



## PSYCHOLOGY PROFESSIONALS AS TEACHERS IN MUSIC CONSERVATORIES: TOWARDS A SUSTAINABLE MUSIC EDUCATION

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*La psicología de la música, pese a su trayectoria durante el siglo XX, no ha logrado tener consecuencias directas en las prácticas de los conservatorios de música. En España, la Asociación Española de Psicología de la Música y la Interpretación Musical (AEPMIM, 2015) propició la confluencia de profesionales especializados en esta área que estaban dispersos por todo el territorio nacional. Entre sus iniciativas destaca la urgencia de incorporar psicólogos profesionales a los conservatorios para procurar la mejora de la salud psicológica y el rendimiento del alumnado dentro de una actividad tan exigente como la musical. En 2019 se constituyó dentro de AEPMIM un grupo formado principalmente por psicólogos que ejercen como docentes en conservatorios españoles. En este trabajo se muestran las principales actividades llevadas a cabo en ellos a partir de unos valores globales comunes que pretenden servir de guía para una educación musical sostenible.*

**Palabras Clave:** Educación musical, Psicología de la música, Conservatorios, Sostenibilidad.

*Despite its history throughout the 20th century, the psychology of music was not able to have a direct impact on the practices of music conservatoires. In the case of Spain, the Spanish Association for the Psychology of Music and Music Performance (AEPMIM, 2015) led to a confluence of professionals in this field who were dispersed around the country. Among its initiatives was the urgency of incorporating psychology professionals into conservatories as the main way to ensure the improvement of psychological health and student performance in an activity as demanding as music. In 2019, a group was constituted within the AEPMIM, mainly made up of professional psychologists who work as teachers in Spanish conservatoires. This work shows the main activities carried out by this group based on common global values that are intended to serve as a guide for sustainable music education.*

**Key words:** Music education, Psychology of music, Conservatoires, Sustainability.

### **T** HE PSYCHOLOGY OF MUSIC IN SPAIN AND THE BIRTH OF THE AEPMIM

Since the end of the 20th century and the beginning of the 21st century, we have witnessed a rapid development of technology and knowledge that has affected all areas of human activity. Psychology as a scientific discipline has not been alien to these advances and in recent decades has carried out extensive research in different areas, including music.

The complex situation of music in the Spanish education system, with a minimal presence in compulsory education and no connection with European and university plans in higher music education, does not exactly facilitate the influence of psychology in this context. In the words of Gutiérrez (2014, p. 133), in Spain this presence «is practically testimonial». However, the promotion of institutions such as the ISME or the UNED [Spanish National Distance University], whose decisive role continues today, as well as some universities such as

those of Granada, the Basque Country, the Complutense University of Madrid, or the Autonomous University of Madrid with their important research activity (Fernández-Morante & Casas-Mas, 2016) could constitute the first steps towards a greater development of music psychology in our country.

The Spanish Association of Psychology of Music and Musical Performance (AEPMIM) was born in 2015, founded at the Royal Conservatory of Music in Madrid with two essential supporters: Professor Emeritus Jaime Vila and Dr. John Sloboda. The creation of this entity incorporates Spain into the portfolio of countries with societies of this nature (in order of seniority, England, Germany, Japan, the United States, Australia, Korea, Argentina, China, Brazil, Colombia and, more recently, Mexico), opening the door to exchange between professionals who were relatively isolated.

The AEPMIM emerges as an initiative that aims to establish itself as a forum for the discussion and exchange of scientific and academic knowledge at the intersection of psychology and music, facilitating the interrelationship of researchers and scientists as well as the integration of results of different research approaches to music and educational practice.

The year 2017 meant an important strengthening of music

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psychology in Spain thanks to the organization of the I International Congress of Psychology of Music and Musical Performance (CON MUSICA, 2017), organized by AEPMIM together with the UNED. More than 150 professionals and researchers from 10 countries in Europe, America, and Asia participated in this event led by Dr. Andrés López de la Llave whose dedication and unceasing work resulted in the implementation, in collaboration with the AEPMIM, of a specialized Master's Degree and taught by professional experts in the field since the 2018/19 academic year at the UNED.

