Methodology**

Tamborrino surveyed 312 college music performance majors and 18 faculty members at a major Midwestern university. A six-page survey was designed, using two instruments and either a Student Information Sheet or a Questionnaire to Applied Music Faculty. The first instrument was the Clarity Survey, with which Tamborrino collected qualitative and quantitative data reflecting the intensity of feelings regarding students' "best solo performance" and "most recent solo performance."<sup>25</sup> The second instrument was the Personal Report of Confidence as a Performer, which contained 30 true/false

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<sup>24</sup> Tamborrino, "An Examination of Performance Anxiety," 145.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., 68.

questions that allowed Tamborrino to measure performance anxiety and assign a Performance Anxiety Score.<sup>26</sup> The last page of the student survey was an author-generated information sheet, with which Tamborrino gathered demographic information and data about students' experiences with performance anxiety.<sup>27</sup> The last page of the faculty survey contained questions about what anxiety reduction techniques faculty members teach their students, if their students suffer from performance anxiety, if they believe performance anxiety reduction techniques should be taught, and whether faculty members personally suffered from performance anxiety.<sup>28</sup> Tamborrino distributed surveys to students during regularly scheduled master classes and to faculty members via email.

## **Findings**

Using survey data, Tamborrino revealed that 97.1% of students had experienced MPA before a performance and that 100% of faculty had experienced MPA. Performance anxiety negatively affected performances of 76.5% of faculty surveyed. Nearly half (48.1%) of students responded false to the question "My mind is clear when I face an audience." A vast majority of students and faculty, 80.3% and 64.7% respectively, felt that performance anxiety reduction techniques should be addressed in required college music major curricula.<sup>29</sup>

Tamborrino concluded that MPA impacts the lives of most college music majors and that it has not yet been studied through thorough systematic research. Necessary curricular components addressing MPA may not currently be included in the education of

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<sup>26</sup> Ibid., 69.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., 70.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., 78-86.

college music majors.<sup>30</sup> Tamborrino's recommendations included in-depth investigation of non-pharmacological anxiety management techniques, investigation of anxiety-reduction techniques commonly used in non-music fields, and development of a systematic method for addressing college music major performance anxiety.<sup>31</sup>

### **Relevance to Current Research**

Tamborrino's findings revealed the need for greater understanding of MPA among college music majors. Non-pharmacological methods for treatment of negative symptoms of MPA have not been rigorously studied. Most music students and faculty agree that treatment of MPA should be a standard part of college music major curricula. With this study I aim to address each of these issues and gain insight into how meditation influences music majors' symptoms of MPA.

#### **A Survey of Music Performance Anxiety: Definitions, Causes and Treatments**

Lacey Hutchison Marye (2011)

In 2011 Marye examined the causes of MPA and summarized current treatments with the intent of providing a research guide for musicians coping with MPA. Marye gave an overview of historical and current research on anxiety, diagnostic procedures for anxiety disorders, and therapies and treatments for anxiety, aiming to gain greater insight into how anxiety impacts people and how musicians may treat MPA.

### **Methodology**

Marye provided an historical guide for musicians seeking to better understand MPA by examining a wide variety of topics related to MPA. A history of research on anxiety disorders included the theories of Sigmund Freud, William James, and Carl

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<sup>30</sup> Ibid., 143-145.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid., 145-146.

Jung.<sup>32</sup> Modern theories by Albert Ellis, Rollo May, Peter Lang, Aaron Beck, Gary Emery, Rick Ingram, and David Kendall offer deeper insight into how anxiety functions.<sup>33</sup> Marye discussed diagnostic techniques for anxiety disorders, including the diagnostic procedures of the American Psychiatric Association and the National Institute of Mental Health.<sup>34</sup> Marye included an extensive list of therapies and treatments for performance anxiety, with modalities including cognitive-behavioral therapy, pharmacological treatment, and alternative treatment.<sup>35</sup> Marye also examined treatment facilities and the services they offer.<sup>36</sup>

### **Findings**

Marye offered a thorough exploration of MPA treatment methods with a list of treatment centers for anxiety. A survey of causes of anxiety allowed greater insight into how certain treatments may help individual musicians.

### **Relevance to Current Research**

Marye concluded “a musician can be afflicted from previous negative performing experiences and create an illogical thought process for future performing events. Undesirable feelings can overtake an individual and create a sense of doom about performing.”<sup>37</sup> Marye discussed meditation briefly, describing how it may aid in centering the “focus of attention” and removing “excess negative energy.”<sup>38</sup> Meditation may therefore be of significant use to musicians who suffer from negative thoughts related to previous performance experiences. Regular meditation practice may enable

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<sup>32</sup> Marye, “A Survey of Music Performance Anxiety,” 10-14.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, 13-20.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, 20-30.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, 31-56.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, 56-62.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, 63.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, 65.

musicians to replace negative thoughts with positive ones through focus on positive experiences.

### Effect of Meditation on Music Performance Anxiety

Joanne Chiung-Wen Chang (2001)

In 2001 Chang sought to determine if meditation training had an effect on MPA, if meditation training affected concentration in music performance, and if meditation training caused a physiological response in musicians effecting heart rate or blood pressure.<sup>39</sup>

#### **Methodology**

Nineteen music students from Manhattan School of Music, Teachers College, Columbia University, Yale University, SUNY Purchase, and Mannes College of Music participated in an eight-week-long study on the effects of meditation on MPA. The study ended with each participant performing in a required solo performance. Chang assigned 10 of the 19 participants to a control group, members of which did not attend any meditation classes but did participate in the final solo performance. The 9 meditation group participants attended weekly meditation classes. Two instruments measured anxiety levels, the Performance Anxiety Inventory (PAI) and the State Anxiety Inventory (SAI). Concentration was measured with the Cognitive Interference Questionnaire (CIQ). A Confidential Personal Questionnaire gathered demographic information and past experience with MPA. Experimental group participants were also asked to keep a meditation journal to log their practice.<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> Chang, "Effect of Meditation," 21.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid., 26-29.



Chang randomly assigned participants to the experimental group or the control group. Participants in the experimental group completed the PAI prior to beginning meditation classes. After eight weeks of meditation classes, taught weekly by a meditation instructor, members of the experimental group and the control group joined together for a public concert in which each person performed a 5- to 10-minute-long piece. Heart rate and blood pressure measurements were taken prior to each participant's performance. The SAI, CIQ, and PAI instruments were administered immediately after each participant's performance.<sup>41</sup>

Dr. Lindley Hanlon, a meditation instructor and professor at Brooklyn College of Film, CUNY, taught the meditation classes. Hanlon taught a variety of techniques, including standing, walking, lying down, and sleeping forms of meditation. Hanlon also taught performance visualization and mental rehearsal. Hanlon stressed the importance of several basic components for meditation, including a quiet environment, a mental device, a passive attitude, and a comfortable position. A passive attitude encouraged participants to acknowledge distracting thoughts, but then return to the mental device without negative thoughts.<sup>42</sup>

## **Findings**

Through data analysis, Chang revealed that meditation may help musicians reduce anxiety. Reduction of performance anxiety was statistically significant among participants in the meditation group ( $t = 1.926$ ,  $p = 0.45$ ), but was not significant among participants in the control group ( $t = 0$ ,  $p = 1.00$ ).<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> Ibid., 30-32.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid., 32-34.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid.

State anxiety, one of the measurements Chang used in this study, is described as anxiety brought on temporarily by seemingly dangerous situations. State anxiety differs from trait anxiety, which is a relatively long-term feeling of stress or worry. The difference in state anxiety between the two groups was not significant; however, Chang reported a trend in the “right direction,” because state anxiety among experimental group participants was lower than state anxiety among control group participants.<sup>44</sup>

Chang collected qualitative data revealing positive experiences among 8 out of 9 experimental group participants. Experimental group participants reported positive changes in mind and body related to both their personal lives and musical performance.<sup>45</sup> Meditation was not shown to have an effect on the physiological responses of heart rate or blood pressure.<sup>46</sup> Chang concluded that MPA is modifiable through meditation practice based on anxiety reductions between pre- and post- tests of the experimental group as measured with PAI and SAI. Chang recommended a number of improvements for future quantitative studies of the effects of meditation on MPA. Those improvements included larger sample sizes, longer-term studies, and study of when meditation practice most benefits practitioners.<sup>47</sup>

### **Relevance to Current Research**

Chang aimed to discover if meditation had an effect on MPA through a small study using quantitative methodology. In the current study, I aim to better understand how meditation influences symptoms of MPA using qualitative methods. A thorough grasp of how meditation fits into musical practice and performance may improve future

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<sup>44</sup> Ibid., 59.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid., 57.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid., 73-74.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid., 69-70.

research on the relationship between meditation and MPA. As in Chang's study, participants in the current study will use a performance opportunity to gauge the influence of meditation on symptoms of MPA.

Does Daily Meditation or Coherent Breathing Influence Perceived Stress, Stress Effects, Anxiety, or Holistic Wellness in College Freshman and Sophomores?

