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A Research Episode in Dubai, United Arab Emirates: The Echo of the 27th International Society For Music Education Research Commission Seminar

The Seminar of the International Society for Music Education Research Commission (ISME) is presented throughout the world as an international, high level academic community, where music education scholars meet to discuss the various advancements in music and music education. In 2018, the seminar took place in Dubai, UAE and enjoyed attendance from all the six continents. This report article not only communicates a functional summary of the event's proceedings, but also critically approaches its impact in Dubai and the Middle East. Introducing advanced musical experiences, exchanging ideas on cutting-edge theories and major practices of music making and music education, proposing many constructive ideas on improved, efficient, balanced and sustainable thinking processes, and providing a fervent analysis of existing problems across the globe, this seminar has proven to express a brilliant dialogue, a clash of various modes of wisdom and a feast of thought. All forms of relevant communication, as this article proposes, comprise a glance forward into the future, creating a high-end and prudent platform for global communication and cooperation.

Keywords: ISME, Research, Music Education, Seminar, Music in Dubai.

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О XXVII семинаре Научной комиссии Международного общества музыкального образования (ISME) в Дубае

Семинар Научной комиссии Международного общества музыкального образования (ISME) является международным академическим собранием высокого уровня, где педагоги-учёные встречаются для обсуждения достижений в области музыки и музыкального образования. XXVII семинар состоялся в Дубае, в Объединённых Арабских Эмиратах в 2018 году с участием представителей шести континентов. Настоящая публикация не только

содержит функциональное резюме хода работы мероприятия, но и оценивает его влияние в Дубае и на Ближнем Востоке. Знакомство с передовым музыкальным опытом, обмен идеями по инновационным теориям и основным практикам музыкального образования, предложение многих конструктивных идей по совершенствованию, эффективности, сбалансированности и устойчивости процессов мышления, а также обеспечению анализа существующих проблем по всему миру, дало возможность ведения блестящих диалогов, сопоставления мнений, что вылилось в настоящий праздник мыслей. Любое подобное общение, как это показано в настоящей статье, предполагает взгляд в будущее, создавая высококачественную и разумную платформу для глобальной коммуникации и сотрудничества.

Ключевые слова: ISME, исследования в музыкальном образовании, XXVII семинар ISME, музыка в Дубае.

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It was in October 2016, when I first received an email from a very good friend and colleague, Patricia Gonzales, offering me the possibility to organize the 27th International Society for Music Education (ISME) Research Commission (RC) Seminar in the Canadian University Dubai, United Arab Emirates. I must admit that I was quite hesitant to do so in the very beginning. It was not because I did not have the experience of organizing similar events; rather I was feeling that music and music education were fairly both absent at confessional – not to mention academic – fields in the UAE up to that moment. Moreover, as I was a newcomer in Dubai at the time, I was not quite sure how I could handle in this working and academic framework – which were new for me – both the administrative and the academic outreach of such an important, high caliber and surely demanding event.

Indeed, it was the RC Chair, Evelyn Orman a few days later, showcasing a large amount of support in our very first email correspondence, who persuaded me to accept this project, which finally resulted in being what could be seen later on a very

distinctive event for the ISME and the Canadian University Dubai. This meeting signified an important time-point and music education research benchmark since the very first gathering in 1968. It was the 50th year of the Commission's conventions, which showcased an established tradition highlighting the established educational, music and research values.

In relation to the RC's seminar guidelines, Bentley's benchmark publication (Bentley, 1969) shows that nothing has changed in structure since the very first event, as the meeting still focuses predominantly on experimental research. It is limited in size (25 articles) for the sake of favoring general discussion between the participants; it is conducted entirely in English; and it takes place in one specific geographical place (alternating in years) within the time span of 5–7 days. This time, during the seminar days in July 2018, 25 researchers from all over the world (35 in total including the research commission executives, the observers and the event organizers) met under the roof of the host university exchanging valuable information and ideas in a multicultural academic

context, aspiring for change, active, albeit, still not very used to this topic. Considering especially this latter fact, the organizers of the event's schedule took pains to leave ample time for the attendees to discuss, familiarize themselves with and learn to understand the region's fairly misunderstood mentality on music and music education, while they also enjoyed the activities, observing the customs and quite progressive multicultural ideas permeating Dubai and the UAE.