## FORMAL MUSIC EDUCATION

### *Psychological research at the Conservatory*

Traditionally, a conservatory is a school of music independent of the universities, offering specialized training in the performance of classical music (Bennett, 2010). However, referring to the «conservatory» as the institution that has housed most of the formal music education in the western world for several centuries requires a certain amount of caution and the necessary nuances to avoid misleading generalizations, given the notable differences that exist among the centers in aspects such as the organization of studies, internal structure, training curricula, etc. (Jørgensen, 2014). These differences increase if we compare centers in different countries or regions, with different teaching-learning cultures.

On the other hand, it is necessary to highlight the remarkable advances in research on teaching in conservatories that have taken place in the last two decades. In fact, the metaphorical vision of the conservatory as a «secret garden» unfavorable to research (Burwell, Carey, & Bennet, 2017), particularly in higher music education (Jørgensen, 2010), could be considered to be disappearing as the 21st century progresses. Especially relevant are the exhaustive reviews about higher music education (Jørgensen, 2009, 2014) or the studies that delve into the particular dynamics of these teachings, such as one-to-one teaching (Burwell, 2012; Burwell, Carey, & Bennett, 2017; Carey et al, 2013; Carey & Grant, 2014). Likewise, the existing teaching styles based on the implicit theories of teachers (Pozo, Bautista, & Torrado, 2008) and students (Casas-Mas, Pozo, & Montero, 2014) and their influence on practice (López-Iñiguez & Pozo, 2014) are analyzed. All of this has only reinforced the need for research in this context based on the first signs of ethnographic research (Kingsbury, 1988; Nettle, 1995) that pointed to an extraordinarily demanding socio-cultural model based on talent, the instrument teacher as the main judge of that talent, and performance over teaching. This is what some studies

have called the «conservatory model» (López & Vargas, 2010).

Elsa Perdomo Guevara<sup>1</sup> proposed an analogy between this «conservatory model» and the medical practices of the early 19th century and the current ones.

...] if you took a piano lesson in the 19th century and another one today, you may not notice any difference.

...] Our teaching methods have not changed since the time of Liszt. However, there has been an impressive amount of scientific study on psychology and education, and specifically on music education, which shows that there are ways to help people learn, develop their skills, and perform to their fullest potential. The question is: what do we do with all these findings? Is it normal that we continue to teach as if they didn't exist? Aren't we behaving like doctors who continue to carry out bloodletting and prescribe morphine when there may be more efficient resources available? (Perdomo Guevara, 2018)

Some of the most recurrent criticisms of this model have been the gap between theory and practice or its evaluation of musical skills based solely on instrumental skills (Borgdorff & Schuijjer, 2010). More than two centuries later, it is not uncommon to observe how these teaching practices are perpetuated by reproducing static and uniform models, anchored in a heritage that goes back more than 200 years (Loges & Lawson, 2012).

These learning models, based on the teaching experience, function outside of the scientific evidence, which points to the need to incorporate training actions that take into account the development of psychological principles aimed at achieving an integrated musical and artistic potential (Fernández & Orozco, 2015).

One of the traditional pillars of teaching action has been learning structured around repetition, whose essential indicator is the number of hours dedicated to the instrument. The technical expertise is thus linked to the volume of practice. However, research shows that the reality is much more complex. Instrumental practice must be deliberate (Ericsson, Krampe, & Tesch-Romer, 1993), efficient (Hallam, 2001), effective (Williamon, 2004a), and a process of self-learning (Jørgensen, 2004). Previous reviews on instrumental practice (Miksza, 2011; Zukhov, 2009) propose a model of effective practice that includes variables such as metacognition, self-evaluation, results, etc. Despite the scientific evidence, students often receive a wealth of information about how to play and interpret music, but little about how to study it (Hatfield & Lemyre, 2016).