Nancy Coyne Baker (2012)

In a 2012 three-week pilot intervention study of 37 college freshman and sophomores at Boston College, Baker examined the influence of two intervention techniques, meditation and coherent breathing, against a reading control group. Participants in all three groups experienced a reduction in trait anxiety and perceived stress, but participants in the two intervention groups reported greater results compared with participants in the control group. Wellness scores also improved more for participants in the intervention groups than for participants in the control group.<sup>48</sup>

### **Methodology**

Baker notes that college students frequently experience common mental health conditions including depression, anxiety, obsessive-compulsive disorder, and eating disorders. College students experience some of their greatest psychological challenges during the first year of study. These challenges include increased perceived stress, stress effects, and anxiety. Common unhealthy coping mechanisms such as alcohol and drug abuse often lead to injuries and deaths.<sup>49</sup>

By examining the influence of coherent breathing and meditation, Baker offers some insight into approaches for treating the increased stress of early college years.

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<sup>48</sup> Baker, "Does Daily Meditation or Coherent Breathing Influence Perceived Stress," 66.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, 1-2.

Coherent breathing is a yoga practice in which the practitioner slows the breath rate to around 5 breaths per minute. Baker examines Distraction Meditation (D-M) in this study, as taught by Joseph Tecce.<sup>50</sup> D-M practice fosters an acceptance of outside thoughts or distractions during meditation. D-M differs from Mindfulness Meditation (MM) in that D-M practitioners allow the mind to continuously wander, “and the result is a full awareness of distracting thoughts and sensations, including positive and negative experiences.”<sup>51</sup> MM by contrast encourages the practitioner to return to the point of focus after acknowledging distractions.

Baker divided the 40 participants into groups. 14 participants were assigned to each of the intervention groups, meditation and coherent breathing. The remaining 12 participants were assigned to the control reading group.<sup>52</sup> Each of the two intervention groups attended a weekend-long workshop to learn their respective techniques. Experts in coherent breathing and D-M meditation taught the workshops and participants attended weekly follow-up classes. Baker assigned control group participants readings, which they discussed at weekly meetings. The coherent breathing practice required 20 minutes of daily practice, while the D-M meditation practice required 10 minutes of daily practice.<sup>53</sup>

Pre- and post- test measurements included four paper instruments, the Cohen Perceived Stress Scale (PSS), Spielberger’s State and Trait Anxiety Inventory (STAI), the Body-Spirit-Mind Wellness Behavior and Characteristic Inventory (BSM-WBCI),

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<sup>50</sup> Ibid., 20.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid., 20.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid., 53.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid., 43.

and a self-report questionnaire (SRQ).<sup>54</sup> The PSS measures the extent to which persons find life situations as stressful. BSM-WBCI measures perceived holistic wellness.

## **Findings**

Perceived stress, state anxiety, and trait anxiety scores decreased more for participants in the intervention groups than for participants in the control group. The average change in PSS scores for participants in the coherent breathing group was -7.4, while meditation group participants experienced an average change of -8.4, and the average change in PSS among participants in the reading group was -2.5.<sup>55</sup> The average change in SA scores among participants in the coherent breathing group was -9.6, while the average SA score change for participants in the meditation group was -10.6, and SA scores for participants in the reading group changed by -0.5.<sup>56</sup> Mean TA scores for participants in the coherent breathing group changed by an average of -12.4, while the average TA score change for participants in the meditation group was -11.5, and TA scores for reading group participants changed by an average of -2.8.<sup>57</sup> Additionally, BSM-WBCI scores increased by a greater amount for participants in the intervention groups than for participants in the control group.<sup>58</sup> Average BSM-WBCI scores among participants in the coherent breathing group changed by 10.9, while scores among participants in the meditation group changed by an average of 9.4, and BSM-WBCI scores for participants in the reading group changed by an average of 3.8.<sup>59</sup> Baker concludes meditation and coherent breathing “should be taught to health care providers,

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<sup>54</sup> Ibid., 46-47.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid., 62.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid., 63.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid., 67.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid., 64.

medical and nursing students, psychologists and social workers.<sup>60</sup> Additionally, “further investigations should be pursued to identify the mechanisms, sustainability, and generalizability of these techniques.”<sup>61</sup>

### **Relevance to Current Research**

While Baker used quantitative methods to study the influences of meditation on anxiety, I aim to examine the influence of meditation using qualitative methods. College music majors face unique psychological stresses including strict performance requirements and increased peer competition that result in similar mental health conditions as those described by Baker. The following research uses a meditation period of four weeks, similar to Baker’s three-week-long study.

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<sup>60</sup> Ibid., 78.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid.,

## Chapter Three

### Methodology

#### Method

Qualitative phenomenological research “describes the meaning for several individuals of their lived experiences of [...] a phenomenon.”<sup>62</sup> For this study, the phenomenon was the perceived experiences of undergraduate and graduate music majors while learning and practicing a meditation technique. Through this qualitative phenomenological research, I sought an understanding of those perceived experiences with regard to MPA and a specific meditation practice. In 2012, I was certified as a 200-hour Registered Yoga Teacher (RYT) through Yoga Alliance after completing an intensive yoga teacher training at YogaWorks Baltimore.<sup>63</sup> During that training I learned about awareness meditation and I developed a personal meditation practice that I used as a tool for music performance preparation.

#### Site Selection Strategy

I used purposeful sampling to select the site for this study.<sup>64</sup> The School of Music at the University of South Carolina offers more than 20 degrees to approximately 500 undergraduate and graduate students. As a graduate student at the University of South

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<sup>62</sup> John W. Creswell, *Qualitative Inquiry & Research Design: Choosing Among Five Approaches*, 2nd Edition (Thousand Oaks, California: Sage Publications, 2007), 57.

<sup>63</sup> Formerly Charm City Yoga.

<sup>64</sup> Michael Quinn Patton, *Qualitative Research & Evaluation Methods*, 3rd Edition (Thousand Oaks, California: Sage Publications, 2002), 230.

Carolina, I have access to the diverse socioeconomic groups, ethnic groups, races, religions, and communities represented within the School of Music.

### Participant Selection Strategy

To identify and select participants, I used homogeneous sampling.<sup>65</sup> I sent an announcement of an information session for interested participants via email to approximately 500 undergraduate and graduate music majors at University of South Carolina.<sup>66</sup> Of 15 respondents, I selected six participants who either responded directly to the announcement via email or who attended the information session.<sup>67</sup> In Table 3.1 I present a description of each participant. The participants were acquainted with one another but they did not represent a cohesive or familiar group.

Table 3.1

### Participant Descriptions

| <b>Participant Pseudonym</b> | <b>Major Instrument</b> | <b>Degree in Progress</b> | <b>Years Playing Instrument</b> |
|------------------------------|-------------------------|---------------------------|---------------------------------|
| Cameron                      | Viola                   | Bachelor of Music         | 10                              |
| Jamie                        | Violin                  | Master of Music           | 21                              |
| Jessie                       | Voice                   | Bachelor of Music         | 7                               |
| Morgan                       | Violin                  | Bachelor of Music         | 15                              |
| Skyler                       | French Horn             | Bachelor of Music         | 6                               |
| Taylor                       | Percussion              | Master of Music           | 14                              |

<sup>65</sup> Patton, *Qualitative Research*, 235-238.

<sup>66</sup> See Appendix A

<sup>67</sup> See Table 3.1 for a brief description of each participant.



## Meditation Practice

Participants in this study learned a meditation practice that I developed based on my experiences with meditation, yoga, and performance visualization. I personally used this meditation practice for performance preparation for several years prior to beginning this study. The meditation contains four distinct segments, including deep breathing, internal statement of a centering phrase, visualization of a positive past performance memory, and visualization of a future performance. Participants began meditation by completing three to six rounds of centering breathing. Each round of breath consisted of a full inhalation and a complete exhalation at a slow, steady pace. Participants then focused on a centering phrase of their choice. Each participant chose a centering phrase prior to beginning meditation practice. Next, participants visualized a positive past performance and then a future performance. After completing the visualizations, participants again focused on their centering phrase and then finished the practice with another few rounds of centering breathing.

## Data Collection

I collected data during November and December of 2015. In order to enable data triangulation and enhance credibility and rigor, I collected data from five sources.<sup>68</sup> After selecting participants, I asked each participant to begin keeping a daily practice journal recording thoughts related to MPA, meditation, and music performance. Participants maintained those journals throughout the month-long data collection period. I offered participants the option to keep their daily practice journals either electronically or by hand. Cameron, Taylor, and Skyler kept electronic journals; Jessie, Morgan, and Jamie

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<sup>68</sup> Patton, *Qualitative Research*, 261.

kept handwritten journals. I also gathered data on participant perceived experiences by conducting video-recorded individual interviews, facilitating an audio-recorded focus group interview, hosting a video-recorded post-performance group discussion, and collecting written responses from an open-ended survey.<sup>69</sup>

Participants began writing daily journal entries one week prior to receiving meditation instruction. I asked participants to reflect on their experiences with MPA and thoughts on music performance in general in these first journal entries. I collected responses from the open-ended survey by the end of the first week of data collection, prior to giving meditation instruction. I gave two 30-minute meditation instruction sessions. Half of the participants attended each session and all participants received meditation instruction within a 24-hour period. I instructed participants to practice meditation for around 10 minutes each day during the next four weeks and to use the meditation to prepare for upcoming performances.