As a fair indication to the event's cultural diversity, the countries officially represented were: the United States of America, Hong Kong, Japan, Kenya, Switzerland, Finland, Canada, Argentina, Portugal, South Africa, Brazil, Australia, the United Kingdom, Mexico, Spain, Brazil, Australia, Germany, Japan and Italy, while the topics covered in these five days referred to projects ranging from studies on rehearsal structures and content, perceptual constructs and creative musical productions to community, cultural and identity manifestations, music teachers education, infant development, statistics and special education contexts.

The Research Content

To delve into greater specificity, the first day of the seminar included presentations by Graca Boal-Palheiros, Ruth Brittin, Julia Brook, Melissa Brunkan, Sabine Chatelain and Debora Confredo. Boal-Palheiros (Boal-Palheiros and Boia, 2019), who were the first in the row to occupy the podium, discussed how a course delivered to music teacher graduates from the Porto School of Education during the years 1990–2010 (as an updated educational model, which was first implemented in 1986) helped shape and greatly benefited their current perceptions and practices. This follow-up shaped study indicated a positive stance on teachers' perception in regards to their professional preparation for the particular course

offered at that time, albeit, pinpointing the difficulties arising in contemporary music education in the classrooms of Portugal as the result of insufficient resources, students' behavior and the constraints of the curriculum design. Brittin (2019), who was the second to present her report, expanded on the perspectives of 112 students on a novel structure of setting up string orchestra rehearsals, which included different activities every single day of the weekly class as compared to the structure of the 'classical' orchestra rehearsal. Throughout her report the researcher proposed valuable opinion patterns arising from her topic, highlighting such themes as improvisation and involvement of different genres of music into an experimental setting. She also brought to the fore opinions related to a functional comparison of this novel approach to other conventional rehearsal contexts, concluding that 'diverse musical and authentic practices' are in dire need of large ensembles in musical education settings. Continuing, Brook (2019) referred to the well-known El-Sistema music education construct, bringing to the fore an alternative path of examining research data emanating from the program's implementation and course of action. More specifically, during her protocol implementation in a Sistema-inspired string program in Eastern Ontario, Canada, she asked 23 students to use photos and any other visual material they were given by the research team, creating finally posters according to their own free will and imagination. The material these students were given was directly related to what they had posed as the direct actors in the aforementioned program. Based on the above, the researcher portrayed the students' perceptions of the program, after showcasing the particular research methodology she had used to collect and analyze the data (i.e. Photo Elicitation). Brook concluded

that this specific methodology of research may provide an extensive repository of data exposure, which, being a research-sensitive practice, may well go beyond the music educational paradigm and context, aspiring to discussion of the fields of sociology and psychology in the particular context.

Brunkan (2019) enriched the discussion of the first day, presenting how she measured systemically pre- and post-test conditions of gestures on solo singing performance. More specifically, she explained how she had managed to study statistically the acoustic changes in intonation (based on F0) and amplitude (dB) while using a predefined set of gestures on the sample of N=32 singers. Her findings were in accordance with previous research, pinpointing that no significant post-test differences were indicated in regards to the singers' technical features of performance, although there were indeed individual perceptions of positive outcomes in the studied cohort due to the followed intervention. Later in the day, Chatelain (Chatelain, Giglio and Moor, 2019) brought to the fore a number of relevant techniques used by teachers when interacting with students, after focusing on mobilized knowledge emanating from interdisciplinary learning contexts; music-making through relevant perception of visual art in this case. More specifically, the study recorded and analyzed data on how teachers 'use to talk with students in order to discover musical knowledge.' The results exposed six main topics, which presented approaches towards successful musical learning, while significantly showcasing the ability of learning experiences remote from each other in their content to bring a positive learning outcome in musical education settings. The first day of the presentations ended with the contribution of Confredo (Confredo, Parisi and Doss, 2019), in which there was a discussion of the participation

of Italian and American musicians in community bands. The session reported organized data in relation to the qualities and reasons proven to be important for the two cohorts' involvement in this particular field of music making, while demonstrating comparative results in perceived benefits (similarities > differences).

