Use of Musicological Context by Collegiate Chamber
String Ensemble Coaches and Directors

By

Qianyi Li

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OF:

Rachel Brashier, PhD (advisor)

Anna Crowell, DMA

Andy Moran, DMA
Abstract

Musicological context always matters in a good, expressive performance. While many music education scholars and researchers have mentioned that the importance of understanding musicological context is helpful for ensemble playing, few have described how this can be implemented in pedagogical contexts. In order to find out the ways ensemble directors and coaches of chamber string ensembles incorporate musicological context in their work with players, I created an online survey that was sent out to collegiate level chamber string ensemble directors and coaches. The goal of this study was to investigate the pedagogical value of incorporating musicological context into chamber ensemble coaching processes.

Key words: musicological context, string ensemble, chamber music, coaching
# Table of Contents

Chapter I: Introduction ........................................................................................................... 5

Chapter II: Review of Literature .......................................................................................... 7
- Leadership, Teamwork, and Cooperation ................................................................. 7
- Using Other Senses of the Body ................................................................................. 9
- Musicology and Musicianship .................................................................................. 10

Chapter III: Design and Methodology ............................................................................... 14
- Process ....................................................................................................................... 14
- Participants ............................................................................................................... 14
- Mixed Methods Research ...................................................................................... 15
- Data Collection ....................................................................................................... 16
- Approach to Analysis ............................................................................................ 16

Chapter IV: Findings ............................................................................................................. 18

Chapter V: Discussion and Implications ............................................................................ 31
- Approaches to Chamber Literature ........................................................................ 31
- Technique and Teamwork ...................................................................................... 33
- Music of Living Composers ................................................................................... 35
- Implications .............................................................................................................. 37

Resources ......................................................................................................................... 40

Appendix A: Letter of Informed Consent .......................................................................... 42

Appendix B: Survey Questionnaire .................................................................................... 44
Chapter I: Introduction

Introduction

As a string player and future string educator, I know that learning to play in a chamber ensemble setting is an important part of string study. However, in both feeling and technique, playing in a chamber ensemble is different than playing in a solo setting. Unlike solo playing, cooperation with different parts of the ensemble needs to be considered more. Balance and intonation need to be paid more attention to, as a whole, while playing in the string ensemble setting. The degree to which students are involved in the chamber music playing depends upon their attitude and the way that chamber ensemble coaches or directors interact with the group members, especially when the students first join the group. While many string players may struggle at first with the techniques needed during their chamber music playing, one thing that both students and coaches need to remember to be successful is that technique should always serve musical expression. One reason that makes music a unique form of art is its breadth of musical expression. Research has shown that musicological context is key to the success of technique and developing musical expression in the chamber ensemble. Therefore, in this study I considered how string ensemble coaches and directors go about introducing musicological context to their ensembles, and the impact this has on performance.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this thesis is to provide a descriptive explanation about how string ensemble coaches and directors go about introducing musicological context to their ensembles, and the impact this has on performance of the group. Thus, the specific research question of this
Running Head: Use of Musicological Context: Collegiate Chamber String Ensemble Coaches

thesis seeks to answer is: how and in what way do directors and coaches of chamber string ensembles incorporate musicological context in their work with players?

**Importance of the Study**

The information in this thesis will be of value to chamber ensemble coaches and directors, students, and living composers, as well as future researchers. While many music education scholars and researchers have mentioned that the importance of understanding musicological context is helpful for ensemble playing, few have described in detail how this can be implemented in pedagogical contexts or provided any guidance for living composers who desire to write for the chamber ensemble.

**Definition of Terms**

There are some musical terms used throughout this thesis that it may be helpful to clarify for some readers. First, the term *musicology*, in this thesis, refers to what Deaville and Wiley (2013) describe as “a field of knowledge having as its object the investigation of the art of music as a physical, psychological, aesthetic, and cultural phenomenon” (p.1). And, the term *musicianship*, throughout the thesis, is used to refer to knowledge, skills, and sensitivity of aesthetics in performing music. Also, in this thesis, the definition of *chamber music* refers to what Bashford (2001) describes as “music written for small instrumental ensemble, with one player to a part…intended for performance either in private, in a domestic environment with or without listeners, or in public in a small concert hall before an audience of limited size” (p.1).

To summarize, in this first chapter of my thesis, I gave information on the purpose of this study, my research question, the importance of the study, and a definition of key terms. In chapter two I will provide a review of literature related to this study.
Chapter II: Literature Related to String Coaching and Directing

In the previous chapter, Chapter One, I introduced this study about use of musicological context by collegiate chamber string ensemble coaches and directors. This research study is designed to determine how and in what ways ensemble directors and coaches of chamber string ensembles incorporate musicological context in their work with players. In this chapter, I will review the literature related to the study of coaching string ensembles. The existing literature on coaching string ensembles in this chapter is approached by the authors from different contexts, and students in the various studies are of different age levels. But all the authors agree that string ensemble playing is an important part of string study, and that it helps students play better in the string ensemble setting. However, coaches or directors have many different areas of focus that are represented in these writings. Therefore, I have organized my review of the literature into the following three sections: 1) leadership, teamwork, and cooperation, 2) using other senses of the body, and 3) musicology and musicianship.

Leadership, Teamwork, and Cooperation

Scholars mention that leadership, teamwork, and cooperation play an important role in coaching the string ensemble. Leadership is demonstrated through soloistic attitudes that guide string ensemble playing. Teamwork and cooperation are demonstrated by valuing positive environment and good communication.