I conducted three audio-recorded individual interviews with each participant during those next four weeks. I scheduled each interview with each participant individually in-person or via email. For each round of interviews with each participant, I prepared an interview guide to “ensure that the same basic lines of inquiry [were] pursued with each person.”<sup>70,71</sup> As a result, the main questions I asked in each participant’s first interview were similar, as were the questions I asked in each participant’s second and third interviews. During each interview I built “a conversation within a particular subject

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<sup>69</sup> See Appendix C

<sup>70</sup> See Appendix D

<sup>71</sup> Patton, *Qualitative Research*, 343.

area,” asking follow-up questions as appropriate.<sup>72</sup> All interviews were held in rooms within the School of Music.

After two weeks of meditation practice I facilitated an audio-recorded focus group for participants. As in the individual interviews, I prepared an interview guide for the focus group interview.<sup>73</sup> After four weeks I hosted an informal performance in which each participant performed a short musical work of his/her choosing. This offered participants an opportunity to try the meditation practice in the context of a performance. After the performance I facilitated a video-recorded post-performance group discussion. I transcribed all recorded individual interviews, the focus group interview, the post-performance group discussion, all written journal entries, and all written open-ended survey responses.

### Data Analysis

I analyzed the data using Patton’s method by first coding all transcripts for convergence and divergence.<sup>74</sup> I found “recurring regularities in the data,” and utilized a classification system that verified the “meaningfulness and accuracy of the categories and the placement of data in categories.”<sup>75</sup> Then, I examined divergence through “careful and thoughtful examination of data that doesn’t seem to fit including deviant cases that don’t fit the dominant identified patterns.”<sup>76</sup> After organizing the codes into categories, I grouped the categories into themes, integrating the results to reveal an exhaustive description of the phenomenon.<sup>77</sup>

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<sup>72</sup> Ibid.

<sup>73</sup> See Appendix D

<sup>74</sup> Patton, *Qualitative Research*, 465-66

<sup>75</sup> Ibid.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid., 466

<sup>77</sup> Creswell, *Qualitative Inquiry*, 270.

## Credibility

I maintained credibility in this study using Patton's three inquiry elements: rigorous methods, credibility of the researcher, and philosophical belief in the value of qualitative inquiry.<sup>78</sup> Rigorous methods comprise "fieldwork that yields high-quality data that are systematically analyzed with attention to issues of credibility."<sup>79</sup> Multiple data sources yield high-quality, triangulated data. Those data sources included individual interviews, a focus group interview, and post-performance group discussion, written journals, and written responses to an open-ended survey. "Training, experience, track record, status, and presentation of self" all play roles in researcher credibility.<sup>80</sup> Belief in the value of qualitative inquiry lies in a "fundamental appreciation of naturalistic inquiry, qualitative methods, inductive analysis, purposeful sampling, and holistic thinking."<sup>81</sup> Moreover, I submitted all transcripts and this manuscript to participants for member checks and I made all necessary edits.

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<sup>78</sup> Patton, *Qualitative Research*, 552-553.

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.*, 552.

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid.*, 553.

## **Chapter Four**

### **Findings**

Three primary themes emerged regarding participants' perceived experiences while learning and practicing a meditation technique. Those themes included:

1. Shifting Attitudes about Performance,
2. Personalizing the Meditation Practice, and
3. Experiencing Increased Awareness.

#### **Theme 1: Shifting Attitudes about Performance**

Each participant kept a daily journal from the week before meditation instruction through the final individual interviews. During that week before beginning the meditation practice, participants discussed their prior experiences with MPA in their journal entries and open-ended survey responses. In subsequent journal entries, the individual interviews, the focus group interview, and the post-performance group discussion, participants revealed a shift in attitude regarding music performance from anxiety to calm, focus, and excitement.

#### **Performance Anxiety**

Participants reported experiencing negative MPA symptoms prior to learning the meditation practice. Those symptoms included physical discomfort, mental distress, and worry about future performances. Participants described their MPA symptoms in written responses to the open-ended survey, the first round of individual interviews, and written

journal entries. Morgan discussed the physical manifestations of performance anxiety in an early journal entry:

My biggest concerns with the manifestation of performance anxiety are the physical symptoms – rapid heart rate, cold sweat, clammy hands, shaking, loss of control, stomach cramps, and numbness. As a string player, some of my worst experiences have occurred with shaking and numbness – unable to move my left hand well, unable to place my bow on the string, and shaking at upper and lower ends of the bow. These symptoms would occur regardless of the level of preparation or difficulty of performance. Also, the symptoms are worst in solo performance and chamber ensembles, and less frequent but still present in orchestra.<sup>82 83</sup>

Cameron mentioned similar physical experiences with performance anxiety: “My breath gets shorter and I start to get very cold, especially in my hands. I also can feel my shoulders tensing up.”<sup>84</sup>

Jessie observed that she found it easier to recover from negative MPA symptoms as she learned to use the meditation practice in this study. In her first interview Jessie said, “my knees will shake during the performance. So you can tell, like, I’m actually nervous. And also, my voice gets really wavery kind of on notes, so the vibrato goes, like, way up.”<sup>85</sup> In the final interview Jessie reported, “I still got a little bit, like, shaky before a performance but it was easier to, like, calm down.”<sup>86</sup>

Jessie, Morgan, and Skyler discussed feeling worried before performances. Jessie said, “I would get nervous about getting nervous.”<sup>87</sup> Morgan observed, “when I would come to parts in a piece that I knew were difficult or that I was afraid of, those were the ones where I’d feel, like, the worst physical or the worst, like, mental effects.”<sup>88</sup> Skyler

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<sup>82</sup> Morgan, journal entry, November 3, 2015.

<sup>83</sup> Each participant in this study is identified by a pseudonym.

<sup>84</sup> Cameron, open-ended survey, November 09, 2015.

<sup>85</sup> Jessie, first interview by author, November 17, 2015.

<sup>86</sup> Jessie, third interview by author, December 08, 2015.

<sup>87</sup> Jessie, first interview by author, November 17, 2015.

<sup>88</sup> Morgan, focus group interview, November 22, 2015.

experienced similar anticipation about difficult passages of music. In her first interview she said, “I’ve always been worried about, like, anticipation and, like, ‘I’m going to mess up here.’”<sup>89</sup>

Participants also reported experiencing mental distress during performances. Morgan said, “I feel that when I’m performing, like, I’m not able to think about anything. Like, my mind kind of goes blank.”<sup>90</sup> Jamie observed, “I have an issue where I kind of forget everything I’ve ever learned.”<sup>91</sup> Taylor commented that “it’s a really uncomfortable feeling, and that feeling of being lost...but it just happens a lot. You know ...being disconnected.”<sup>92</sup>

### **Performance Relaxation**

After learning and practicing the meditation technique in this study, participants reported changes in their mental and physical experiences related to MPA. Morgan noticed a change in her physical symptoms. In her first interview she said, “I feel more open in a way. Because I think that I start to feel very tense, just in general and, like, even just taking a few minutes like I have this past week, like, my hand, like, I feel like it’s easier to shift, or that the sound is different.”<sup>93</sup> Cameron observed, “it’s mostly the physical things that changed. My hands weren’t as cold as they usually are and if I noticed my shoulders kind of tensing up I would just take a few breaths and was able to kind of let that tension out a little bit. So, physically I’m a lot more relaxed. [I am] still a little bit shaky but not that really tense, like, cold unpleasant feeling.”<sup>94</sup> Jamie said,

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<sup>89</sup> Skyler, first interview by author, November 17, 2015.

<sup>90</sup> Morgan, first interview by author, November 17, 2015.

<sup>91</sup> Jamie, focus group interview, November 22, 2015.

<sup>92</sup> Taylor, first interview by author, November 18, 2015.

<sup>93</sup> Morgan, first interview by author, November 17, 2015.

<sup>94</sup> Cameron, third interview by author, December 09, 2015.

“really focusing on my breathing and just being relaxed in my body...that really helped relax me and my playing.”<sup>95</sup>

Cameron, Morgan, and Taylor felt more calm before performances and during performances. After the group performance in the fourth week of data collection, Cameron noted, “When I stood up in front of the other members of the study I had my nerves under control better than I usually do, and felt very calm about playing.”<sup>96</sup> Morgan observed, “meditation practice helped me to think more positively/calmly before performances, during my pre-performance time.”<sup>97</sup> Morgan also noticed a change during a regular practice session:

...I meditated this morning before practice, and I did feel both more relaxed and in control while practicing. Specifically I felt less like I had to cram as much playing. Instead, I was able to detach myself and focus more on slow, accurate review of various sections. In general, it was nice because I did not feel so neurotic about playing as usual.<sup>98</sup>

Taylor said, “Well, I keep thinking about this idea that when you do this, you get more connected to yourself.”<sup>99</sup>

Cameron and Morgan each noticed a change in their ability to focus during performances after learning and practicing this meditation technique. In the final interview Cameron said, “having something to focus on before playing...to calm myself was really helpful. And I was a lot more focused in my jury.”<sup>100</sup> Morgan found greater ease in performance as a result of this change in focus:

...being able to be more aware and in the moment when I was playing was really helpful because I caught myself thinking about you know, how I wanted a phrase

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<sup>95</sup> Jamie, first interview by author, November 18, 2015.

<sup>96</sup> Cameron, journal entry, December 09, 2015.

<sup>97</sup> Morgan, journal entry, December 08, 2015.

<sup>98</sup> Morgan, journal entry, November 27, 2015.

<sup>99</sup> Taylor, third interview by author, December 10, 2015.