The second day of the presentations included equally high-level material and scholarship, being introduced this time by Emily Good-Perkins, Christopher Johnson, Clifford Madsen, Nancy Abigail Masasabi, Gwendolyn McGraw, and Hiromichi Mito. Good-Perkins (2019) started the day discussing five Arab students' perception of music education in the UAE. region. Providing a sufficiently reflective stance to the integrated music educational signals a westernized curriculum can offer in the particular context, the researcher pinpointed a number of interesting issues related to *cultural relevance* and *fitting-in-context*, showcasing through the narratives of her research demonstration the need for further clarification and crystallization of perceptual constructs related to the field of music education in the UAE. Continuing, Johnson (Johnson and Geringer, 2019) discussed an experimental field of study, comparing different variations of patterns of tempo used between expert and novice conductors. The presenter explained how the research team followed a path of systemic analysis of the conductors' choices of tempi in their performances, which eventually demonstrated the rubato and its operative processing as core practices in this kind of settings. Madsen (Madsen, Glaser, Clark and Johnson, 2019) being third in the day to occupy the podium, debated why and how to further develop nonverbal (i.e. facial expression) reinforcement of communication into the teaching process. To answer this inquiry, two distinctive pre-



service student cohorts were recruited for two separate, albeit, interconnected studies. The two groups were identified as musical educators and musical therapists, while they were located in the Southeastern and Midwestern Universities, respectively. The outcome of the study demonstrated for the two nonverbal training methodologies applied in the particular contexts of the pre-service training classrooms, that neither of them was influential enough to substantially impact or alter the participants' communicative responses. It was shown furthermore that although nonverbal expressions of approval are easier to be learned and finally expressed, the same is not true for the neutral and the negative ones. An extended discussion in the panel incorporated how and if such a practice would really benefit pre-service music teachers, after considering implementation and cost-related issues.

Continuing the second day, Masasabi (2019) brought the discussion to the context of the musical life of Kenya, successfully posing the interplay of musical identities in the creative advancement of the Kamabeka Dance, evident in the Kenya Music Festival. She questioned how these musical identities may or may not relate to the regional constructs of music education. Several sociological and cultural codes were examined throughout the study, concluding that a certain amount of sustainability exists at the core of the Kamabeka dance values, despite the multiplication and further variation of the actual interplay taking place in time. McGraw and Mito concluded the day by discussing vocal learning in early childhood and the proceedings of a school choral competition in Japan, respectively. More specifically, McGraw (2019), following a mixed-methods research design, explained how she studied a group of infants through

their parents' questionnaire responses, focusing on the formers' early acquisition of song and speech, as well as their clarity and expressivity of speaking. In conclusion, she exposed a strong predictive chain between the parents' child-directed singing, as well as the acquisition of song and accelerated language on the participants' developmental line, substantiating once more the correlation between music and speech well-evidenced in literature. At the same time, Mito (2019) discussed the analysis of a set of semi-structured interviews referring to the reasons why participants may take part in a specific choral competition project in Japan. After following a qualitative analysis approach on the questionnaire's content, Mito managed to establish a multi-faceted basis of codes, including among others concepts related to prize-winning, as well as the meaning of music and achievement-related thoughts. This study undoubtedly showed the multivariate nature of activities related to choral singing we can enjoy in our lives.

The third day of the event was comprised by the talks of Karabo Lucy Mogane, Harry Price, Suvi Saarikallio, Luis Ricardo Silva Queiroz and Christina Svec, completing its proceedings with two posters by Fred Spano and Ana Lucia Frega. More specifically, Spano's poster debated the perceptions towards transgender individuals on the part of students of musical programs in the U.S.A., while Frega's poster, clearly related to the eminence of the particular event, offered some personal empirical elements of the first RC seminar in 1968. Mogane's (2019) oral presentation, being the first one that day, aspired to enhance interest in African creativity, after it deployed evidence on the formal musical activities and involvement in them so insufficiently supported in the continent yet so important for children's development. Mogane

