

From the Classroom to the Spotlight. Professional Musical Practice: Continuation or Culmination of the Learning Process?

Ligia Fărcășel^a,

ABSTRACT: Learning is organically part of human life. Whether we like to admit it or not, reality leads us through contexts in which we are compelled to adapt and learn, to constantly acquire knowledge and skills. For an individual who embraces this truth, the learning process becomes efficient and fulfilling, in contrast to a person who refuses to accept learning as a natural course of things and consequently places obstacles in their own developmental path.

The present research aims to observe the learning experience of artists who are students in the Voice Department of the "George Enescu" National University of Arts in Iași and, at the same time, vocal performers in the choir of the Romanian National Opera in Iași. The objectives are to identify how the learning process is perceived in these two contexts and to practically highlight the importance of continuous learning.

KEYWORDS: education; lifelong learning; singing; student; opera;

Introduction

Learning is part of the continuous process of life, in which every individual seeks meaning, whether consciously or not. Is learning an activity that continues within the context of professional practice? If we introduce into the current discussion the concepts referred to in the international specialized literature as LLL (lifelong learning) and LLE (lifelong education), we must also consider CPD, since young people and adults transitioning from education to work move into the specific professional realm of learning – that is from

^a PhD Scientific Researcher "George Enescu" University of Arts, Iași, Romania, ligiafarcasel@yahoo.ro, ORCID 0009-0006-6440-2510;

lifelong learning to continuing professional development. In fact, experts believe that CPD occurs in both personal and institutional contexts, meaning that learning and improvement take place both specifically within the work itself as required by the job and through the individual's personal attitude, which drives them to develop themselves personally as well. (Friedman, 2023)

An environment that is not explicitly dedicated to learning can be considered a non-formal educational setting. This type of learning occurs solely through the participants' own initiative and genuine interest. Non-formal adult education can take place at any time throughout life and may continue indefinitely, as it is always tailored to individual needs (Sobol, 2019). A learning process that takes place throughout an adult's life must include a critical-analytical component, which allows for the development of a framework from which the adult can begin. What defines the concept known as LLL (lifelong learning) is learning that takes place throughout one's entire life, from the first to the last breath. (Laal, 2011). The viability of continuous learning in non-formal and informal contexts is also supported by Harrison (2004). He explains how the learning process begins as early as the prenatal period, all the more so with regard to music, since it is perceived through the sense of hearing, which is available in some form even from that period.

Studies show that group learning not only fosters intergenerational bonds but also creates an environment conducive to developing a sense of independence in creative expression (Brook et al., 2026, p. 96). Students who join a specific experiential learning group (such as an opera choir) embrace certain changes associated with their status within that community and, at the same time, have the opportunity to engage in a process of self-reflection that facilitates the discovery of their identity (both musical and non-musical). The ability to self-assess can improve their transition from the learning context to the workplace (Benjamins et al., 2021). Smilde (2021) states that lifelong learning requires a significant degree of flexibility, given that contemporary society is evolving at an increasingly rapid pace, driven primarily by technology. This requirement is challenging; however, for musicians in particular, it is essential to approach it by first embracing change.

Given that in a collective – such as an opera choir – generations succeed and overlap one another, the intergenerational transfer of knowledge is a practice that is as popular as it is necessary. Researchers even propose the concept of group mentoring, in which experienced professionals offer newcomers support in settling in and learning (Basque, 2013). This is a phenomenon that occurs – whether mandated by job descriptions or practiced intuitively, out of empathy – in groups with healthy relationships among colleagues.

Beyond the issue of collective work and the transfer of information between generations of colleagues, one aspect worth considering in the practice of opera houses

is stage movement. Vocal performance (in this case, choral) accompanied by movement can reflect the extent to which choristers form a team in the artistic act, but it also constitutes an effective way to assimilate musical ideas (D'Amario et al., 2023). Moreover, research conducted in pre-university education confirms the importance of the ability to engage in informal learning to improve musical performance accompanied by movement (Pušić, Sablić, & Šulentić Begić, 2024).