<sup>100</sup> Cameron, third interview by author, December 09, 2015.



to sound and I would never think about that. That sounds strange but in a performance I was, like, so freaked out usually that I would depend on, like, repetition to make it sound the way I wanted rather than, like, mindfulness in the moment, which was really a big difference for me.<sup>101</sup>

Cameron noticed that she felt more comfortable moving on from mistakes in performances. In her third interview she said, “it has kind of taught me to think a little bit more positively while I’m playing....so when I make a mistake I don’t, like, beat myself up about it while I’m playing. I’m just like, ‘That’s OK, things happen.’”<sup>102</sup> Taylor also felt that it was easier to cope with performance errors. In her last interview she said, “I was just really pleased with the fact that if something were to go wrong, it’s just nice to know that I can handle it.”<sup>103</sup>

Jessie and Skyler expressed newfound excitement about performing. Jessie said, “I’m pretty excited for my juries, actually....I just feel like I’m really prepared. I feel like it’s going to go well. So I guess maybe the positive feelings have kind of carried over into my, like, thoughts about future performances.”<sup>104</sup> Skyler noticed, “whenever I was doing the meditation, it was like I just heard the music. And I, like, I really got emotional with it. And so, like, whenever I did my jury, like, I was moving all over the place just because I was so, like, into the piece. It was because I didn’t care if I missed a note.”<sup>105</sup>

Discussing the same jury performance, Skyler wrote:

I smiled throughout the performance and remembered to breathe much more than I have previously. I felt more poised and didn't let my nerves affect my sound. I felt proud and prepared. The meditation has really helped me prep for this day. I knew how to control my anxiety and work with it. I felt confident because I knew this piece, and I was ready to perform it one last time.<sup>106</sup>

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<sup>101</sup> Morgan, third interview by author, December 11, 2015.

<sup>102</sup> Cameron, third interview by author, December 09, 2015.

<sup>103</sup> Taylor, third interview by author, December 10, 2015.

<sup>104</sup> Jessie, third interview by author, December 08, 2015.

<sup>105</sup> Skyler, third interview by author, December 10, 2015.

<sup>106</sup> Skyler, journal entry, December 08, 2015.

After her jury Cameron wrote about the experience in her journal:

I am happy to say that this is the least nervous I have ever been in a jury. When I was waiting outside I focused on my breathing and my centering phrase and was able to keep my physical symptoms of performance anxiety under control. As I was playing I was able to focus more, and did a much better job of moving on after making a mistake instead of dwelling on it. I also noticed after my jury that for a while I had forgotten where I had made mistakes. Usually after I perform I immediately remember where I made mistakes and beat myself up over them a little bit. This time I found that I did not start to remember my mistakes until about five or ten minutes after I had performed. I am very excited that through mediation I am starting to think more positively about my playing.<sup>107</sup>

## Theme 2: Personalizing the Meditation Practice

Participants learned the meditation practice in a 30-minute instruction session. I described how to do the meditation, we practiced each segment of the meditation together, and we discussed any questions between segments. After moving through the entire meditation step-by-step, we practiced the meditation one more time as a group. I asked participants to practice the meditation on a daily basis for the next four weeks. I encouraged participants to explore the meditation and to take notes on any observations.

### **Learning to Meditate**

Each participant expressed difficulty establishing a habit of daily meditation, especially in the first two weeks after learning the meditation practice. Taylor said, “I have a hard time making things habit. I am able to find time to meditate regularly. Sometimes I simply forget. I think that as I continue I will be able to make it a habit.”<sup>108</sup> Cameron discovered the need to prioritize meditation to help make it a habit. In her first interview she said, “I was running late one morning and I thought, ‘OK, I’ll do the meditation at the end of the day,’ and I found that that doesn’t work for me because I

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<sup>107</sup> Cameron, journal entry, December 09, 2015.

<sup>108</sup> Taylor, journal entry.

forget to do it... So, even if I show up a little bit later than I mean to, I make myself kind of sit down and just really take time meditating.”<sup>109</sup>

Morgan wrote in her journal about her plan “to be more consistent in time, duration, and commitment. I think by making meditation a non-negotiable routine, it becomes even more effective.”<sup>110</sup>

Jamie observed anxiety sometimes limited his desire to meditate. In his third interview he said, “I sometimes forget because I’m so on edge before something that I forget this, to take a minute... and afterwards I’m like, ‘Aww, I should’ve done that.’”<sup>111</sup>

Morgan also noticed that stress influenced her desire to meditate: “I think that for me, the worst thing is, like, until I start feeling, like, uncontrollably anxious then I’m like, ‘I probably should have done this in the first place.’... You kind of wait, and then you’re like, ‘Well this is out of control.’ So then I’m like, ‘OK I really need to sit down and do this now.’”<sup>112</sup>

Each participant discovered aspects of the meditation practice they could adjust to fit their needs. Participants observed changes in the meditation practice based on location of practice, duration of practice, and when they practiced relative to other daily events. Cameron, Jessie, and Skyler reported coping with distractions during the first week of meditation. Cameron wrote in her journal:

Today while meditating it was a lot more noisy in the practice rooms. I was surrounded by more brass instruments, and there were more people talking in the hallway. I found that I had to rewind my visualization a few times when I let these noises distract me. I also had to make sure that I wasn’t letting any self-consciousness distract me from my meditation. It was hard for me to stop

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<sup>109</sup> Cameron, first interview by author, November 18, 2015.

<sup>110</sup> Morgan, journal entry, November 26, 2015.

<sup>111</sup> Jamie, third interview by author, December 09, 2015.

<sup>112</sup> Morgan, first interview by author, November 17, 2015.

imagining what people thought of the strange person just sitting with her eyes closed in a practice room.<sup>113</sup>

Jessie had a similar concern. She wrote, “I tried to meditate right after practice, and got nervous that people were peeking in the door window and thinking I WAS SO weird.”<sup>114</sup> Skyler told me in our first interview, “I have a really hard time with these practice rooms. Yeah, I’ve been actually, like, going back to my dorm and doing it. Just because there’s people around you playing music and there’s people in the hallway, so it’s easier to focus, like, in my room.”<sup>115</sup> Several of the participants found it easier to meditate at home or in another quiet space than in the School of Music.

Morgan tried meditating for different lengths of time. She said, “It depends on the timing as well. Like, most of the time I do feel a calming effect, especially the more time. Like, if I take 10 minutes rather than 5, I’ve noticed an improvement in how I feel afterwards.”<sup>116</sup>

Several participants tried meditating at different times during the day. Morgan observed some difficulties practicing meditation at night. She wrote, “I’ve realized over the course of the study that, for me at least, meditation at night is more difficult/often less effective because I am unable to maintain concentration.”<sup>117</sup> Contrastingly, Skyler noticed, “[the meditation] works pretty well to use before bed. It allows me to recollect myself and relax and remind myself that tomorrow is a new day and I can move on from the mistakes I made.”<sup>118</sup>

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<sup>113</sup> Cameron, journal entry, November 13, 2015.

<sup>114</sup> Jessie, journal entry, November 10, 2015.

<sup>115</sup> Skyler, first interview by author, November 17, 2015.

<sup>116</sup> Morgan, first interview by author, November 17, 2015.

<sup>117</sup> Morgan, journal entry, November 26, 2015.

<sup>118</sup> Skyler, journal entry, November 16, 2015.

Morgan and Cameron each considered how to alter the meditation practice for certain performances. Morgan tried meditating immediately before a concert and “actually found it really difficult.”<sup>119</sup> She said, “even though I was trying to breathe deeply, I would still feel kind of, like, sick to my stomach...it actually made me almost uncomfortable and I was like, ‘Oh gosh, I’m out of control.’”<sup>120</sup> Instead of meditating so close to a performance, Morgan tried practicing earlier in the day. In her second interview she said, “I found it helpful if I’m doing that more like a couple of hours before the performance, and then I’m already in the mindset.”<sup>121</sup> Cameron discussed how meditation played a role in her experience of chamber music performance:

I was kicking myself today a little bit when my quartet performed, because I didn’t spend a lot of time visualizing that performance and the closest thing I got to meditation was when we were standing at the door and I kind of closed my eyes and tried to do that for a little while, which of course is not as effective as sitting down by yourself and taking the time to concentrate. So, it helped a little bit but, again I wish I would’ve taken more time to, like, visualize that performance instead of just thinking about my jury.<sup>122</sup>

Taylor discussed how the activities in the study influenced her experience with meditation practice. She said, “it was really helpful to be in the group,” because “it was like we talked about some different things that people were experiencing, or trying, and some, a lot of them were just things that I wouldn’t have necessarily thought of on my own.”<sup>123</sup> During our final interview, Taylor mentioned that the group performance and post-performance group discussion helped her “to see that [the meditation] had made a difference...it makes you feel... comforted.”<sup>124</sup>

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<sup>119</sup> Morgan, second interview by author, December 04, 2015.

<sup>120</sup> Ibid.

<sup>121</sup> Ibid.

<sup>122</sup> Cameron, focus group interview, November 22, 2015.

<sup>123</sup> Taylor, second interview by author, November 24, 2015.

<sup>124</sup> Taylor, third interview by author, December 10, 2015.