String ensemble playing is an important part of string study, and beneficial for string students, as Sariti (2007) mentions in his article “It is important for us to develop our skills as soloists, which also benefits our ensemble playing” (p.16). However, musicians must be more
String musicians must find a way to adapt to the needs of different ensembles and situations. In this case, students need to be aware that teamwork and cooperation are important in ensemble playing. As Sariti (2007) also says in his article “[students] become aware that their instruments can be used to achieve a cooperative musical result for which each member of the group is vitally responsible” (p. 16). It is vital for students to develop their cooperation skills by playing in ensembles.

On a similar note, there are cases that have been discussed in the research where in many situations, students need coaches or directors of string ensembles to help them develop their cooperation skills and to guide them concerning how to work as the group. Cotter-Lockard (n.d.) mentions in his article that when students faced key challenges, such as the problem of ‘what to do’ to improve, they at this point need for music teachers to help them, as students, to develop particular skills to enable them to be successful as a chamber music group. Also, Droste (2013) mentions in his article, “Students need instruction on how to effectively lead their peers, work with each other toward a common goal and solve problems, particularly in a chamber music or small ensemble setting” (p. 36). This research shows that coaches or directors play an important role in helping students to develop collaboration skills in the chamber music setting.

Not only are teamwork and cooperation important in string ensemble playing, but a democratic leadership style aids in developing a positive group rehearsal environment in the string quartet setting. White and Lippett in Cotter-Lockared (n.d.) suggest that in the string quartet, “a democratic leadership style is most likely to generate a stronger commitment to excellence from quartet members and create a positive group rehearsal environment” (p. 34). A democratic leadership style helps to develop a good group communication-based rehearsal
Running Head: Use of Musicological Context: Collegiate Chamber String Ensemble Coaches

environment in the string quartet setting, and a positive group rehearsal environment will help the string ensemble communicate more when playing.

As I discussed in this section, teamwork, cooperation, and leadership are important in the string ensemble, and this is an important topic in terms of string ensemble coaching. There are also some scholars who point out that using other senses of the body will improve the musical expression of ensemble players. This will be discussed in the next section.

Using Other Senses of the Body

As a musician we often think that a strong auditory sense is crucial to musical playing or performance. However, some researchers point out that encouraging students to use the other senses of the body during ensemble playing would help them improve the musical expression of their ensembles and help to build deep connections within the chamber music group.

Hopkins (2016) suggests in his article that the coach or director of the string ensemble should get each student to perform with their whole body. He mentions in his article that, in fact, many musicians who play from the mid-chest up do not realize that the sound they produce is influenced by the position of their feet and legs, the pressure in their lower back, and their breath. And he argues that free and relaxed movements is helpful and important for musical expression in performance. Highly expressive musicians use more musical movement, and a lack of movement can prevent communication in an ensemble. This highlights that encouraging students play with their whole body would improve the musical expression of their ensembles.

Leshnower in Hopkins (2016) points out that “expressive orchestras display high levels of visual communication between members of the ensemble. In string education, visual cues such as eye contact, upper body movement, or head nods are encouraged among members of
Running Head: Use of Musicological Context: Collegiate Chamber String Ensemble Coaches
chamber groups” (p. 21). Hopkins (2016) encourages students to use gestures and other little
movements to create a connection that would help the musical expression of their ensembles.

In addition, Leventhal (2015) indicates that dance movements help build deep
connections in the chamber music group and also influences playing. In her article, Leventhal
brings up how studies in psychology have shown that engagement of people’s unconscious
mimicry plays an important role in building strong social bonds. The author found that one of the
most direct paths to build deep connections that are required in chamber music is through dance
and movement. She also points out that the closeness of the relationship particularly found
between the famous dance called the tango and chamber music is very strong and describes how
elements of the dance’s physical requirements can be directly applied to ensemble playing. The
author shows how dance movements can have a strong influence on chamber music playing.

Encouraging more body movement and visual communication would help improve the
musical expression between string ensembles players, and it is also helpful in building the deep
connections necessary in the chamber music group. Many researchers mention that having a
knowledge of the musicological context also can play an important role in string ensemble
coaching, as will be discussed in the next section.

Musicology and Musicianship

With experience, players in the string ensemble notice that in order to play pieces
expressively one must have knowledge of the musicological context of the piece. The following
articles related to chamber string ensemble coaching show how knowledge of musicology and
musicianship are vital for the chamber ensemble coach.
Loft (1999) mentions, “the ensemble has to make clear the closings that separate the musical ideas within a composition” (p. 45). He explains that different decisions must be made within the ensemble according to the different forms or musical structures being approached. Then, a knowledge of the composition as a whole must be considered. The other example the author provides is in the string quartet, where the audience tends to focus on the first violin, as opposed to a piano trio or quartet where the musical focus will often be in the piano part, with few exceptions. In this case, the composition would guide the choices the player makes.

Balancing is one of the most important things that string ensemble coaches need to pay attention to during the coaching time, which differs for different compositions. These three specific ideas (i.e., clear closings, knowledge of the composition, and balance) show how a knowledge of musicology is essential for the chamber ensemble coach.

Romer (1998) suggests two ways that are useful for coaching a string ensemble, and encourages discussing the emotional content and historical context of a work as well as discussing music form and musical conversations. This approach illustrates the importance of the effects of the musical structure on how ensembles interpret the music they play. These suggestions show that musicology plays an important role in string ensemble coaching for the purpose of pedagogy.