A Look at the Concept of Learning

From a very young age, the human psyche has a need for meaning and significance. An individual engages in certain activities to obtain benefits, whether short-term (children) or short-, medium-, and long-term (in the case of adults). We are encouraged in every context to pursue results; this is part of human nature and is the driving force that propels us to accomplish tasks of varying complexity depending on age and the general context. For example, a child is willing to invest energy for a concrete reward or an immediate satisfying result, while an adult focuses on accomplishing complex tasks, often carried out over longer periods, that will bring a satisfying result in the long term. At the heart of every advancement, in any field, has been this desire to achieve results.

Learning is also part of this ongoing process of life, in which we seek meaning. Perhaps even more so than theoretical education, vocational education is deeply shaped by the need for meaning. An artist cannot create or perform unless they have the feeling. Indeed, an artistic performance executed perfectly but lacking in emotion ends up being perceived by the audience as lacking in value. This concept of "emotion" is an abstract one, difficult to define in quantifiable technical-scientific terms, one reason being the artist's subjectivity, the other being the audience's subjectivity. This is how we ultimately come to accept that art offers something that technical and theoretical fields cannot, which is why it is so valuable.

Within the broad field of education and vocational professions, current research focuses on the field of music, such a vast one, with multiple and complex implications throughout the world and across all eras. Reflecting on the phenomenon of music, British musicologist Michael Spitzer (2022) observes that "music, seemingly devoid of meaning – its semantic openness – is like a magical laboratory that allows us to make connections (...). Music has inspired religion (...). Music has been at the helm of history and civilization." (Spitzer, 2022, p. 392). In this context, the present study aims to identify and analyze how a music student – specializing in Vocal Performance – perceives the experience of opera vocal ensemble, the ways in which the two contexts of learning and work influence and affect each other, as well as to demonstrate and highlight the importance of lifelong learning and the opportunity to apply it in various life situations. The research aims to observe the subjects' learning experience in the academic context by comparison with the theatrical one, as well as to investigate the advantages resulting from the combination

of the two types of activity.

Regardless of the context and stage of life, an individual not only has a perpetual opportunity to learn, but, more importantly, is often compelled to remain in the learning process in order to sustain their existence and ensure their progress, because “learning leads to evolution (of various types and degrees), and a person who has undergone a process of evolution will be eager to learn more” (Fărcășel, 2024, p. 42). Experts also support the idea of this (almost) absolute presence of learning, understanding that it is not always a choice. In this regard, psychologist Andrei Cosmovici believes that “everything that is not innate is learned” (Cosmovici, 2005, p. 75).

Building on the idea stated above, we conclude that learning can be viewed through two paradigms: formal learning (in dedicated educational institutions) and informal learning (in any context that offers the opportunity to acquire both information and experience). This study addresses both, as it focuses on university students (formal education) who are also singers in the opera choir (informal education). The ability to gather information from various experiences and develop skills is truly valuable throughout all stages of life. Interest in experiential learning is growing and has come to be practiced with great enthusiasm even within formal educational institutions. The most natural explanation lies precisely in the understanding of the human need to move beyond the theoretical realm (which should by no means be underestimated) and toward the practical, functional realm.

It is well known that a teaching style can be truly effective only for certain types of learners, not for all. Depending on their personality and cognitive traits, students tend to prefer certain approaches, with an emphasis on visual, auditory, or kinesthetic learning. While education in general requires close attention to how information is received, this is even more critical in vocational education. In arts education, the student’s skills are of paramount importance. In the major arts – music, theater, visual arts, and choreography – having talent is the first requirement. Certainly, from this point onward, progress comes through sustained effort, but the three components – visual, auditory, and kinesthetic – are essential right from the start. In this context, learning can only take place to a certain extent in a conventional manner, specifically regarding theoretical disciplines. In professional artistic training, specific skills play a fundamental role.