## Aspects of the Meditation Practice

The meditation practice in this study contained four main segments: centering breathing, centering phrase, past performance visualization, and future performance visualization. Participants began meditation by completing 3-6 rounds of centering breathing. Each round of breath consisted of a full inhalation and a complete exhalation at a slow, steady pace. Participants then focused on a centering phrase of their choice. Each participant chose a centering phrase prior to beginning meditation practice. Next, participants visualized a positive past performance and then a future performance. After completing the visualizations, participants again focused on their centering phrase and then finished the practice with another few rounds of centering breathing.

While developing personal meditation practices, participants noticed that each aspect of the meditation played a unique role. Several participants observed that centering breathing helped them to feel calm. Taylor said, “as far as the physical symptoms go, controlling the breath is a solid way to help calm me.”<sup>125</sup> She used centering breathing to feel calm in situations where she couldn’t use the entire meditation.<sup>126</sup> Jamie also found the centering breath helpful for relaxation. He said, “I’m going back to breathing, just really focusing on the breathing and how that relaxes the body, because it’s insane how that really does help.”<sup>127</sup> Skyler used the centering breath to feel calm in both music and non-music activities. In her final interview she said, “it really helped me in performing and practicing and in everyday life. So I really like the aspect of breathing and just focusing on that. And, like, it helped, like, calm me down.”<sup>128</sup>

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<sup>125</sup> Taylor, journal entry.

<sup>126</sup> Taylor, first interview by author, November 18, 2015.

<sup>127</sup> Jamie, first interview by author, November 18, 2015.

<sup>128</sup> Skyler, third interview by author, December 10, 2015.

Cameron wondered if merely focusing on the breath instead of other thoughts was enough to help her feel calm. She said, “I’m not sure if the actual deep breathing is what calms me down, but thinking about the deep breathing is what calms me down. Because then I’m not thinking about ‘what if I mess up here,’ or ‘what if they think this?’”<sup>129</sup>

Each participant chose a centering phrase that suited his/her perceived needs. Discussing how her phrase influenced her meditation, Taylor said, “I feel more connected with myself, and have a better sense of, like, what I, my goals.”<sup>130</sup> She later observed “it just kind of helps center yourself and bring you back to where you are. And just not be so irrational.”<sup>131</sup> Skyler noticed her centering phrase influences her physical awareness. She said, “it just makes me, like, realize that I actually kind of have shallower breathing, whenever I start thinking about those things, so it reminds me to breathe.”<sup>132</sup> She also used her centering phrase outside of the meditation, observing, “My centering phrase truly helped me get through the day even after all the stress that has been on me.”<sup>133</sup>

Cameron remembered using her centering phrase immediately before a performance. She said, “before my quartet performed yesterday and we were waiting outside the door, I was standing with my eyes closed and breathing and kind of saying that over and over to myself to calm myself down.”<sup>134</sup>

Talking about using her centering phrase, Morgan said, “I think that it would be useful, like, the longer I do it, because it kind of puts me in a mindset...Like this phrase is associated with, like, the mindfulness.”<sup>135</sup> She also said, “I thought it was useful to me,

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<sup>129</sup> Cameron, first interview by author, November 18, 2015.

<sup>130</sup> Taylor, first interview by author, November 18, 2015.

<sup>131</sup> Taylor, second interview by author, November 24, 2015.

<sup>132</sup> Skyler, first interview by author, November 17, 2015.

<sup>133</sup> Skyler, journal entry, December 04, 2015.

<sup>134</sup> Cameron, second interview by author, November 23, 2015.

<sup>135</sup> Morgan, second interview by author, December 04, 2015.

like, the specific phrase I chose, because it's about, like, tension in the body. So, if I used it, like, focused on that, I noticed myself feeling more relaxed in general. So, that was pretty helpful just, even on a daily basis when I would do it."<sup>136</sup>

Jamie did not use the centering phrase early on in the meditation study. He admitted, "I did not use any of my phrases to help me."<sup>137</sup> By the end of the study, he was using the centering phrase in performances. He said, "for the jury I closed my eyes for a little bit and just, you know, tried to calm down and went over my phrase in my head and at the start of my jury I think I did really well."<sup>138</sup>

Each participant chose a positive memory of a past performance to visualize. Taylor wrote, "In my past positive performance visualization I mostly rely on visual memory and how I felt. How I feel about a performance sticks with me."<sup>139</sup> Skyler and Cameron also connected with the emotions they felt during and after their past performance. Skyler said, "it just reminds me to, like, stay positive, and just reminds me of how, like, accomplished I felt."<sup>140</sup> Cameron noticed, "I'm finding that I don't really, I'm not really focusing so much on the performance aspect of that. I was focusing on my interactions with people," ultimately feeling "really proud of myself, and really confident" with a "victorious feeling."<sup>141</sup> Cameron also noticed her focus changing during the past performance visualization. She said, "when I start visualizing the successful performance that I decided to choose, the calm comes and I'm really focused."<sup>142</sup>

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<sup>136</sup> Morgan, second interview by author, December 04, 2015.

<sup>137</sup> Jamie, first interview by author, November 18, 2015.

<sup>138</sup> Jamie, third interview by author, December 09, 2015.

<sup>139</sup> Taylor, journal entry.

<sup>140</sup> Skyler, second interview by author, November 24, 2015.

<sup>141</sup> Cameron, second interview by author, November 23, 2015.

<sup>142</sup> Cameron, first interview by author, November 18, 2015.



Some participants tried switching between first-person and third-person perspectives of the past performance. Morgan discussed her experience:

I would experiment so some days I would do both. So, I would do the first person, and then I would flip it so that I was watching myself. And I thought it was interesting in that you know, I was imagining myself as an audience member, like, sitting within the audience, and then watching myself play, I noticed a lot of, like, changes in how things would've sounded probably. Like, imagining myself, like, the use of my bow would definitely be different than what I was imagining when I was just looking at myself from the first person perspective.<sup>143</sup>

Jamie visualized his past performance in first person. He said, "I literally just you know, go back five or six years, however long ago it was, and just relive it again."<sup>144</sup>

Skyler noticed an emotional shift while visualizing her previous performance. She said, "going through the motions and the process of the performance and pairing it with that, like, that good memory of like an orchestra performance of mine, like putting that together kind of comforts me in a way."<sup>145</sup> Continuing to discuss her experience with the past performance visualization, Skyler said, "that's kind of like what gets me into that positive, happy atmosphere."<sup>146</sup> Jamie reported feeling mixed emotions when visualizing a past performance. He described his feelings as "joy, a little bit of despair, because you know, it wasn't perfect."<sup>147</sup>

Each participant chose a future performance to visualize each time they meditated. Several participants chose to visualize their upcoming end-of-semester jury performances. As they did for the past performance visualization, participants experimented with different approaches for visualizing a future performance.

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<sup>143</sup> Morgan, second interview by author, December 04, 2015.

<sup>144</sup> Jamie, second interview by author, November 24, 2015.

<sup>145</sup> Skyler, first interview by author, November 17, 2015.

<sup>146</sup> Skyler, second interview by author, November 24, 2015.

<sup>147</sup> Jamie, second interview by author, November 24, 2015.

Skyler described her typical future performance visualization:

I see myself putting my horn together and playing tuning notes, warming up, and then going onto the stage thinking about my centering phrase, and breathing, and just trying to be as really calm, tell myself that I can play this. I'm not going, if I mess up it happens. It's fine. And then I begin to play my piece. And so then, it's kind of like a little fast forward to whenever I go to different sections of it, and so, like, I focus on parts that I really really like. Just to remind myself to have a really positive attitude and just remember the past memory.<sup>148</sup>

For one performance, Taylor was able to determine many details about the performance beforehand. Describing how the detail of her visualization influenced her performance experience, she said, "I kind of knew where I was going to be, how it was going to look, how the people were going to be set up, who all was going to be there. And so, like, there was just that expectation...that comfort of like 'I know it.' So basically everything I did meditation-wise and actual practice-wise is matching up. So that was really nice."<sup>149</sup>

Cameron offered an in-depth description of her future performance visualization:

I picture myself walking out on stage and perceiving that small shock of getting the brighter lights in your eyes, and going on stage, and visualize my accompanist playing the first few notes, and then I take a breath, and then play. And I imagine I start out a little bit softer and I imagine what that feels like in my right and, in my right arm, to manipulate the sound that way. And, I've never visualized the piece all the way through. I'll start...and then maybe skip to the next section or skip to a difficult section. And picture it going well...Because hopefully it will at the final performance. And then at the end of the visualization I really make sure I focus on what the last few measures of the last note sounds like. So that I don't kind of speed through it because I just want it to be over with in the actual performance....And then I kind of visualize that weight off of my shoulders...I take a deep breath and, like, everyone's like, "Thank you, you're done," and then I go off stage and...come out of it feeling very happy.<sup>150</sup>

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<sup>148</sup> Skyler, second interview by author, November 24, 2015.

<sup>149</sup> Taylor, second interview by author, November 24, 2015.

<sup>150</sup> Cameron, second interview by author, November 23, 2015.