The emphasis of traditional teaching in conservatories thus

<sup>1</sup> Elsa Perdomo Guevara is the current president of the Spanish Association of Psychology of Music and Musical Performance, AEPMIM.



lies in developing technical-instrumental skills, overlooking equally decisive factors such as psychological, personal, and performance ones. In this sense, emotional development has also been relegated, sometimes forgotten, by focusing on the acquisition of correct performance technique and development of musicality «to the detriment of the treatment of emotional competencies» (Campayo & Cabedo, 2014, p. 42). Self-knowledge, human relations, and emotional development continue to represent a major gap in teacher training (Torres Riquelme & Lorente, 2014).

The identification, understanding and regulation of socio-emotional aspects are learned. According to Gardner (1987), intrapersonal and interpersonal intelligence, like all other intelligences, needs adequate stimulation for learning. Consequently, there is a need for initiatives such as «social-emotional learning» (SEL) programs, which have a positive impact on academic performance as well as on the personal and social environment. These programs should be carried out regularly and consistently (Moral-Bofill *et al.*, 2015) and included in the curriculum of music education. In summary, overcoming the gap between research and educational practice is urgent, given the importance of the quality and complexity of the artistic experience. Thus, any educational center that provides the adequate context in which to transmit the enjoyment of learning throughout life increases its value notably (Moral-Bofill *et al.*, 2020).

### **Development of disorders and injuries in musicians**

According to Bennett (2010), there is a higher rate of injury among musicians than among athletes. The most common disorders as a result of professional practice affect their musculoskeletal system, with very diverse prevalences, according to the scientific literature, ranging from 25% to 93% (Víaño Santasmarinas *et al.*, 2010). These dysfunctions can seriously affect the ability to play. Thus, attending to their treatment, but also to their prevention is key and psychological intervention is essential in both cases. The correct corporal training of musicians, requiring the participation of adequately trained teachers who understand the relationship between the corporal and the emotional aspects, forms part of these programs of prophylactic intervention, since one of the main risk factors is bad postural habits (Blanco-Piñeiro, Díaz-Pereira, & Martínez, 2015, 2017). The high physical demand, together with the use of repetitive movements required by the practicing of the skills of instrumental execution of a high level of difficulty can cause very significant damage (rñivec, 2004). Some of these problems are particularly serious such as overuse syndrome or focal dystonia (Tubiana & Chamagne, 1993; Rosset-Llobet *et al.*, 2005) the treatment of which involves psychological care (Altenmüller & Jabusch, 2009).

The vulnerability of musicians to physical injury and related psychological problems increases during periods of intense

training. Aaron Williamon, director of the Centre for Performance Science at the Royal College of Music in London, is critical of the lack of risk and injury prevention strategies in conservatories, noting that education and training of artists does not incorporate body care, injury prevention, or psychological well-being (2004b). To alleviate this shortage, this institution provides six hours of seminars per week to address this issue.

In short, we can affirm that there is a risk of manifest deterioration or psychological damage motivated, firstly, by the absence of content in music psychology in the curriculum or, when it is included, by the lack of specialists trained to teach it. This is the case of the Autonomous Community of Galicia, which includes the discipline Techniques of Emotional and Physical Control in the curriculum of the Higher Degree of Music (Decree 171/2016, 2016), which can be taught by any teacher belonging to the multiple teaching departments that teach it, whether or not they have specific knowledge. And secondly, tolerance to psychological violence within the conservatories has to be taken into account as another filter to evaluate the resistance-resilience of the student: «if they can't stand it, they'd better leave» (Fernández-Morante, 2018), in line with the natural selection characteristic of these teachings (Pozo, Bautista, & Torrado, 2008).