Learning is an activity that should accompany an individual throughout their entire life. It brings fulfillment and meaning to one’s work. However, both learning and work are inseparable from discipline. The most effective results will be achieved by those who develop discipline and adhere to it, and this is made up of small habits. Consistency is, in the opinion of experts, more important than increasing the amount of work: “Too often we fixate on the belief that great successes require dramatic efforts. (...) The difference that small progress creates over time, however, is surprising. Here’s how it works mathematically: if you can increase your performance by 1% per day for 12 months, you

will be 3.7 times better at the end of that period.” (Clear, 2019, p. 23). The same principle applies to the study and interpretation of music. Indeed, vocational education is based on specific aptitudes – in music it means musical ear – but the path from these natural gifts to performance is paved with hard work and discipline. In the process of professional development, learning is indispensable. Regardless of age, the process must not stop. Continuous learning makes the difference between a life with meaning and direction and a life with a flat horizon.

Research methodology

Research in the arts differs from scientific research, as in the arts, results cannot be fully evaluated in quantifiable terms or structured in a systematic way. For this reason, the current study employs a qualitative method, applied with the flexibility required by artistic research.

The research participants comprise a group of nine students from the “George Enescu” National University of Arts in Iași, Department of Vocal Performance, who are also opera singers in the Romanian National Opera Choir in Iași. Of these, seven are enrolled in the Master’s program, and two in the Bachelor’s program. Additionally, six of the participants are women and three are men, ranging in age from 22 to 43. All respondents completed music studies prior to their Bachelor’s program in the Vocal Performance specialization and have experience in the opera choir ranging from 3 months to 15 years.

Table 1
Educational Background and Experience

Respondent	Current stage of studies	Musical studies before university (singing)	Previous experience in Opera Choir	Stage experience before opera choir
Respondent 1	Master’s	Classical singing	3 years	Recitals, invitations to various performances
Respondent 2	Bachelor’s	Classical singing	1 year and 5 months	Children’s opera choir
Respondent 3	Master’s	Piano	3 months	Occasional collaborator in opera choir
Respondent 4	Master’s	Piano, double bass, accordion	1 year	Music festivals
Respondent 5	Master’s	Classical singing	4 years	None
Respondent 6	Bachelor’s	Music pedagogy	14 years	Various choral and orchestral ensembles

Respondent 7	Master's	Music pedagogy	14 years	Philharmonic Choir "Moldova" Iași
Respondent 8	Master's	Byzantine music, religious music	12 years	Collaborator at "Nae Leonard" Theatre in Galați
Respondent 9	Master's	Violin, classical singing	15 years	Collaborator at Opera in Brașov

The primary research tool used is the semi-structured interview, administered to participants. The questions posed to participants focus on the learning component but also address other issues related to the activity, as follows: educational background – achievements and aspirations; experience in the Opera choir; stage and artistic experience; the learning process viewed in different contexts; professional development and career prospects. The subjects provided written consent for the processing of the data and opinions offered in the interview, while also being informed of the possibility to withdraw from the research if they wished; however, all respondents chose to participate.

The purpose of this article is to explore the extent to which continuous learning takes place in the workplace throughout the professional careers of opera singers. The focus is on exploring the factors that directly or indirectly influence perceptions of the learning process and the process itself, in order to provide an informed, insider perspective and, consequently, to raise awareness of the importance of continuous learning. The research questions are as follows: How do students in the Vocal Performance program view the learning process as it transitions from the classroom to the opera stage? Is professional practice an opportunity to continue the educational process, or merely a context for applying the skills and abilities acquired?

Results

Nine vocal students, who are also opera singers in the choir of the Romanian National Opera in Iași, were interviewed. The analysis revealed five main ideas, as follows:

1. Joining the opera choir does not mark the end of the learning process, but rather its intensification. It can be perceived both as the culmination of learning and as a new stage in a continuous process.
2. Some academic disciplines are essential to professional training, while others are considered less useful.
3. Participation in the opera choir is an advantage for academic performance.
4. The memorization skills acquired through academic work prove useful in the opera choir, particularly in memorizing musical scores and lyrics.
5. Participation in the opera choir is a valuable factor for personal development.