Intonation is always a major topic of discussion in considering string technique, and it is also very important in string ensemble coaching. Hopkins (2016) suggests in his article that making students consistently play in tune in every rehearsal is one important way to improve the expression of the string ensemble. In addition, Droste (2013) also points out that one way to improve a string player’s intonation in the ensemble setting can be achieved by ensemble coaches providing opportunities for students to sing a simple line within the music while they are
Running Head: Use of Musicological Context: Collegiate Chamber String Ensemble Coaches

in rehearsal, and then playing the same musical line. This process will have great benefits and will result in muscle memory and ear training improvements, as well as better intonation. These authors all indicate the meaningful role of intonation in string ensemble coaching.

Sariti (2007) mentions in his article that awareness and listening are the most important things during the ensemble coaching session. “Awareness of a conductor, awareness of the score as a whole, even awareness of the score’s musicological significance” (p. 17) are key. It is important to invoke musical awareness in our students because it is beneficial for students to attentively listen around the ensemble. Sariti also points out that knowledge of musicology is useful and important in coaching the string ensemble. The author also mentions how a deeper understanding of musicology will help students to develop their musicianship more completely.

Iglitzin (1992) mentions a couple of ideas for helping high school students to become more aware of what they listen for and to better understand the structure of the pieces they are playing. One of these ideas includes having only one or two sections play at a time while having the other sections of the group listen, and to have sections whose music is alike to play together. Another idea is highlight one musical idea and instruct different sections to play only if they have a certain type of musical material. For example, “play only if or when you have the theme”, or “play only if your sections have the eighth-note accompaniment part” (p. 90). This process makes students count all the time. This also help the students understand the structure of the music that they are playing. In this case, the knowledge of musicology plays an important role in guiding the string ensemble’s playing.

Vallo (1999) suggests that the ten most highly ranked qualities that are useful for all music directors in their coaching are enthusiasm, integrity, assertiveness, aural skill, knowledge of music history, theory, psychology, utilization of resources, and expressive gestures. Some of
Running Head: Use of Musicological Context: Collegiate Chamber String Ensemble Coaches

the pedagogical qualities listed here display further how musicology is an important part of the string ensemble coach’s skill set.

In conclusion, this literature review has included scholarship concerning leadership, teamwork, and cooperation, using other senses of the body, and musicology and musicianship. As the research has suggested, the musical and historical knowledge of the musician plays a very important part in effective string ensemble coaching. Therefore, it is important to research how collegiate chamber ensemble coaches and directors incorporate musicological context in their work with players. Thus, the literature included here forms the foundation of my research because it helps to better examine my research question: How and in what way do directors and coaches of chamber string ensembles incorporate musicological context in their work with players?

In this chapter, Chapter Two, I reviewed the literature related to this study focused on string ensemble coaching. Next, in Chapter Three, I will describe the methodology I used to address my research question and the design of this study as well as the procedures used for analysis.
Chapter III: Design and Methodology

In the last chapter, I reviewed the preexisting literature about leadership, teamwork, and cooperation, using other senses of the body, and musicology and musicianship. In Chapter Three, I will now explain how I designed this research project and share my methods of analysis. I have created the following subsections for the ease and understanding of the reader: process, participants, mixed methods research, data collection, and approach to analysis. As I noted in Chapter One, the research question driving this study is “how and in what ways do ensemble directors and coaches of chamber string ensembles incorporate musicological context in their work with players?”

Process

My process for conducting this research began with trying to understand if the way ensemble directors or coaches of chamber string ensembles incorporate musicological context in their work with players and how this impacts their perceptions of the performance level of the ensemble. I knew I wanted to interview directors and coaches of string ensembles using a survey. I reached out via email to appropriate participants whose email addresses I found through their university web page listings. Twelve participants accepted my proposal, and after receiving the Informed Consent form (see Appendix A), filled out the survey for this study. I created an anonymous survey (see Appendix B) and piloted this survey with the help of faculty members at my university. Then, I distributed it using two rounds of e-mails. I analyzed the quantitative data from Likert-scale responses separately from the qualitative data received from open-ended questions.
Participants

The participants for this study were selected because they are collegiate level chamber string ensemble coaches or directors. I began by selecting forty (40) highly regarded string ensemble teachers from a variety of universities. I reached out to these teachers via email. I found their email addresses on university webpages and emailed all faculty who were identified as chamber string ensemble coaches or directors. Each person received an Informed Consent form (see Appendix A) with the link to an online survey form that they could fill out via the same e-mail. Ten people responded to the survey the first time it was sent out. One person e-mailed back saying she would not be comfortable participating, so she was removed from the list. Three e-mails turned out to be non-working addresses. And one person responded he no longer was working in the capacity of a string ensemble coach or director. I re-sent the survey with a second request to those same respondents again after 15 days to remind them to fill the survey out if they had not yet done so. Two more people responded to the second inquiry. Therefore, out of thirty-five (35) possible respondents, only twelve (12) responded to the survey. However, the twelve respondents (n=12) in this study all gave rich responses.