During the first week of practice, Cameron found that she felt some anxiety when visualizing the future performance. Describing what that felt like, she said, “I kind of feel my shoulders start moving up towards my ears a little bit and I always get kind of like a coldness in my chest sort of, from being nervous.”<sup>151</sup>

Morgan found that she could rewind her visualization when she started to feel anxious about specific moments in the upcoming performance:

I’ve found that when I would come to parts in a piece that I knew were difficult or that I was afraid of, those were the ones where I’d feel like the worst physical or the worst, like, mental effects. And so those were the ones where I would stop, go back, do it, and then do it again. Like, kind of like a repetition so I would get used to the feeling of like redirecting at a particular point in the music. So you know, it’s kind of a habit almost, so you’re more used to that than the actual panic, whenever you actually have the performance.<sup>152</sup>

Morgan also tried rewinding her visualization when she was unhappy with the sound she was imagining in her future performance:

In meditation today, I tried to focus more on my sound in my visualization of a future performance. But, I really struggled with imagining the feeling I would experience to accomplish the sound I wanted. Rather than visualizing a straight run through, I would rewind and replay sections where I felt nervous/displeased with the sound. This was somewhat helpful, but it was hard for me to translate the sound I wanted into the visualization for some reason.<sup>153</sup>

Morgan visualized the events leading up to her performance, observing that this level of detail influenced her feelings of anxiety. She wrote, “rather than just thinking about an upcoming performance, I also went and imagined the process of getting ready, warming up, and walking to the recital hall as well as the actual performance. I thought this was useful because I found myself feeling less nervous than usual.”<sup>154</sup>

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<sup>151</sup> Cameron, first interview by author, November 18, 2015.

<sup>152</sup> Morgan, focus group interview, November 22, 2015.

<sup>153</sup> Morgan, journal entry, November 18, 2015.

<sup>154</sup> Morgan, journal entry, November 21, 2015.

Taylor and Jamie commented on how their perceptions of the audience played a role in the future performance visualization. Taylor wrote, “I also like to think about the audience’s reactions- I’m not so good at this so I think it’s good to incorporate.”<sup>155</sup> Jamie tried another approach: “I don’t mind looking at the people, that doesn’t really scare me too much. But then just...clearing the mechanism and just, like, creating your own little bubble that you’re in. And then...like I said in the focus group, I just kind of stare at a corner the entire time.”<sup>156</sup>

Jessie focused on the technical aspects of her future performance in visualization rather than the emotional experience. She said, “I think more about, like, how I’m going to technically do it, instead of, like, the feelings I’m going to have with it.”<sup>157</sup>

Contrastingly, Skyler used her emotional connection to the music in the meditation. She said, “whenever I would play through my performance in my head, whenever I was doing the meditation, it was like I just heard the music. And...I really got emotional with it.”<sup>158</sup>

### Theme 3: Experiencing Increased Awareness

Each participant noted increased awareness about aspects of music performance and performance preparation. Those aspects included physical tension, mental anxiety, methods for performance preparation, and other musicians’ experiences with performance anxiety.

A few days after learning the meditation, Morgan wrote, “by doing this meditation the first few times yesterday and today, I realized that I generally take very

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<sup>155</sup> Taylor, journal entry.

<sup>156</sup> Jamie, second interview by author, November 24, 2015.

<sup>157</sup> Jessie, second interview by author, December 03, 2015.

<sup>158</sup> Skyler, third interview by author, December 10, 2015.

shallow breaths.”<sup>159</sup> In a later journal entry she wrote, “I noticed over the past few days that I have difficulty smoothing out between the intake and exhalation of air. I also noticed, especially in imagining my future performance, that I would start to feel physical pangs of nervousness. The more I concentrated on taking full breaths, the better I ended up feeling.”<sup>160</sup> Skyler also observed greater awareness of her breath. She wrote, “This study has really made me self-aware and more conscious about the little things like breathing. I realized that is something I sometimes forget to do is focus on my breathing and keeping it consistent.”<sup>161</sup>

Morgan noticed new awareness of her physical position during performances. Discussing the meditation, she said, “it helped me focus a lot on, like, how I was feeling physically, too. Because I would sometimes get up and not really realize, like, how closed up that I was.”<sup>162</sup> Morgan also discovered that changing the physical position she used for meditation influenced how she felt before performances. She said, “I also have begun considering meditation while standing. I’ve either been sitting or lying down, but if I’m nervous before a performance, I notice big differences in how I feel based on my orientation.”<sup>163</sup> After the group performance Morgan discussed how increased physical awareness allowed her greater physical control in performances:

...one of the things that I noticed that I was doing which, I don’t know if I don’t do this when I’m practicing but maybe I do and I didn’t notice it until I was just performing but I like clench my feet...I just kind of felt more aware of myself so if I felt that, then I could hear it kind of in my sound and then I would let go of my feet and then I felt like [my sound] would actually improve. So it was like

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<sup>159</sup> Morgan, journal entry, November 10, 2015.

<sup>160</sup> Morgan, journal entry, November 20, 2015.

<sup>161</sup> Skyler, journal entry, December 09, 2015.

<sup>162</sup> Morgan, second interview by author, December 04, 2015.

<sup>163</sup> Morgan, journal entry, December 03, 2015.

watching that while I was trying to play was kind of interesting. I don't think that I would've been as aware of it before.<sup>164</sup>

Skyler described how deeper awareness of physical and mental symptoms of MPA changed the way she experienced a performance:

I still have some anxiety, but it was like I was more aware of it and rather than trying to push it away, I kind of, like, lived in it. And I felt it. And I noted, like, my mouth gets dry when I get nervous. I start to shake a little bit. And I focused on making sure that my tone wasn't affected by that, because if I'm shaking then that could mess up my tone. I rush when I get nervous. I made sure that didn't happen because that would not be good. But it became, I made myself more aware of the symptoms that I have whenever I became more anxious and because of that they weren't as profound. And it was like I felt more comfortable understanding that it's OK to be a little bit anxious or nervous for the performance.<sup>165</sup>

Skyler also wrote in her journal: "I felt aware of my nerves, but I was comfortable with them."<sup>166</sup> She described this comfort in detail in our last interview, saying, "whenever I played in front of our small group, and then whenever I played in front of juries, like, I felt really comfortable and more confident in my performance just because again, like, I understood that I had the anxiety but I didn't let it take over my performance."<sup>167</sup>

Taylor felt when doing the meditation that "you get more connected to yourself."<sup>168</sup> As a result of this connection, Taylor was able to keep her performances in perspective. In her third interview she said, "I'm more aware of the experience or the opportunity, I start to realize that it's not that big of a deal. You know, just having that sense of, like, reality check. Of where everything really belongs in priority."<sup>169</sup>

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<sup>164</sup> Morgan, post-performance group discussion, December 07, 2015.

<sup>165</sup> Skyler, third interview by author, December 10, 2015.

<sup>166</sup> Skyler, journal entry, December 07, 2015.

<sup>167</sup> Skyler, third interview by author, December 10, 2015.

<sup>168</sup> Taylor, third interview by author, December 10, 2015.

<sup>169</sup> Taylor, third interview by author, December 10, 2015.

Discussing how the meditation influenced her post-performance self-evaluation, Morgan said, “I felt less personally invested. I know that sounds strange but, like, usually I would be more critical or negative about a performance. And I felt more, like, kind of at peace with it in a way.”<sup>170</sup> Cameron observed a similar change in how she felt immediately following a performance. She said, “something I noticed is, a lot of the times right after a performance I’m always like, Aww, that wasn’t good. I didn’t like this, this, this and this.’ But immediately after I got out, I didn’t remember what I messed up.”<sup>171</sup> Morgan reported an improved awareness of how to let go of anxiety in performance. During the focus group she said:

...when I’m able to, like, think about performing and I feel myself getting nervous, like when I’m really, like, in the visualization, and I start to feel the nervousness I realize that there’s a sense of control that I can actually stop time in the visualization and then you know, calm myself down and then start from there. So it’s kind of given me a sense of control.<sup>172</sup>

Morgan noticed that she felt different in performances on days she meditated compared with days she did not mediate:

I learned just in general that the mental preparation plays a huge part. Because I would, you know, before I would kind of ignore that aspect and, just like going through my journal I realized...on the days that I kind of didn’t spend as much time being as mindful or trying to meditate, I didn’t have as good performances.<sup>173</sup>

Jamie, Jessie, and Morgan reported improved awareness of techniques they could use for performance preparation. Jamie said, “it was definitely an eye-opening experience to have a different way of thinking about performing in concerts and how to prepare for

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<sup>170</sup> Morgan, third interview by author, December 11, 2015.

<sup>171</sup> Cameron, third interview by author, December 09, 2015.

<sup>172</sup> Morgan, focus group interview, November 22, 2015.

<sup>173</sup> Morgan, third interview by author, December 11, 2015.

them.”<sup>174</sup> Jessie discussed her new approach to performance preparation in the focus group: “usually I would just kind of, like, only focus on the music and not, like, how my performance was going to be. So I’ve been kind of working on, like, how I’m going to stand and how I’m going to, like, act, instead of just how I’m going to sound. So I think I’m more, like, conscious of that now.”<sup>175</sup> Morgan wrote in her journal, “I found that meditation highlighted the necessity of pre-performance preparation/routine.”<sup>176</sup> Later she wrote, “I believe this meditation practice helped me become more mentally assured of myself so I could be more aware of my playing objectively rather than devolving into criticism and panic.”<sup>177</sup>

Several participants reported feeling better about their MPA symptoms after discovering that other musicians experienced similar symptoms. Taylor described how she felt after discussing performance anxiety with other musicians in the focus group: “it helps me remember that there are so many people who deal with performance anxiety. I’m not alone, and that’s important.”<sup>178</sup> She also wrote, “Having the opportunity to be in a group and discuss in detail so many things was truly eye opening. It’s encouraging to see people succeeding and of course knowing that you aren’t alone.”<sup>179</sup> Jessie said she started “noticing other people’s performances more and, like, thinking about them.”<sup>180</sup> After the group performance Skyler said, “I noticed that some people like, before they started would just, like, take a deep breath, let it out and just, like, check themselves, just, like,

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<sup>174</sup> Jamie, third interview by author, December 09, 2015.