1. Joining the opera choir does not mark the end of the learning process, but rather its intensification. It can be perceived both as the culmination of learning and as a new stage in a continuous process.

Most respondents believe that the learning process continues or intensifies once they begin performing in the opera chorus:

"The learning process did not end when I joined the chorus; on the contrary, it intensified and took on a much deeper dimension. On stage, every rehearsal and every performance becomes a living lesson: you have to integrate vocal technique, expressiveness, and stage presence, adapt to your colleagues, the conductor, and the dynamics of the moment – all in real time." (Respondent 9)

"It continues and has intensified. You spend your whole life learning about yourself and (...) you have to prepare for the future" (Respondent)

One of the respondents, however, has a deeper and more demanding perspective, considering that the university stage was merely a prelude to the learning process:

"The learning process is just beginning. Only now am I beginning to grasp what proper vocal training entails."

2. Some academic disciplines are essential to professional training, while others are considered less useful.

More than half of the respondents (7) consider the vocal technique they learned in singing classes to be one of their most useful tools. Nearly half (4) find the opera class useful, and one respondent (Respondent 2) believes it should be introduced as early as the first year of study. More than half (6) of the participants stated that the music theory knowledge they acquired in class is useful in their work at the opera. When asked to suggest possible changes to the university curriculum, nearly all respondents (7) stated that they would request more class hours and a greater focus on practical disciplines:

"(...) 'Opera Class' in the first year of study, because it is very important for the future (just excerpts from operas, not entire operas, but it would be a very good start to handle the volume of study required by an opera). Second, I would make 'Choral Ensemble' a required course, not an optional one. I would add more hours of voice and Italian language" (Respondent 2)

"I would add more hours of stage movement and opera class, conducted more effectively" (Respondent 5)

"I think it would be useful for the training to include more practical exercises in conditions close to real-life situations: rehearsals with larger ensembles, performing complex roles, integration with the director, and close collaboration with conductors" (Respondent 9)

In addition to his peers, one of the respondents believes that the academic curriculum can be utilized as is in individual study and adapted to specific needs:

"Far be it from me to think of changing anything (...). I absorbed the teaching I received from my teachers, and in the study hall, on an individual level, I applied it to the gaps in my knowledge at that time." (Respondent 8)

3. Participation in the opera choir is an advantage for academic performance.

Almost all participants (8) stated that their experience in the opera choir had improved their approach to individual study:

"Yes. Once I joined the choir, I started studying more, but also learning faster. (...) When I get a new score, I immediately start studying it so that I can learn it very well and correctly by the time of the performance" (Respondent 2)

"Individual study has become much more conscious and structured – I pay more attention to breathing, intonation, harmony, and vocal balance, so that I am prepared to contribute effectively to the ensemble. (...) Essentially, the stage has become the most demanding teacher: individual study is no longer just a solitary exercise, but active and strategic preparation for every moment I experience on stage, a way to transform knowledge and technique into real and authentic artistic presence." (Respondent 9)

4. The memorization skills acquired through academic work prove useful in the opera choir, particularly in memorizing musical scores and lyrics.

More than half (6) of the students interviewed stated that the transition from a limited repertoire (at the university) to a broad one (at the opera) was a challenge. However, the skills acquired in class proved useful in the opera choir as well:

"At the opera, there were many scores to learn in a relatively short time, but my experience and solid knowledge of the notes helped me learn them quickly." (Respondent 6)

Memorizing the lyrics (approximately 500 words per opera, in Italian, French, or whatever language the libretto is written in) is also made easier by the learning experience gained in university courses. At the same time, some participants highlighted the importance of thoroughly learning the foreign languages most commonly used in opera texts.

"At first it was difficult for me, especially French, but I listened and sang at the same time, and by doing this very often, I managed to keep up with my fellow students." (Respondent 1)

5. Participation in the opera choir is a valuable factor for personal development.

All respondents, without exception, stated that participating in the opera choir helps develop personal skills and qualities, including calmness and empathy, self-confidence and the ability to work in a team, a willingness to take on challenges and push oneself, attentiveness, patience, discipline, and self-control.