Mixed Methods Research

This study used a mixed method approach to conducting research, which “focuses mainly on conducting a research process mixing both quantitative and qualitative research methods in a single study to understand a research problem” specifically employing an embedded design (Nova, 2020). By using an embedded design in this research, I was able to collect qualitative data embed in a quantitative design. My mixed methods research is informed by pragmatism,
Running Head: Use of Musicological Context: Collegiate Chamber String Ensemble Coaches

which means that my research design is based on the practical needs of knowing subjective and
targetive information and trying to be as unbiased as possible, while keeping in mind that a
complete lack of bias is impossible in any research. Conducting research using a mixed methods
approach allowed for me to connect the quantitative and qualitative data that I collected
simultaneously.

Data Collection

The process of purposive sampling was employed for selecting participants for this study.
“Purposive sampling is described as a random selection of sampling units within the segment of
the population with the most information on the characteristic of interest” (Guarte and Barrios,
2005, p. 277). Purposive sampling was used because the research process required me to select
college level chamber string ensemble coaches or directors. First, using this criterion, I searched
university websites that were publicly available for American universities who had string
ensemble programs. Then, I searched carefully to identify who the string ensemble coach or
director might be and copied their email address into an electronic database. Then, I sent two
rounds of emails, as described above, and removed addresses that were non-working, or whose
owners declined to participate, from the database. This resulted in thirty-five (35) possible
participants, from which I gleaned twelve (12) responses.

Approach to Analysis

My data analysis plan included both quantitative analysis and qualitative analysis
approaches. Participant responses to Questions 1, 2, 4, 5, 6, and 7 (as seen in the survey in
Appendix B) were quantitatively analyzed using descriptive statistics. “Descriptive statistics
In my quantitative analysis, I used an online digital tool (Google Forms) to collect all the participant responses in the form of multiple choice or Likert scale responses. I used the software to compile the responses and report percentages and statistics showing how many participants selected each possible response. Then, I modeled those percentages and statistical results in pie charts and bar graphs to better enable my analysis of the data.

Qualitative participant responses were also elicited in the second half of questions 2, 3, 4, 5, and 6 (see Appendix B). These open-ended responses were qualitatively analyzed using content analysis and coding for themes. “Qualitative content analysis shares many features with other qualitative research methods, such as the concern with meaning and interpretation of symbolic material, the importance of context in determining meaning, and the data driven and partly iterative procedure” (Schreier, 2014). For the qualitative analysis part of this project, I first collected every response for each open-ended question. Second, I put each response content into context, compared the content of each response, and analyzed if the response’s content had any similarity or difference to other responses. Third, I grouped the similar responses and those which were different from the others. Fourth, when the questions required both quantitative and qualitative responses, I analyzed each qualitative response while considering the quantitative data chosen by the same respondent in order to help me figure out any connection or relationship between the quantitative and qualitative data. The results of this analysis can be found in the next chapter.

In this chapter, Chapter Three, I described how I designed this research project and approached the collection and analysis of data. I explained each step of my process and shared
Chapter IV: Findings

In the previous three chapters, I introduced this study about the use of musicological context by collegiate chamber string ensemble coaches and directors, provided a review of literature related to the study, and described the methodology and my approach to analysis. Here, in Chapter Four, I will report the findings from the data.

The descriptive statistics that represent the responses to the first survey question are modeled in Table 1, below. The first question asked respondents “Which of the following techniques is most important to you in your work as a string ensemble coach or director?” The response options available to them included: a) explaining historical context, b) talking about the composer’s style, c) score study, d) promoting new music, e) using recordings, and f) having the group attend live concerts of other chamber string ensembles. Surprisingly, all respondents chose either response b: talking about the composer’s style or response c: score study. 5 out of 12 respondents, or 41.7 %, thought that score study was most important in their work as a string ensemble coach or director. Meanwhile 7 out of 12 respondents, or 58.3%, selected talking about the composer’s style as the most important part of their work as a string ensemble coach or director. No other responses were selected by any participant. There were no qualitative responses elicited for this question.
Table 1

Responses to Question 1 on the Survey

1. Which of the following techniques is MOST important to you in your work as a string ensemble coach or director?
   - 12 responses

The descriptive statistics that represent the responses to the second survey question are modeled in Table 2, below. The second question asked respondents “Do you think it is helpful to provide lessons or instruction about chamber literature in order to help your students better understand their pieces?” The response options available to them included: a) Yes or b) No. 12 out of 12 respondents, or 100%, chose yes. Respondents all agree that providing lessons or instruction about chamber literature helps their students better understand their pieces. No other responses were selected by any participant.

Table 2

Responses to Question 2 on the Survey
2. Do you think it is helpful to provide lessons or instruction about chamber literature in order to help your students better understand their pieces?

12 responses

In response to the second part of the second survey question, respondents provided the following qualitative responses:

- *[My university] does not have music performance majors, so providing an overview of literature in regard to styles, harmonies, etc. leaves students with a better overview for their adult lives as amateur musicians.*
- *It allows students to have more in-depth understanding of the piece by looking at the historical contexts of the composition and the composer who wrote it.*
- *By "their pieces" do you mean their solo repertoire? If so, definitely. More understanding of music in general will help their solo playing.*
- *I think compositions being studied should be put in context with other compositions of the same genre. Works studied in isolation carry limited educational value and can simply be "rehearsed for performance".*
- *Understanding cultural and social context of the period the piece of music was written can help give insight about interpretations and approaches for the students.*
- *Information about other repertoire within the context of style and similar characteristics is very helpful.*
- *If you mean that it is important to listen to other works by the composer you are studying- yes, I think this is important because it provides context.*
- *To better understand the innerworkings (ensemble of other parts) of the music.*
Moreover, all 12 respondents implied in their qualitative responses that they believe a better understanding of the musical context is necessary for students to help them better approach their pieces.