measured and assessed the creativity of children in primary schools by encouraging them to compose and perform their originally created music, making thereafter a point of necessity for this kind of culturally driven creative activities. Later on, Price's team (Price and Orman, 2019) highlighted the process of how they statistically pinpointed the differences of reaction and similarities between the two cohorts of music and non-music major students in an American university setting in relation to the conductor's expressivity when the latter performs with an orchestra. The researchers aspired to assess and study a set of eight distinctive conditions, while concluding that appreciation of performance in these kind of settings are indeed cross-modal in nature, notwithstanding the intentionally implemented variations in the sound dynamics and/or the audiovisual output the research protocol dictated (e.g. sound/no sound; still vs. motion picture; the conductor appearing or not appearing in the videos). It was noted that no distinctive feature excels in pointing out a specific appreciation/reaction angle. Saarikallio (2019) continued the line of talks in the third day, posing through her own study how early song acquisition can predict accelerated speech acquisition and expressiveness. Being closely connected with McGraw's study previously presented, Saarikallio established her claim in a more theoretical manner, referring more specifically to the experiential-embodied and *self-reflective affective awareness* terms. Through these, she declared music to be a tool that can definitely support the early years' development process, while relying on the social-emotional competence the former can induce.

Queiroz's presentation (Queiroz and Marinho, 2019) presented a rather bold experiment for the seminar, both technically as well as philosophically, as the presenter

could not physically attend the event due to unforeseen travel-related circumstances. First the commissioners, and then the whole assembly decided to make the attempt of a long-distance presentation, as the plan was not to deviate from the initially announced seminar program. All preparations for establishing a productive discussion platform between the presenter and the audience in CUD were achieved effectively and on time, notwithstanding the short notice, being successful, as a result, in organizing a smoothly run session. In relation to its content, Queiroz's presentation focused on the musical genre of the Embolada (a traditional concept in Brazil featuring an artistic combination of music and poetry) thoroughly explaining how specific features of processing music education surface and permeate its distinctive cultural structure in a contemporary musical educational setting. Taking a combined ethnomusicological and music educational approach, the project showcased its converging nature between studying music tradition and the technical features of music, asserting in the end that both sides are indeed important for the particular genre to flourish, no matter how old or fundamental its profile may appear in the Brazilian musical regime. Finally, the day concluded with the technical presentation of Svec (2019), where statistical practices related to previously published music education research were critically reviewed. This report analyzed data from three music scholarly journals (JRME; PoM; CRME) showcasing the quantitative nature of work which is predominantly evident in the research field. Although it was an ongoing project, this meta-analytical study indicated an important sum of strengths and weaknesses in the quantitative research paradigms of the context, resulting in the additional nourishment of musical education research with valuable information and advice to follow.



David Taylor, Tai Shun Tse, Graham Welch, Jennifer Whitaker, Eva Wilde and Debbie Lynn Wolf presented the results of their study as originally scheduled for the last day, while in the evening, the closing Gala Dinner took place, concluding the overall seminar works and proceedings. Initially, Taylor (2019) explained what kind of cultural attitudes and related preferences emerge from two ethnographically distinctive groups towards specific decision-making systems (i.e. democratic, inclusive, and egalitarian) in the context of an amateur choral rehearsal. After analyzing the valuable input of 485 choristers based in the U.K. and Australia, their distinguishing characteristics being demonstrated to correlate to the recorded sample demographics, bringing to the foreground the differences in relation to the *group-input* versus the *conductor-only* music decision making processes. Based on these findings, Taylor took a good care to convey to the audience that relevant studies can be of paramount importance for the multicultural and politically variable global music education environment we face nowadays, claiming that similar research content could provide valuable input to internationally-oriented teaching careers. Changing the focus of the day's debate, Tse's presentation (Tse and Chen, 2019) combined the fields of composition and IT, bringing up a progressive study of music curriculum development through a student-computer mediated composition interface. More specifically, the two researchers involved in this study tried to identify a possible correlation between students' thinking style and their composing strategies after analyzing the formers' digitally created works. The data collection process included digital files, reflective journals, individual interviews and compositional sketches from a group of 22

secondary school students in Hong Kong. The study ended up proposing a specialized learning model for a computer-mediated composition course based on the students' accumulated cognitive profile created from the available data. The proceedings of the day progressed towards the domain of special music education, as Welch and his team (Welch, Saunders, Wilde, Mason, Maynard and Knight, 2019) introduced a preliminary research-based evaluation of a three-year long music program (Sounding Out) for hearing impaired children, taking place in secondary special schools in London, U.K. Following the longitudinal observation *modus operandi*, the research team employed the Sounds of Intend (Ockelford and Welch, 2018; 2012) musical development framework to study the particular population. The collected data suggested that all participants in this program were positively benefited, implying that an extended application of this program could equally benefit the musical profiles of any other special needs and disabilities population, similar to the one under investigation.