Table 2
Perceptions on Learning and Opera Choir Activity

Respondent	Learning process after joining opera choir	Meaning of joining opera choir	Essential academic disciplines	Choir activity helps academic performance	Memorization skills useful	Personal development benefits
Respondent 1	No, it never ends. A stage in a continuous process.	A stage in a continuous process	Vocal technique, opera class	Yes – vocal control	Yes	Gaining calmness and empathy
Respondent 2	Continuous learning and development	—	Music theory, acting, singing, vocal technique	Yes – intensified study; improved memorization of scores	Yes	Self-confidence, teamwork skills
Respondent 3	Continued and intensified. Fulfillment and stage in continuous process	Fulfillment and stage in a continuous process	Music theory, acting, singing, opera class, choir	Yes – improved memorization and sight-reading	No	Self-confidence
Respondent 4	The learning process is just beginning	A process where skills and knowledge are applied	Singing, theory, opera class	Yes	Yes	Self-confidence
Respondent 5	Continues and intensifies	Fulfillment, but also opportunity to evolve	Vocal technique	Yes – increased attention to vocal technique	Yes	Sociability, expressiveness, calmness
Respondent 6	It has not ended	Fulfillment, but also an opportunity to progress	Vocal technique	No	Yes	Empathy

Respon- dent 7	A stage in a continuous process	Practical courses, music theory	Very little	No	Openness to challeng es, desire to evolve, self- improve ment	
Respon- dent 8	Learning continues. Fulfillment but also continuation of learning	Fulfillment and continuation of learning	Vocal technique	Yes	No	Constant attentive- ness
Respon- dent 9	Learning intensified and became much deeper	Fulfillment and stage in a continuous process	Vocal technique, score analysis	Yes – structuring individual study	Yes	Patience, discipline, self-control

Discussion

When asked what motivated them to choose vocal studies, most of the subjects cited passion, a desire to improve their vocal skills, or an admiration for opera performances. The choice to study singing arose from a natural connection to music, which led some to believe that the voice is one of the most original forms of expression. Singing studies were not always a *sine qua non* requirement in Romania for joining professional vocal ensembles; the main requirements were related to vocal abilities, assessed through auditions. However, with the amendment of the salary law (Law 153/2017, published in Monitorul Oficial 492/June 28, 2017), opera singers were compelled to pursue specialized studies in order to continue their work under optimal salary conditions (Monitorul Oficial, 2017, p. 47). Thus, for some of the respondents, this was the specific motivation for beginning vocal studies, as talent and passion for music were already present.

Being a lyric artist in an opera chorus involves, beyond singing, a theatrical component, along with everything that makes up the stage experience: direction, set design, and costumes. As musician Barry Green (2015) observes, "Like actors and actresses, musicians are performing artists. Their job isn't to express their own personalities, but to let the 'character' of the music speak through them. They have a responsibility to express the qualities of the music rather than to exhibit their own personality" (Green, 2015, p. 95). Thus, an opera singer is compelled to master, in addition to vocal aspects, theatrical skills as well. In certain directorial visions, performers are required to execute intense movements, which must be performed with authenticity but also with caution to avoid injuries on stage. Attention must be one of the main partners on stage, as it is required in multiple directions. The challenge of stepping outside one's musical comfort zone is intensified by the constant need to maintain the quality of the

musical performance. Some of the research participants stated that there are moments when they are tempted to get carried away by the flow of the performance and lose sight of the technical control of their vocal delivery. At the same time, the experience of performing in the opera chorus proves to be rewarding, not only for the audience but also for the performers, as these performances offer them genuine opportunities to appreciate from within the diverse and precious gifts of the vast musical culture. In fact, an opera performance is the result of sustained effort and collaboration among the various departments involved, which makes the performance experience extraordinary, hard to match, important for the development of a young performer, and fulfilling in the long term.