The third question asked respondents “Particular pieces require different techniques, in light of their historical context or the composer’s style. How do you approach teaching such techniques in the chamber ensemble setting, when not all student players are at the same technique level?” Below are their qualitative responses:

- Try looking for the simplest way to help. Sometimes it is good practice to separate technique from the written literature for a moment. Say a group is having difficulty on getting the right bow strokes for a fast passage in a Mozart quartet, you can ask the students to work on the bow strokes by playing open strings (instead of the notes written) first, and then add the fingered notes when they are ready. Those who are less experienced will at least get something through the practice (they certainly can play open strings!). I sometimes do sectional rehearsal with student groups (e.g., 1st violin+cello only). Professional quartets sometimes do that. That way you can address some technical issues specifically for each player. Overall, learning about performance practice and stylistic sensitivity often take much more than one coaching or two. If the students have not even learned the notes or rhythm well yet, I will focus on those more before getting into a deeper level. For students of all levels, I encourage them to watch video recordings of professional chamber groups and attend live quartet concerts.
- All players need to understand the concepts of technique you are teaching, regardless of individual technical proficiencies. They will still be learning the concepts to be applied later.
- By explaining, demonstrating, and encouraging student to bring to teacher.
- Executing correct articulations are primary details of interpretations and playing appropriate styles, all playing levels benefit from instruction about bow arm technique.
- I will not be shy about singling players out and work individually with them during the coaching. Especially if someone is struggling with their part, teaching them how to play their instrument helps create a better group sound.
- Have all students make an effort to achieve the goal. Differentiate expectations to improve ability from a basic level of accomplishment to refining artistry for those more accomplished.
- I find that the level of technique doesn’t interfere with a general grasp of style.
- Well generally I try to put together ensembles that are actually at the same general level. Chamber groups don’t work when students are at different levels of ability.
Running Head: Use of Musicological Context: Collegiate Chamber String Ensemble Coaches

- Select some repertoire that is accessible to most players. Concertino/ripieno literature works well. Hold sectionals but also give one-on-one instruction for players being introduced to new techniques.
- I usually create a "watered down" part for the individual based on their current level.
- Demonstration

One respondent did not complete this question. All the respondents who did reply mentioned that they have some ways to help their students reduce their technique level gap. For example, they mentioned sectional practice, listening to recordings, and making effort to achieve a goal. It is very interesting that one respondent thought that different levels of technique does not influence students’ ability to achieve a particular style. One respondent tried to place students of the same ability level with similar students in their chamber group.

The descriptive statistics that represent the responses to the fourth survey question are modeled in Table 3, below. The Fourth question asked respondents “Do you think that as a collegiate string ensemble coach or director who wants their students be successful, you are more concerned with:” The response options available to them included: a) the students’ understanding of the historical context of the music they are learning, b) the teamwork needed to learn to play together expressively as a group. Surprisingly, all respondents chose response b: the teamwork needed to learn to play together expressively as a group would be more concerned as ensemble coach or director to help the student success in string ensemble playing. No other responses were selected by any participant.

Table 3

Responses to Question 4 on the Survey.
In response to the second half of the Fourth survey question, respondents provided the following qualitative responses:

- The experience of playing music effectively is more motivational than knowing why, though that is also important.
- Actually, they are both indispensable from successful chamber-music-making. It is difficult to play "expressively" without fully understanding the music (including the historical context of the music). It depends also on the group's individual musical backgrounds as well. There is limited time during a chamber coaching. So, for less advanced groups, it may be more important for them to learn the fundamentals first on how to play together first. But like I said, they should eventually learn about the literature and the historical context of the piece too.
- A successful coach/director would not choose between those two, but address both at the same time.
- It is not that more important for the group's performance level, but for them to keep working in the longer term. Some groups that sound great together cannot stand working with each other. Invariably, they have to learn to work together to survive.
- Learning to work as a team with a common goal will carry over into all other life endeavors.
- An ensemble is a team; they must learn how to work with each other.
- In a performing chamber group, growing in ensemble is job 1.
- My goal is to instill the love of playing with others and the comradery of working thru musical challenges. Performing as a respite, source of expression and outlet is a valuable component of playing music together. While it can be hard to let go of the "perfectionist" within us, my goal is to have this be a highlight and emotional outlet in their week.
- In a chamber coaching we are focusing on ensemble skills. Music history classes focus on historical context.
It is all about the finished product and how far they have progressed as an ensemble. Accurate ensemble playing is paramount to the group's success.

One respondent did not complete the qualitative response for this question. Five respondents implied in their qualitative responses that the students must learn to work as a group in the string ensemble playing process. One of these respondents implied strongly that his goal is instill a love playing with others in his students. Conversely, four respondents implied that it is hard for an ensemble coach or director to separate an understanding of the historical context of music and learning to teamwork in this process, with one of these respondents went further to express that different courses should have separate focuses. Two other respondents focused on accuracy and the finished product of the music more than on teamwork, which interestingly contrasts with their quantitative responses to this question.