Despite this, there is growing awareness in conservatories to prevent these physical and psychological dysfunctions. One example is the directive of the National Association of Schools of Music in the United States (NASM), according to which all music schools must include in the curriculum subjects that address prevention and awareness of these injuries (Bennett, 2010). Unfortunately, the initiatives in this respect in our country respond to proposals, almost always on an individual basis, from motivated teachers who usually have highly professional profiles with several complementary official qualifications, but who carry out these functions without a sufficient institutional structure to provide the solid support required.

### **PSYCHOLOGY PROFESSIONALS AS TEACHERS IN SPANISH MUSIC CONSERVATORIES**

One of the main initiatives of the AEPMMIM to help alleviate the shortcomings reported was to form a working group with psychology professionals (PsyCon) who exercise their main task in music conservatories.

The group has as a common framework of action the promotion of a model of «education» in its broadest sense, with the moral aspects that it implies (Fernández-Morante & Casas-Mas, 2019). That is, to promote significant learning both in the musical and personal aspects. The students and the evolutionary stage they go through with respect to such crucial aspects as the development of their identity, self-concept, and self-esteem become the center of attention towards which all actions are directed. This teaching-learning approach must



contemplate all the processes involved and have as a priority value the integral health of the learner. The aim is to build a sustainable education model that allows new generations to reproduce and improve in the future. This concept of sustainability is linked to that of «sustainable development» defined by UNESCO, which highlights education as a way to promote healthy and sustainable lifestyles over time. Music plays an important role in sustainable development and educational inclusion (Vernia-Carrasco, 2020). In classical music, this approach focuses on the sustainability of the activity of musicians to adapt to social and economic changes and not to move away from reality by remaining anchored in the past (Narejos, 2013).

This double aspect of music as a contribution to a sustainable culture and its own sustainability entails a necessary self-criticism on the part of the teaching staff. Reproducing the schemes of our teachers in which instrumental ability prevails is not enough for education to be sustainable in the sense expressed: «doing things the way we learned them is to do them half-heartedly [...], and playing the instrument well is not enough» (Narejos, 2013, pp.5-6). Even teaching music is not enough in itself to create a culture in which sustainable values prevail (Fernández-Morante, Casas-Mas, 2019). This ideal of sustainability requires giving back to music and culture their power to bring people together, favoring communication and mutual understanding. In short, to unite ethics and aesthetics (Narejos, 2013).

In Spain, psychology is beginning to play an essential role in this sense, particularly the pioneering initiative that emerged in Madrid. In October 2013, M<sup>o</sup> José García-Patrón, Director General of Secondary Education, Vocational Training, and Special Education of the Community of Madrid, issued Instructions on Guidance Departments in the Professional Conservatories in the territory of the Community of Madrid<sup>2</sup>, thus opening the possibility of providing a guidance department to the conservatories that request it.

The main concern of this political initiative is to offer psycho-pedagogical support to young musicians in order to help them to successfully face increasingly rigorous professional academic teaching and to access higher level education.

Ángeles Sánchez, a psychologist and guidance counsellor, in charge of the Guidance Department of the Getafe Conservatory, explains the multiple facets of her work as a guidance counsellor: «to advise and inform her fellow travelers, to listen to the students and their families, to critically evaluate the rigid educational format that crushes musical

training, and to contemplate the scene in the classroom and in the auditorium». Some of the fundamental elements for the reflection that Sánchez highlights are the development of the necessary interdisciplinarity that minimizes the current atomization of resources and favors a quality stage projection; the cultivation of an appropriate motivational climate, and a fluid communication between teacher and student; a listening based on the formative commitment and critical thought; encouragement of the progressive autonomy of the student; the univocal quality of the performance as a holistic and creative exercise and the social, performance, and aesthetic projection of the music.

This line of work emphasizes time for reflection, the promotion of new learning alliances and collaborative projects, as well as psychological support for students and families. Finally, it highlights the impact of mindfulness and its psychological and philosophical approaches by allowing «the creation of groups among students and offers each of them an opportunity to transform into an experience and wonder what usually precipitates as an occurrence and anxiety».