The excitement of the stage is intense and remains palpable even after a large number of performances, and being onstage continues to be captivating. Younger respondents, however, expressed a desire to be introduced earlier and more intensively to acting practice – so essential on the opera stage – as part of their university curriculum. They prioritized this aspect in practice and, with extra effort compared to their more experienced colleagues in opera, managed to adapt successfully. Acting in opera performances is not merely a structural element but a catalyst for creative artistic expression, encouraging the psychological exploration of characters and bringing them to life on stage.

Building on the direction outlined above, the current research has shed light on the relationship between the vocal score and movement. In this regard, participants were asked whether stage movement is an ally of the vocal score or an additional challenge. Opinions were divided, thus highlighting the importance of diversity and adaptability within a group. Some artists admitted that they are forced to focus more on movement during vocal performance, which already requires a certain discipline, thereby giving the experience a holistic character. Other respondents, on the contrary, believe that movement serves the music, helping with relaxation and ease, as long as it is not too complex.

The Classical Singing university program naturally places an emphasis on solo performance. However, in professional development, being part of a vocal ensemble plays a significant role. In class and during solo recitals, student artists come to understand their vocal capabilities so they can make the most of them. In contrast, as part of a choir, individuality is no longer an advantage but must be adapted to the demands of the score. The two approaches are different and must be treated with due attention. We investigated how the transition from the role of soloist (at the university) to that of ensemble opera singer (at the opera) is perceived. Here, as before, the diversity of artistic visions is reconfirmed. In describing the transition from the individual to the collective, respondents used words and expressions such as: challenging, formative, coordination, sound balance, stage harmony, adaptability, empathy, homogenization,

vocal color, and teamwork.

Regarding the transfer of knowledge and skills from the classroom to the stage, the young people surveyed stated that their university studies proved particularly effective in the context of courses in vocal training, music theory, acting, and opera. The students' pragmatic mindset is reflected in their desire and willingness to focus on subjects with practical applications for their future careers. They noted that they had the opportunity to master certain concepts strictly within an academic context, which later proved useful in the opera, where they put them into practice and refined them on stage – a setting where there is no room for glaring mistakes, as opera audiences are more demanding than those of university productions. In the same vein, a significant number of respondents expressed a desire for additional support in learning the languages in which most operas are written. Furthermore, artists-to-become believe that closer collaboration between arts education institutions and cultural institutions would be beneficial.

Another benefit that students who are singers in the opera choir have noted in their professional practice is the improvement in their individual study. While in academic settings the repertoire is tailored to each student, in the opera the situation is reversed: the artists must adapt to the program proposed by the institution, ultimately serving its cultural and artistic mission. In this regard, students are forced to intensify their individual study program in order to meet the required demands: complex and diverse opera scores, averaging three different titles per month. The accelerated pace of learning has helped them quickly gain greater dexterity in memorizing music and sight-reading scores. By comparison, while in academic study the student follows the instructions received from the professor, in opera they rely on those from the conductor or choir master, stored during group rehearsals, in order to put them into practice during individual study. Talent proves useful only when combined with discipline. Passion and the desire to sing are, thus, the driving force behind the desire to improve.

Every achievement requires sacrifice, hard work, and perseverance. Those who supported this study view these aspects through the lens of a passion for music and a desire for personal and artistic fulfillment. Although they acknowledge that the effort they devote to this endeavor is considerable, most of them put it aside, prioritizing the rewards that come with this work.

To address the main focus of the study, participants were asked whether, in their opinion, the learning process ended once they entered the choir. Although the answer is easy to guess, the respondents offered various nuances, all equally worthy of consideration. Some believe that the learning process continues upon joining the choir, that it never actually ends, while others believe it has intensified. Another perspective is that the learning process is only just beginning here. In fact, based on the responses received, we concluded that opera choir activities represent a place where learning, work,

and the culmination of that work stand on the same stage. On the other hand, some of the students surveyed believe that being part of the opera choir is a tangible reward for approaching academic work with responsibility. When asked whether it is difficult to balance the rehearsal and performance schedule with academic studies, those involved in the research demonstrated a high degree of openness and flexibility, sharing their perception that the two activities complement each other and expressing their gratitude for the support they receive from both sides.