The presentation of Welch was followed by Whitaker (Whitaker and Orman, 2019) who went up on the podium to present how the perceptions of 34 novice music conductors are constructed in relation to cyber-sickness symptoms in a virtual music ensemble setting. Focusing on the features entailed by a spherical video in this context, the team studied two different conditions (i.e. slow and fast conducting) and compared them to other fields of study unrelated to music through the Simulator Sickness Questionnaire (SSQ; Kennedy *et al.*, 1993). The results did not show any significant statistical differences between the compared samples, hence establishing a safe practical context and a viable exploratory trend towards this

technologically advanced application in the world of music education. Continuing the inspiring line of talks, Wilde (2019) discussed the important topic of children and young people with ADHD. Indeed, there is quite enough research about music and populations suffering from ADHD present in the relevant literature which makes the attempt to understand – successfully, most of the times, – how the former can normalize the symptoms of the latter. The particular researcher on the podium, however, not following the aforementioned line of research, tried to showcase how and to what extent ADHD expresses a particular educational profile in the formal process of musical practice and education. The outcome, being quite remarkable, described a rather unexpected educational angle, suggesting that individuals with ADHD do not pose a distinctive educational profile, and that they can effectively involve themselves in musical activities irrespective of their clinical profile. ADHD should not be a deterrent do to so. Finally, the closing presentation of the seminar was given by Wolf (Wolf, Adderley and Love, 2019), who explained how she comprehensively studied perspectives on motivation and satisfaction of in-service music teachers in Australia and the USA. Her questionnaire-based approach to research affirmed that no major differences – rather, mostly similarities – exist between the cultural characteristics and educational systems the two investigated cohorts project during their teaching practice. Generally, it was shown that music education equally motivates practitioners from both countries, as its globally solid profile infuses an enjoyable professional engagement, rewarding at many levels.

A truly diversified content of research was exposed in the 27th ISME RC seminar in Dubai, bringing some remarkable

knowledge under the international music education spotlight. In the aftermath of the proceedings it seemed that the seminar successfully managed to analyze the overall situation and existing problems of music education and its creative research initiatives across the globe; it introduced advanced experiences in the ever expanding multicultural contexts of our times; it undeniably helped for the exchange of ideas on cutting-edge theories and major practices of musical performance and education, while it also proposed many constructive frameworks on improved practices in the music education context, which would be more efficient, more balanced and more sustainable. Most importantly, the RC seminar in Dubai not only fed the process for international collaborations and networking to further extend, as it was supposed to do in the first place, but it gloriously planted the seeds for research of music education to start officially existing as a domain to this eastern part of the world, which is also very welcoming for the field. Such an achievement was confirmed in two ways: (a) the full acceptance and support the event enjoyed by the local authorities – The Canadian University in Dubai, the Dubai Tourism and Dubai Business Events; and (b) the fact that for the first time in ISME's existing history, three members of the U.A.E. were officially registered under the ISME's membership pool. This presented a great gain for the Arab world and the rest of the musical educational world.

The Epilogue

In conclusion, as the leading organizer of the event, I certainly believe that the fervent discussions related to high-level multicultural music education which took place in July 2018 in Dubai, transformed the specific Research Seminar into a



brilliant intellectual dialogue, a clash of different sides of wisdom and a feast for thought. Therefore, I firmly believe that the closing of this seminar could not be seen as an end for the region, but rather a new, fresh starting point. Based on this, I invite all interested colleagues to build on the current status the specific event established, look ahead into the future, and create a high-end and prudent platform for

global music education communication and cooperation where Dubai and the U.A.E. is actively included from now on. Let us all continue to expose and extend the effective themes beneficial to music education to all those people who enjoy, live and breathe through music, devising and implementing other similar, equally pervasive and high-class in content and people academic events.

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