<sup>175</sup> Jessie, focus group interview, November 22, 2015.

<sup>176</sup> Morgan, journal entry, December 08, 2015.

<sup>177</sup> Morgan, journal entry, December 09, 2015.

<sup>178</sup> Taylor, journal entry.

<sup>179</sup> Taylor, journal entry.

<sup>180</sup> Jessie, third interview by author, December 08, 2015.



be aware, then start playing. I felt like that was really cool.”<sup>181</sup> Jamie said, “it was definitely eye-opening to see that I wasn’t the only one having these experiences.”<sup>182</sup>

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<sup>181</sup> Skyler, post-performance group discussion, December 07, 2015.

<sup>182</sup> Jamie, third interview by author, December 09, 2015.

## **Chapter Five**

### **Discussion and Implications**

#### Overview of the Study

##### **Purpose and guiding research questions**

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to examine undergraduate and graduate music majors' perceived experiences while learning and practicing a meditation technique. The guiding research questions were:

1. How did meditation practice alter participants' thoughts related to music performance?
2. How did meditation practice influence participants' perceived MPA symptoms?
3. What aspects of meditation practice did participants find most/least helpful in perceived reduction of negative MPA symptoms?
4. How did meditation practice influence post-performance self-evaluation?
5. What influence did meditation practice have on participants during performance preparation?

No additional research questions emerged during the study.

## **Methodology**

I used purposeful sampling to select the site of the study.<sup>183</sup> To select participants, I used homogeneous sampling.<sup>184</sup> Then, I gathered data by conducting audio-recorded individual interviews, collecting participants' daily written practice journals, facilitating an audio-recorded focus group interview, hosting a video-recorded post-performance group discussion, and collecting written responses from an open-ended survey.<sup>185</sup> I transcribed all individual interviews, the focus group interview, the post-performance group discussion, all written journal entries, and written responses to open-ended survey responses. I analyzed the data using Patton's method by first coding all transcripts for convergence and divergence.<sup>186</sup> Then I organized the codes into categories, grouped the categories into themes, and integrated the results to reveal an exhaustive description of the phenomenon.<sup>187</sup>

## **Findings**

I identified three emergent themes based on participants' perceived experiences while learning and practicing the meditation technique in this study. Those themes included:

1. Shifting Attitudes about Performance,
2. Personalizing the Meditation Practice, and
3. Experiencing Increased Awareness.

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<sup>183</sup> Patton, *Qualitative Research*, 230.

<sup>184</sup> *Ibid.*, 235-238.

<sup>185</sup> See Appendix C

<sup>186</sup> Patton, *Qualitative Research*, 465-66

<sup>187</sup> Creswell, *Qualitative Inquiry*, 270.

Theme 1, Shifting Attitudes about Performance, represents participants' changing attitudes about music performance during the month that they learned and developed a personal meditation practice. Participants reported experiencing symptoms of MPA prior to learning the meditation practice. After learning and practicing the meditation, participants described feeling calmer before performances and during performances, feeling more focused in performances, and feeling better about the prospect of performing.

Theme 2, Personalizing the Meditation Practice, describes participants' experiences as they personalized their meditation practices. Theme 2 also surveys participants' thoughts on the influences of different aspects of the meditation. Participants reported that the meditation was most useful when used habitually on a daily basis. Participants observed changes in the meditation practice based on location of practice, duration of practice, and when they practiced relative to other daily events. Participants noticed that each aspect of the meditation played a unique role in performance and performance preparation.

Theme 3, Experiencing Increased Awareness, captures the changing level of physical and mental awareness that participants experienced during the study. Each participant noted increased awareness about aspects of music performance and performance preparation including: physical tension, mental anxiety, methods for performance preparation, and other musicians' experiences with performance anxiety.

### **Summary of the findings as they relate to the research questions**

Research question 1: How did meditation practice alter participants' thoughts related to music performance?

Cameron, Morgan, and Taylor felt calmer before performances and during performances. They worried less about upcoming performances as they developed more detailed performance preparation techniques. Skyler and Taylor reported feeling more comfortable with their MPA symptoms. Jessie and Skyler felt excited about their upcoming juries despite previously feeling worried about those performances. Morgan and Taylor reported increased awareness and control over their musical performances after learning and practicing the meditation technique in this study. Cameron, Skyler, and Taylor found it easier to move on from mistakes they made in performances. Taylor and Jamie felt better about their experiences with MPA after discovering that other musicians experience similar MPA symptoms.

Research question 2: How did meditation practice influence participants' perceived MPA symptoms?

Participants observed their negative MPA symptoms had less impact on their musical performances after learning and practicing the meditation technique in this study. Morgan, Jamie, and Cameron reported a decrease in their physical MPA symptoms. They reported feeling better able to prevent those symptoms from negatively impacting their performances. Participants reported feeling calmer after practicing the meditation technique in this study. Morgan and Cameron reported feeling more focused during performances.

Research question 3: What aspects of meditation practice did participants find most/least helpful in perceived reduction of negative MPA symptoms?

The meditation practice in this study contained four main segments: centering breathing, centering phrase, past performance visualization, and future performance

visualization. Jamie, Taylor, Skyler, and Cameron reported feeling calmer after practicing centering breathing. Skyler also used centering breathing to feel calm in non-musical situations.

Cameron felt calmer after focusing on her centering phrase. Jamie did not use the centering phrase portion of the meditation during the first week after learning the meditation technique. By the end of the study, he had started using his centering phrase to feel calm. Taylor and Skyler both felt more aware of physical sensations when focusing on their centering phrases.

Taylor, Skyler, and Cameron focused on the emotions associated with their positive performance memory during the past performance visualization segment of the meditation. They reported feeling positive, confident, and even excited about future performances after visualizing a positive past performance. Jamie felt a mix of emotions when visualizing his past performance reflecting the complex emotions associated with his chosen performance memory.

Participants used the future performance visualization to anticipate details about future performances including physical sensations and audience interaction. Taylor reported feeling more comfortable about performances she had visualized in detail. Morgan and Cameron felt well prepared for future performances that they visualized in great detail.

Jessie felt the past performance visualization did not help her prepare for performances as well as the other segments of the meditation. Jamie, Taylor, Morgan, Skyler, and Cameron reported feeling that each segment of the meditation was useful.

Research question 4: How did meditation practice influence post-performance self-evaluation?

Participants observed feeling less personally invested in performances and were more comfortable letting go of mistakes they made in performances. By the end of the data collection period, Morgan and Cameron reported feeling less critical of themselves immediately following performances.

Research question 5: What influence did meditation practice have on participants during performance preparation?

Participants observed increased awareness about aspects of music performance and music performance preparation. Jamie reported feeling better able to prepare for performances. Jessie's increased awareness of the things she could control in performances allowed her to prepare more thoroughly for performances. Morgan felt more confident in her performance preparation as a result of the increased awareness she found from practicing the meditation technique in this study.

### **Discussion of the Findings**

Qualitative phenomenological research “describes the meaning for several individuals of their lived experiences of [...] a phenomenon.”<sup>188</sup> This study was limited in size and none of the findings is intended to be generalized for a larger population. By collecting data on participant experiences I sought to “elucidate the meaning, structure, and essence” of the phenomenon of music majors learning a meditation technique.<sup>189</sup>

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<sup>188</sup> John W. Creswell, *Qualitative Inquiry & Research Design: Choosing Among Five Approaches*, 2nd Edition (Thousand Oaks, California: Sage Publications, 2007), 57.

<sup>189</sup> Patton, *Qualitative Research*, 482.

Morgan, Jamie, and Cameron reported a decrease in their physical MPA symptoms. Other researchers have suggested a connection between meditation and a physiological response. The results from a study evaluating the effects of Zen meditation on blood pressure by de Fatima Rosas Marchiori, Kozasa, Miranda, Andrade, Perrotti, and Leite suggested the benefits of Zen meditation as a complementary treatment for hypertension in elderly subjects.<sup>190</sup>

Participants in this study reported increased awareness of aspects of musical performance and performance preparation. Cameron, Skyler, and Taylor observed improved ability to move on from mistakes in performances. Baltzell, Caraballo, Chipman, and Hayden conducted a study exploring the experiences of a Division I female soccer team participating in a 6-week mindfulness meditation training for sport (MMTS). Participants in that study reported enhanced awareness and acceptance of emotional experiences.<sup>191</sup> Results from other studies suggest a connection between meditation and increased awareness. Srinivasan and Singh investigated focused attention meditators' visual awareness, finding that meditation training leads to changes in "conscious visual perception."<sup>192</sup> Diaz investigated the effects of a mindfulness meditation technique on perceived attention and aesthetic response during music listening. He found "a majority of respondents in the mindfulness groups reported that the task had modified their

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<sup>190</sup> de Fátima Rosas Marchiori et al., "Decrease in blood pressure and improved psychological aspects through meditation training in hypertensive older adults: A randomized control study," *Geriatrics & Gerontology International* 15, no. 10 (2015): 1158-1164.