In music, as in any other field, the more experienced members of a team can (and should) also serve as mentors to newcomers. The same is true for the team comprising the choir of the Romanian National Opera in Iași. More experienced colleagues share with the younger members elements of performance or direction that are not found in the score but must be taken into account.

Learning always involves personal development. The two influence each other, which is why we considered the study participants' perspective on how their work within the opera choir contributes to their personal development to be relevant. The responses provided demonstrated that the entire professional process nurtures or refines qualities such as patience, discipline, rigor, self-control and self-improvement, empathy, self-confidence, openness to challenges, sociability, and the ability to relax. All these personal and professional gains are part of the portfolio that whets young artists' appetite and paves the way for their progress and careers. Some of them aim for a solo career and view their choir experience as a valuable, formative one.

Conclusions

This study aimed to identify and analyze how opera work is perceived by opera singers who are still students in the Vocal Performance program, in order to observe the extent to which continuous learning takes place and how the two work contexts influence one another. Since the perceptions of those involved were one of the main objectives, the research is based on the responses received to the proposed questionnaire. Some of these were easy to anticipate, while others offered a fresh perspective or a personal viewpoint.

The results confirm the initial statement: that learning is a constant throughout the stages of life and that it is the main component of the process of personal and professional development, whether it takes place in formal or informal settings. In formal education, the student learns from the teacher, while in informal education – in the context of the present study – students who are young opera singers in the opera choir learn from designated specialists (conductor, choir master) and from more experienced colleagues.

Another finding of the analysis is that participation in the opera choir is perceived as both the beginning, the continuation, and the culmination of the learning process.

While artists can transfer concepts from the classroom to professional vocal performance (specifically, those related to singing, music theory, acting, and opera), the exchange of value works in reverse as well: the experience gained in the opera choir also benefits individual musical study.

These findings have important implications for long-term professional and personal development, as the skills and qualities acquired are steps toward becoming adults with values – a benefit that, in turn, extends to the community and society.

The findings of this research can be useful for gaining a better understanding of the learning process, both for university professors and for opera artists who interact with the study's participants. In this way, the talents of emerging artists can be effectively harnessed to enhance both academic and performance outcomes. What the current research has not addressed is the perspective on the vocal music job market. On the one hand, the subject underlying this study refers only to the perception of voice students regarding the learning experience they have during their university studies and within the opera choir. On the other hand, an examination of the music labor market in Romania could facilitate the integration of future artists and constitutes a topic worthy of consideration for future research.

Appendix 1

Research Interview Questions: From the Classroom to the Spotlight

1. Educational Background – Achievements and Aspirations

- What level of study (bachelor's, master's) are you currently in, and what year are you in?
- Did you pursue any other musical studies before studying classical singing? If so, which ones and when?
- What led you to choose to study singing?
- To what extent have your university studies to date been applied to your work at the opera? Please elaborate.
- Which skills acquired in class are most useful to you in the chorus?
- What would you change in the way the university prepares students for the realities of opera?

2. Experience in the Opera Chorus

- How long have you been a member of the Romanian National Opera Choir?
- How did you perceive the transition from being a soloist (at university) to an ensemble singer (at the opera)? What were the main differences, and how did you experience them?
- What sacrifices (time, energy, individual study, others) does working in the choir entail?

- How did you perceive the transition from a relatively limited repertoire in your academic work to a much larger and more diverse one at the opera? Please elaborate in a few sentences.

3. Stage and Artistic Experience

- Did you have any stage experience before joining the opera choir, aside from your academic experience? If so, in what context?
- How do you perceive the stage experience? Does it evoke feelings such as fulfillment, joy, excitement, stress, pressure, or anxiety? Or what other feelings does it evoke? Please elaborate.
- Given that in opera the lyrics are sung from memory, how did you adapt to this? Was it difficult for you to memorize such a large amount of material?
- How do you view the acting component of opera? Think about a few of the performances you've taken part in and describe how you felt, what challenges you faced, what you liked, and what you didn't.
- Do you think vocal music is easier to perform with or without stage movement?
- Is participating in opera productions an interesting and important experience? Why? How do you feel it shapes you as a musician?