The descriptive statistics that represent the responses to the fifth survey question are modeled in Table 4, below. The fifth question asked respondents “How important do you think it is for ensemble coaches and directors to promote new music or the music of living composers when programming for their string ensembles on a scale of 1 to 10 with ten being crucially important and with one being not something you consider when programming?” The response options available to them included a Likert-scale ranging from degree 1-10. 1 out of 12 respondents, or 8.3%, selected degree 1, meaning it is not very important for ensemble coaches and directors to promote new music or the music of living composers when programming for their string ensembles, 2 out of 12 respondents, or 16.7%, selected degree 4, and 2 out of 12 respondents, or 16.7 %, selected degree 5 that it is somewhat important for ensemble coaches and directors to promote new music or the music of living composers when programming for their string ensembles. 1 out of 12 respondents, or 8.3%, selected degree 7, and, 2 out of 12
respondents, or 16.7 %, selected degree 8, meaning that they think it is important for ensemble coaches and directors to promote new music or the music of living composers when programming for their string ensembles. 3 out of 12 respondents, or 25 %, selected degree 9, while 1 out of 12 respondents, or 8.3%, selected degree 10, meaning they thought it was very important for ensemble coaches and directors to promote new music or the music of living composers when programming for their string ensembles. No other responses were selected by any participant.

Table 4

Responses to Question 5 on the Survey

5. How important do you think it is for ensemble coaches and directors to promote new music or the music of living composers when programming... not something you consider when programming?

![Bar chart showing responses to Question 5](chart.png)

In response to the second half of the Fifth survey question, respondents provided the following qualitative responses:

- **Again, it depends on the level and musical background of the group. It is always important and fun in many cases to learn new music! However, if some students have not even learned the standard chamber repertoire by Haydn, Beethoven or Dvorak, then we should at least learn some of those first before adding contemporary pieces. A lot of these**
contemporary pieces also are technically more challenging. So, for stronger and more experienced groups I like to challenge them but will save that later for less experienced players.

- While paying attention to living composers, choosing excellent, educationally sound repertoire that assists the development of technique, and quality performance material is more important.
- Composers still write music; we must share that music to help build our community of music and musicians.
- Variable - depends on the level of the group.
- all music provides different challenges and important developmental attributes.
- Surprisingly, few students want to play new music. Some do, and thankfully we have those. I think it is important for the future of classical music to have new works performed.
- We live in the present moment, not the past. The musical deities of the past are essential, those creating today are the deities of tomorrow, and the fresh inspiration of the present time.
- it is less important with amateurs who have not even learned the standard rep or composers.
- This depends entirely on the level of the group. Generally, undergraduates need to study the canon before venturing on to new music. They need to develop basic ensemble skills and understanding, and these are best acquired through the canon. Serious new music tends to be very, very hard- too hard for average undergrad.
- Contemporary pieces enhance and expand all aspects of understanding music.
- Music of all genres and periods should be studied and learned - as we would with any other subject!

One respondent did not complete the qualitative response for this question. Six respondents implied in their qualitative responses that to promote new music or the music of living composers when programming for their string ensembles depends on the learning and technique level of the students. The same six respondents agree that contemporary pieces require a higher level of technique and musical understanding to some degree. Four respondents implied in their qualitative responses that to promote new music or the music of living composers when programming for their string ensembles is important. One respondent implied that to promote music of living composers is important for developing the technique of the performers and quality of the performance.
The descriptive statistics that represent the responses to the sixth survey question are modeled in Table 5, below. The sixth question asked respondents “How important do you think it is for the instructor or ensemble coach to have mastery of the pieces the group is playing, or at least to have studied the score deeply and be able to provide some historical context to the ensemble players, on a scale of one to ten, with ten being it is very important for the coach or instructor to have mastery of the pieces and one being that this is least important to the group’s success?” The response options available to them included a Likert-scale ranging from 1 to 10 degrees. 1 out of 12 responded or 8.3%, selected degree 1, meaning it is not very important for ensemble coaches and directors to have mastery of the pieces the group is playing, or at least to have studied the score deeply and be able to provide some historical context to the ensemble players, 1 out of 12 responses or 8.3%, selected degree 5, meaning somewhat important for ensemble coaches and directors to have mastery of the pieces the group is playing, or at least to have studied the score deeply and be able to provide some historical context to the ensemble players. In addition, 2 out of 12 respondents, or 16.7%, selected degree 8, 3 out of 12 respondents, or 25%, selected degree 9, and 5 out of 12 respondents, or 41.7%, selected degree 10, indicated that they thought it was very important for ensemble coaches and directors to have mastery of the pieces the group is playing, or at least to have studied the score deeply and be able to provide some historical context to the ensemble players. No other responses were selected by any participant.
In response to the second half of the sixth survey question, respondents provided the following qualitative responses:

- **Teaching a piece and performing a piece are not the same thing. That being said, however, having performed and "mastered" the piece will certainly equip us as teachers with more inspiring ideas and experiences to share in coaching. It is very helpful for us to demonstrate on our own instrument to show students how a particular passage should sound like as well.**
- **How can you teach something you don’t know? That is being a fraud.**
- **High level study is necessary for growth.**
- **Music is music, of course, the coach should know the score a little bit, but is the process of discovery of the piece is together with the coached group, it can create a sense of excitement and not going with pre-conceived ideas.**
- **You cannot really teach what you do not know.**
- **insights are important and that isn’t possible without knowledge**
- **I’m not sure what you mean by mastery. This is a vague term. Do you mean does the teacher need to have played the work before? Performed other works by the composer? Performed the work before? What do you mean here?**
- **It is the duty as leader.**
- **Context is a very important tool to understand a subject and viewpoint of when it was created.**
Students are quick - they will know if their leader is unprepared.