<sup>191</sup> Amy Baltzell et al., "A qualitative study of the mindfulness meditation training for sport: Division I female soccer players' experience," *Journal of Clinical Sport Psychology* 8, no. 3 (2014): 221-244.

<sup>192</sup> Narayanan Srinivasan and Amrendra Singh, "Concentrative meditation influences visual awareness: A study with color afterimages," *Mindfulness* (July 2015).



listening experience by increasing their ability to focus on the music without distraction.”<sup>193</sup>

Cameron and Morgan reported an improved ability to focus during performances after learning the meditation practice in this study. Jo, Schmidt, Inacker, Markowiak, and Hinterberger conducted a controlled study on long-term meditators to examine attention control mechanisms. Their results suggested a “higher accuracy in executive attention control among meditators.”<sup>194</sup> Meditators gave fewer error responses than controls, but reaction time of meditators was similar to controls. Nonetheless, Jo et al. add to a growing body of evidence suggesting “that meditation training could improve executive attention control.”<sup>195</sup>

### **Implications of the Findings**

With this study I examined the experiences of a single group of music majors who learned and practiced a meditation technique over one month during the fall semester of 2015. Replications of this study with different groups of music majors under different circumstances would enable further investigation into music major experiences while learning specific meditative practices. Research with similar findings may suggest similarities regarding how meditation influences the musical lives of otherwise disparate participant groups. Different or contradictory findings may suggest the need for additional research and would offer unique insight into how meditation influences different participant groups.

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<sup>193</sup> Frank M. Diaz, “Mindfulness, attention, and flow during music listening: An empirical investigation,” *Psychology of Music* 41, no. 1 (2013): 42-58.

<sup>194</sup> Han-Gue Jo et al., “Meditation and attention: A controlled study on long-term meditators in behavioral performance and event-related potentials of attentional control,” *International Journal of Psychophysiology* 99 (2016): 33-39.

<sup>195</sup> Jo et al., “Meditation and attention.”

Research utilizing longer data collection periods would enhance understanding of how music majors' experiences change when they have developed long-term meditation practices. Research over shorter periods could allow greater understanding of how music majors develop habits and how quickly they experience changes as a result of meditation practice.

Selecting participants from smaller groups of music majors, such as instrument families or specific majors, would enable greater understanding of how those populations experience learning a meditation practice. Research examining participant experiences on specific topics such as practicing, goal setting, or focus would improve the body of knowledge about how meditation plays a role in music major development.

Qualitative research on other meditation practices would allow better understanding of what aspects of meditation influence music majors in performance and performance preparation. Research examining different data sources including audience observations or researcher observations would give a different perspective on the experiences of music majors as they learn and develop a meditation practice.

Increased understanding of the influences meditation has on music performance allows musicians to develop more detailed performance preparation techniques. Musicians may use the meditation practice in this study to feel calmer before performances, experience decreased impact of negative MPA symptoms, or feel more focused and aware during performances.

Music teachers may develop personalized performance preparation practices based on the meditation in this study. Students may benefit from greater focus on certain aspects of the meditation depending upon their prior experiences with music performance

and MPA. Through increased understanding of the possibilities for performance preparation, music teachers may be more aware of their students' experiences, their students' needs, and how to address those needs.

Both musicians and music teachers benefit from increased awareness of how meditation and MPA influence performances. Through open dialogue about MPA and negative MPA symptoms, musicians gain understanding that they are not alone and that there are techniques to address their MPA symptoms. More discussion and research on how to cope with MPA symptoms allows for greater understanding of the influences of specific techniques and encourages interest in future research.

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## **Appendix A: Email Invitation to Participant Information Session**

Dear USC Music Major,

Have you ever experienced symptoms of music performance anxiety? Are you interested in seeking new ways to manage these symptoms?

If so, you are invited to an information session on an upcoming study examining the influences of meditation on music performance anxiety. *Participants in the study will be selected from volunteers attending the information session.*

All study-related activities will occur within the School of Music at USC this fall.

### **Mark Your Calendar:**

**Monday October 5, 2015 at 12:15pm  
Room 330**

The information session will last no longer than 30 minutes. If you are unable to attend the information session but are interested in participating or learning more about the study, please email me at [travis.n.baird@gmail.com](mailto:travis.n.baird@gmail.com)

All the best,  
Travis Baird

## **Appendix B: Participant Letter and Consent Form**

### Participant Letter and Consent Form, Distributed Prior to the Study

September 7, 2015

Travis N Baird  
551 Riverhill Circle Apt. 616  
Columbia, SC 29210

Dear (Name of Potential Participant):

You are invited to participate in a phenomenological study on meditation and music performance anxiety. The purpose of this study is to investigate the influence of a unique meditation practice on music performance anxiety among undergraduate and graduate music students. For this study, you are asked to participate in individual and group audio-recorded open-ended interviews, participate in an informal video-recorded performance, and provide journal entries and/or personal reflections from your meditation, music practice, and music performance experiences. The interviews will be scheduled at your convenience, at regular weekly intervals over the course of three consecutive weeks in October to November of 2015. As an experienced musician, the information you provide will be valuable to other performers interested in the managing symptoms of music performance anxiety. All interviews will be recorded, transcribed, analyzed qualitatively, and a report of all findings will be submitted to you for member checks prior to submission to USC School of Music as partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Musical Arts and to other scholarly forums.

Your participation in this study is completely voluntary. The information gained from you will be coded to ensure your anonymity. You may choose not to participate at all, and you may discontinue your participation at any time during the study without negative consequences.

Should you have any questions about this research, please contact me at (254)315-2446, or Dr. Daniel Sweaney, my faculty sponsor at (803)777-4114. The School of Music at the University of South Carolina is eager to ensure that all research participants are treated in a fair and respectful manner. If you have any concerns or questions about your treatment as a subject in this project, contact Tommy Coggins, USC Office of Research Compliance (803)777-4456.

If you agree to participate in this research project, please complete the following Informed Consent Agreement and return it to me by October 1, 2015. After receiving your Informed Consent Agreement, I will contact you to schedule interviews.

Sincerely,

Travis N. Baird  
USC School of Music, DMA Candidate  
551 Riverhill Circle Apt. 616  
Columbia, SC 29201  
travis.n.baird@gmail.com

Dr. Daniel Sweaney, DMA Dissertation Advisor  
Professor of Music  
USC School of Music - 813 Assembly  
Columbia, SC 29208  
dsweaney@mozart.sc.edu

**Please complete and return this attached form to [travis.n.baird@gmail.com](mailto:travis.n.baird@gmail.com) by  
October 1, 2015**

### **Informed Consent Agreement**

I agree to participate in the research study, A Phenomenological Study on the Influence of Meditation on Music Performance Anxiety. I have read, understand, and agree to comply with the information outlined in the accompanying letter of informed consent.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Today's Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Participant's Printed Name

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Participant

\_\_\_\_\_  
Telephone

\_\_\_\_\_  
Street Address

\_\_\_\_\_  
City, State

\_\_\_\_\_  
Zip Code

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## **Appendix C: Open-Ended Survey**

Meditation and Music Performance Anxiety  
Background Questionnaire  
November 9, 2015

For all questions: add extra space as needed (typed)

Name:

Age:

Instrument:

Years playing instrument:

At what age did you start taking private lessons?:

Have any of your music teachers discussed performance anxiety with you?

If so, what sorts of things did they say/suggest?

Describe your experience with symptoms of music performance anxiety.  
What are those symptoms?

How do they influence your performance (if they do)?

What strategies have you tried to manage any symptoms you experience?

Describe how successful/unsuccessful these strategies were at managing symptoms of Music Performance Anxiety?

Have you ever practiced meditation?

If so, how would you describe this meditation? Does it have a name?

Have you ever used meditation as a strategy to influence symptoms of Music Performance Anxiety?

If so, what influences did meditation have?

## **Appendix D: Interview Guides**

### First Individual Interviews

1. I'm interested in hearing about your recent performance activities. What sort of performances have you been involved with lately?
2. What aspects of these past performances stood out to you?
  - a. What role, if any, did meditation practice play these performances?
  - b. Describe your preparation for each of these performances.
3. Since you started practicing this meditation technique, what changes have you noticed in how you prepare for performances, if any?
4. How do you feel when you are meditating?
5. How do you feel when you finish meditating?
6. What questions have come up during this first week of meditation practice?

### Second Individual Interviews

1. One of the things that came up during the focus group session was what you actually see during visualization. Walk me through what you perceive during your positive memory visualization.
2. Walk me through what you perceive during your future performance visualization.
3. Describe how you use the centering phrase in your performance preparation or in performance itself.
4. Have the influences of this meditation practice changed at all over the last week (since last interview)? If so, describe how those influences changed, or how your perception has changed.

### Third Individual Interviews

1. What about this meditation practice did you find helpful?
2. What about this meditation practice did you find not helpful?
3. We briefly touched on the idea of post-performance self-evaluation after the group performance. How does this meditation practice influence your post-performance self-evaluation?
4. How did your thoughts related to music performance change over the course of this meditation practice?
5. If any of your music performance anxiety symptoms changed during this study, how so?
6. Any final thoughts?

## Focus Group Interview

1. What influence does meditation practice have on you during performance preparation?
2. How does meditation practice alter your thoughts related to music performance?
3. How does meditation practice influence your perceived MPA symptoms?