4. The learning process viewed in different contexts

- Has your experience in the opera chorus changed the way you approach your individual studies?
- Do you consider that the learning process ended when you joined the chorus, continues, or has intensified? Please elaborate.
- Are your more experienced colleagues in the chorus a learning resource for you? In what way?
- Is it difficult for you to balance your academic studies with rehearsals and performances? In what way? Please elaborate.
- Do you think your involvement in opera affects your academic performance? Please elaborate.

5. Professional Development and Career Prospects

- Do you intend to pursue a vocal career (solo or in an ensemble), or are you open to other opportunities?
- In the future, do you wish to remain part of a vocal ensemble (such as an opera chorus) or are you aiming for a solo career?
- Do you consider your work in opera to be the "culmination" of your training, or rather a stage in an ongoing process? Please elaborate.
- How does your work in opera contribute to your personal development? And to your artistic development?

References

- Basque, J. (2013). Supporting continuous professional learning in the academic staff through expertise sharing. *Universities and Knowledge Society Journal (RUSC)*, 10(1), 294–311. <https://doi.org/10.7238/rusc.v10i1.1572>
- Benjamins, L., Roland, S. L., & Bylica, K. (2021). The complexities of meaningful experiential learning: Exploring reflective practice in music performance studies. *International Journal of Music Education*, 40(2), 163–176. <https://doi.org/10.1177/02557614211043224>
- Brook, J., Renihan, C., Varela, W., Bruce, C., & Prystay, K. (2026). Creative aging and lifelong learning through singing+: A scoping review. *Research Studies in Music Education*, 48(1), 87–107. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1321103X251394998>
- Cosmovici, A. (1996). *Psihologie generală*. Polirom.
- Clear, J. (2019). *Atomic habits: Schimbări mici, rezultate remarcabile*. Lifestyle Publishing.
- D’Amario, S., Ternström, S., Goebel, W., & Bishop, L. (2023). The movement of choir singers: An analysis of body motion in choral performance. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 14, Article 1220904. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2023.1220904>
- Fărcășel, L. (2024). Concursuri de canto din România – oportunități de dezvoltare a carierei pentru elevi și studenți. În *Învățământul artistic – dimensiuni culturale 2024* (pp. 41–47). <https://doi.org/10.55383/iadc2024.05>
- Friedman, A. L. (2023). Continuing professional development as lifelong learning and education. *International Journal of Lifelong Education*, 42(6), 588–602. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02601370.2023.2267770>
- Gallwey, W. T., & Green, B. (2015). *The inner game of music*. Pan Books.
- Harrison, S. D. (2004). Lifelong learning in music education: A brief examination. În *Doing, thinking, activity, learning* (conference paper). Griffith University. <http://hdl.handle.net/10072/2416>
- Laal, M. (2011). Lifelong learning: What does it mean? *Procedia – Social and Behavioral Sciences*, 28, 470–474. [https://doi.org/10.1016/S1877-0428\(11\)00252-98](https://doi.org/10.1016/S1877-0428(11)00252-98)
- Monitorul Oficial al României. (2017, iunie 28). Anul 185 (XXIX), nr. 492.
- Pušić, I., Sablić, M., & Šulentić Begić, J. (2024). The differences in music culture teachers’ opinions about informal lifelong learning. În *2nd International Positive Schools & Well-Being Congress: Lifelong Learning and Well-Being in a Digitalized World* (pp. 107–127).
- Sălăvăstru, D. (2009). *Psihologia învățării: Teorii și aplicații educaționale*. Polirom.
- Smilde, R. (2021). *Journeys of lifelong learning in music: Perspectives on musicians’ identity and professional performance – A reflective handbook*. Eburon.
- Sobol, N. (2019). Lifelong learning: music adult education. *Continuing professional education: theory and practice* (series: pedagogical sciences), 1(58), 17–22.
- Spitzer, M. (2022). *Omul muzical: O istorie a vieții pe Pământ*. Nemira.