Two respondents did not complete the qualitative response for this question, and one was unsure of how to answer the question. Five respondents implied in their qualitative responses that a string ensemble coach’s or director’s mastery of the pieces is necessary, and it is their responsibility to have a good understanding of each work and be prepared. One respondent implied mastery, or having performed the piece in the past, would provide people as coaches or directors with inspiring ideas to share with students. Conversely, one respondent conveyed that the process of discovery of the piece happens together with the group being coached, and that this approach is more exciting and important than prior mastery of the piece being worked on. One respondent implied musical context of a piece is a more important tool than mastery the piece is.

The descriptive statistics that represent the responses to the seventh survey question are modeled in Table 6, below. The seventh question asked respondents “Do you find more possible for your group to travel to hear live performances or to use recordings?” The respondents were the given options to answer no or yes. 3 out of 7 respondents, or 42.9%, responded no, indicating that they do not take groups to travel to hear live performances. Meanwhile 4 out of 7 respondents, or 57.1%, selected yes, that take group to travel to hear live performances. Two respondents said that they use recordings. No other responses were selected by any participant.

There were no qualitative responses elicited for this question.

Table 6

Responses to Question 7 on the Survey.
I also asked participants if they had anything further to add and received the following qualitative feedback:

- *In non-music majors instilling a love of music and a joy in playing is my priority*
- *Working with a chamber string ensemble is a wonderful experience. I always encourage to love the music you are playing and continue to share your talents.*
- *I wish there were more opportunities to travel to hear performances - we are in a relatively rural area. Thank goodness for you-tube!*

In this chapter, findings were presented, both terms of descriptive statistics and qualitative analysis. Moreover, this study found that most collegiate chamber string coaches believe that a better understanding of the musical context is necessary for students to help them better approach their pieces. More than half collegiate chamber string coaches feel that the students must learn to work as a group in the string ensemble playing process. More than half of the surveyed collegiate chamber string coaches feel that a string ensemble coach's or director’s mastery of the pieces the group is playing is necessary and it is their responsibility to instruct their students. In the next chapter, Chapter Five, a discussion of the importance and implications of these findings is further developed.
Chapter V: Discussion and Implications

In the previous four chapters, I introduced this study about the use of musicological context by collegiate chamber string ensemble coaches and directors, provided a review of literature related to the study, and described the methodology and my approach to analysis. I also reported the findings from the data. Now, in this chapter, I will present a discussion of my findings as well as implications for chamber ensemble coaches and directors, students, and living composers, as well as future researchers.

Approaches to Chamber Literature

As I mentioned in Chapter 2, existing research shows that discussing the emotional content and historical context of a work is useful in the string ensemble coaching process. To return to my research question concerning how collegiate ensemble directors and coaches of chamber string ensembles incorporate musicological context in their work with players, I found that all the participants in the survey think that providing a lesson or instruction about chamber literature is necessary and helpful to their students to better help them understand the pieces they are playing. Although different chamber coaches have opposing viewpoints on chamber literature, they do approach literature in a similar manner to one another. I will give evidence of this by using some examples from the respondents’ own words.

Some respondents approached chamber literature in a similar way during their coaching processes. One respondent approached chamber literature by giving ‘literature in regard to styles [and] harmonies,’ while another respondent approached chamber literature by ‘discuss [ing the]-same or similar historical contexts of the composition and the composer of the piece,’ while yet
another respondent approached chamber literature by discussing ‘studying the same genre of composition.’ However, they have different reasons for their approaches. One respondent highlighted how their university 'does not have music performance majors,' so to provide the chamber literature context helps their students better their lives. Interestingly, this director seems to think that providing an 'overview of literature' is intended to help their students’ life in general, more than focusing on the benefits to their musical learning. Another respondent expresses how it is crucial to 'allow...students to have more in-depth understanding[s] of the piece.' A third respondent had similar thoughts but was also concerned that providing context in isolation can cause an issue with only ‘rehearsing for performance.’

Other respondents also mentioned some other approaches to coaching chamber literature. One respondent approaches chamber literature coaching by giving a cultural and social background of the piece their students are learning in order to ‘help give insight about interpretations and approaches for the students.’ Another respondent approached chamber literature by having students listen to other works by the composer they are studying. It is interesting to note that no matter how chamber ensemble directors or coaches provide a lesson or instruction about chamber literature, the goal for them seems consistently to be providing a context and background about the style or genre of the piece that their students are learning. They mentioned how providing chamber literature helps their students in different ways. For example, they hold that an in-depth understanding of the piece being played and giving thoughts about the interpretations of the piece they are learning helps their students come to know more about the other parts of music being played by other members of the ensemble.

As I pointed out at the beginning of this section, many directors or coaches in this survey expressed that they think providing a lesson or instruction about chamber literature is necessary.
Running Head: Use of Musicological Context: Collegiate Chamber String Ensemble Coaches and helpful to their students’ better understanding of their pieces. However, when it is comes to the actual process of coaching, respondents varied in their perception of teamwork, and many said that they need to consider more than just explaining the historical context and style to students when they are coaching.

**Technique and Teamwork**

All the respondents agree that historical context is necessary and important for their students to have knowledge of. Similarly, most of them expressed in the survey that technique and teamwork need to be worked on in the coaching process. It is interesting to consider how the coaches’ or directors’ approach historical context, in light of their beliefs that technique and teamwork need to be considered first.