In the rest of Spain there still does not exist regulation of professionals in the psycho-pedagogical area in conservatories comparable to that in Madrid. Meanwhile, several psychologists who are members of the AEPMIM have carried out, in recent years, various initiatives combined with their work as teachers in conservatories in an attempt to meet these needs.

Some of these are described below.

### **Vigo Higher Conservatory of Music: Music Performance Psychology Service (MPPS)**

In 2014/15, Dr. Patricia Blanco, a professor of singing and a psychologist, plans to implement a musical performance psychology service that will cover two main facets: research and intervention. This project was born with the vocation of being useful for students interested in improving their academic, musical, and artistic performance, always following a self-evaluation methodology. The service has the close collaboration of Dr. Pino Díaz Pereira, a psychologist specialized in sports psychology, and Dr. Antonio González, a psychologist specialized in methodology, both from the Faculty of Education Sciences of the University of Vigo. As a result of this collaboration, these two specialists have recently published the results of a study that analyzed the structural relationships among performance anxiety, the feeling of self-efficacy, the urge to play, and self-evaluated performance in a sample of 270 Spanish musicians (González et al., 2017).

<sup>2</sup> Instructions from the Directorate General of Secondary Education, Vocational Training, and Special Education regulating the organization and function of professional music conservatories, professional dance conservatories, and integrated centers for artistic education in music and primary and/or secondary education located in the territory of the Community of Madrid for the 2014/2015 academic year.



### **Professional Conservatory of Music of Valencia: Psychopedagogical Care Service (PCS)**

The lack of specific educational professionals in the teaching of music in the Valencian Community led to the creation in the 2019/20 academic year of the Psycho-pedagogical Care Service (PCS) at the Professional Conservatory of Music of Valencia (CPMV), the music education center with the largest student body in the Community, led by Maribel Argilés, a graduate in pedagogy, and Dr. Basilio Fernández (Psychological Association of the Valencian Community), both piano teachers.

Within its possibilities, the PCS aims to offer support and advice to the educational community in three areas: academic and professional guidance, psychological counselling, and attention to diversity.

### **The «Francisco Guerrero» Professional Conservatory of Music of Seville: Student Psychological Care Service (SPCS)**

The sensitivity of the management of the P.C.M. «Francisco Guerrero» to the demands detected in the conservatory with the largest population of students in the province of Seville, led to the implementation during the academic year 2019/20 of the Student Psychological Care Service (SPCS). Promoted by its Head of Studies, Pedro Luís Benítez, and coordinated by Francisco de Paula Ortiz Ruiz, professor of piano on staff and a psychologist (Psychological Association of Western Andalusia). This service specifies its objectives as offering psychological advice to students, encouraging research aimed at improving academic performance and psychological well-being, and promoting spaces for reflection and debate on aspects related to the prevention and promotion of the health of the musician and learning methodologies.

### **Psychology professionals in other Spanish music conservatories**

It is necessary to point out the work of Elsa Perdomo-Guevara, a psychologist, pianist, and doctor of the University of Sheffield, who works as an external adviser of the Professional Conservatory of Music «Arturo Soria» of Madrid. This center considers that musical learning should contribute to the enrichment and happiness of human beings, whether they are learning to be professional musicians or not, since more and more studies show that positive emotions contribute to valuable results (Lyubomirsky *et al.*, 2005, Pekrun *et al.*, 2011). In addition, one of the priorities of this conservatory is to promote good relationships between teachers and students. As a consequence of this approach, in the academic year 2018/19 the course «Human factors: the key element of an efficient and rewarding musical education» was designed to promote the psychological well-being of teachers, a valuable objective in itself and an indispensable condition for a healthy and enriching relationship between teachers and students.

Also noteworthy is the figure of Dr. Miren Zubeldia, a psychologist, doctor of the University of the Basque Country, and professor of cello at the «Ataúlfo Argenta» Professional Conservatory of Music in Santander, for her research and dissemination work on various psychological aspects related to the musical performance [of the performer] (Zubeldia, 2015).

Finally, we should mention the actions in the origins of the training in psychology in the centers of higher artistic education of Dr. Amalia Casas-Mas, an educational psychologist with a higher degree in Piano and Musical Language and a researcher in the faculties of psychology at the Autonomous University of Madrid and of Education at the Complutense University. During the 2002-2003 academic year, the curriculum for the higher degrees came into effect in Madrid and Casas-Mas took on the design and teaching of the subjects of Psycho-pedagogy and Didactics of Music at the Royal Conservatory of Music (RCSMM) and at what was then the Royal Professional Conservatory of Dance, now the CSDMA. This was a key moment of initiation in psychological teacher training whose future raw material would not be simply a musical instrument, its technique and expressiveness, and the musical score, but rather human beings.

During that first decade of the 21st century, Dr. Casas-Mas worked at the service of Madrid's higher music schools, along with other professionals in the field of educational psychology. They carried out an important task developing a curriculum that included the fundamentals of the psychology of learning and teaching, the psychology of creativity, evolutionary psychology, and the psychology of teacher-student interaction, based on a student-centered approach. In Spain, specialized research in the field is beginning to be developed with national and international publications that serve as a framework to promote the new paradigm of teacher training.

In this sense, it should be pointed out that the inclusion of training in the models of psycho-pedagogical guidance and intervention in the successive musical curricula of the second decade of the century, implies a change in the vision of the role of the teacher who is no longer a mere transmitter of information but also a mediator in the construction of knowledge in the learners - sound - emotion - communication system. The work of Dr. Casa-Mas during these two decades has focused on promoting reflective and empathetic work with the student body, supported by research, which is brought together for the first time in a national publication for music teachers in conservatories and schools (Pozo *et al.*, 2020).

Finally, we would like to highlight the innovation project «Tots músics, tots diferents» that has been developed since 2004 at the Conservatory of Torrent (Valencia), which allows the schooling of students with Special Educational Needs (SEN) in elementary music education. This project has had some extraordinary resources that are not present in other conservatories, such as the assignment of reduced hours for a psychologist and coordinator who are part of the teaching



staff, as well as the teacher of therapeutic pedagogy (Antich & Tomás, 2011).

## CONCLUSIONS

The last decade has seen significant development in the psychology of music on the international scene and in Spain in particular. This circumstance seems to be ideal for a substantial expansion of the curricula of music education at all its educational levels. Thus, the inclusion of specific content related to cognitive and social-emotional skills may be crucial in optimizing both the learning of musicians and their personal and social well-being. Prioritizing the physical and psychological health of the student over his or her excellence must be a first step towards an education that is not only humanly compatible (Musumeci, 2005) but also sustainable over time. This would allow i) mistakes to be seen as inherent to the learning process itself; ii) frustrations to be dealt with preserving the musical self-concept and self-esteem; iii) a psychological and performance training that provides positive and self-fulfilling experiences in public performances; and iv) emotional development to occupy a primordial place.

It is the scientific advances within the area of music psychology that show us the need to broaden the framework of music education, incorporating not only the learning and mastery of technical-instrumental skills along with other theoretical disciplines, but also the development of psychological aspects that have to do with emotional learning, neuroeducation, motivational processes, self-confidence, or the musical self-concept.

Finally, it is considered essential for the educational administration to reflect on the deep and close relationship that exists between psychology and the psychology of music and music education. The need for content and psycho-pedagogical advice in music education, backed by research, inevitably implies the presence of professionals from the field of psychology, among others. These professionals are the ones who can provide the knowledge and tools to achieve the educational objectives of these teachings. For this reason, the figure of the psychologist/counsellor within music education centers, as well as multidisciplinary care teams, are figures who are at the service of both the well-being of individuals and the educational and academic goals of music education. It is hoped that the first step taken in this direction by the professional conservatories in Madrid, together with the other initiatives throughout the country, will help on the path towards an official implementation by the educational administrations of these specialized teams in the Spanish conservatories.

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## CONFLICTS OF INTEREST

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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