As I mentioned in Chapter 2, existing research shows that the teamwork and leadership are important during chamber ensemble coaching. I found that all participants in the survey expressed that teamwork was needed to learn to play together expressively as a group, and as an ensemble coach or director most were extremely concerned with helping the student experience success in string ensemble playing. Five respondents expressed that students must learn to work as a group during the string ensemble playing process. This was evident in examples drawn from the respondents’ own words. One respondent pointed out that ‘learning to work as a team with a common goal will carry over into all other life endeavors.’ It is interesting that the respondent expressed a viewpoint that developing teamwork abilities are necessary and will be beneficial in other parts of life. One respondent highlighted that their goal for their students is to ‘instill the love of playing with others and the comradery of working thru musical challenges….to have to have this be a highlight and emotional outlet in their week.’ In this case, the respondent is expressing their view that music is an outlet of emotion.
Four respondents implied that an ensemble coach or director should not separate an understanding of the historical context of the music being played from the process of learning to work as a team. It is also interesting to point out here that historical context is important during the rehearsal at certain levels for the group to be able to give a performance expressively. One respondent expressed in the survey, ‘it depends …on the group's individual musical backgrounds,’ but that ‘it may be more important for them to learn…. the how to play together first for less advanced groups, they should eventually learn about the literature and the historical context of the piece.’ One other respondent expressed that an understanding of the historical context is ‘not more important for the group's performance level, but [it is key] for [students] to keep working in the longer term.’

Most of respondents expressed in the survey that they try to provide some ways to help their students reduce their technique level gap. Below I summarize a list of the ways that respondents expressed how they try to do this, as found in the survey responses:

- Demonstration is good way to narrow the technique gap during the chamber ensemble coaching process.
- Sectional practice is necessary during the ensemble coaching process to help individualize feedback in instruction.
- Letting students bring their ideas to rehearsal helps coaches or directors by allowing for students to interact by bringing their own voice to the rehearsal process.
- Bow stroke instruction is a good way to identify and teach different genres or styles which are related to approaching different historical contexts.
As I discussed before, many respondents expressed in the survey that demonstration and instruction are important parts of string ensemble coaching, especially when the director or coaches try to involve the teaching of different historical contexts. Surprisingly, the importance of score study for the ensemble coach or director was not uniform.

Four respondents chose 10 on the scale from 1 to 10 to clearly express in the survey that they feel it is their duty as coaches or directors to master the pieces the group is playing, or at least to have studied the score deeply enough to be able to provide some historical context to the ensemble players. Interestingly, two respondents who chose 8 or 9 on the scale concerning the importance of score study, seem have different points view about the role of mastery of the pieces being played by their ensemble. One respondent expressed that their mastery of each piece seems to give the teacher an ability to pass on ‘inspiring ideas and experiences’ to the group. However, the other respondent expressed that the musical context of a piece is a more important tool than mastery of the piece is. Yet another respondent, who chose degree 5 on the scale about importance of score study, expressed in the survey that when ‘the process of discovery of the piece is together with the coached group, it can create a sense of excitement and not going with pre-conceived ideas.’ Moreover, it seems that most ensemble coaches or directors expressed in the survey that it is their duty as ensemble coaches or directors to do score study, and master pieces in order to give students instruction and demonstrate as the group leader.

**Music of Living Composers**

Nowadays, more and more professional ensembles are starting to pay more attention to performing the musical works of living composers. Some people even commission composers to work with their string ensembles to create music in conjunction with the composer. It interesting to know how important for coaches and directors to promote new music or the music of living
Running Head: Use of Musicological Context: Collegiate Chamber String Ensemble Coaches

composers when programming for their string ensembles. The respondents to this survey who
choose degree greater than 5 on the scale from 1 to 10, expressed that they tried to promote new
music or the music of living composers when programming for their string ensembles because it
is important. Those respondents who choose a degree less than 5 expressed it is less important to
promote new music. Two of the respondents who placed less importance on promoting new
music expressed in the survey that to promote new music to ensemble groups depends upon the
level of the ensemble. One of these two respondents said in the survey that ‘Serious new music
tends to be very, very hard- too hard for the average undergrad[uate].’

Among those respondents who expressed that promoting new music is important, all have
different points of view for why they may think it is important. One respondent expressed in the
survey that ‘choosing excellent, educationally sound repertoire that assists the development of
technique, and quality performance material is more important, while paying attention to living
composers’ was key. While another respondent expressed in the survey that to share the music of
living composers is to ‘help build our community of music and musicians.’ Furthermore, another
respondent expressed in the survey that new music is the ‘inspiration of the present time.’ Two
respondents expressed in the survey that to promote new music provides one way to challenge
their students. And another respondent expressed in the survey that ‘contemporary pieces
enhance and expand all aspects of understanding music.’

Overall, whether or not coaches or directors expressed in the survey that promoting new
music is important to them, they all were concerned that it is too hard for less advanced students
to learn. Yet, many of the respondents agree that programming new music required for deeper
and advances musical understandings. So, if coaches and directors can begin to introduce some
pieces or works by living composers, it could provide a way to extend students’ musicological
Running Head: Use of Musicological Context: Collegiate Chamber String Ensemble Coaches understandings, when the level of the group members can allow them to handle the challenge. If music of living composers that is more approachable for string ensembles the lower levels could be acquired, it would help students to have more genres or styles to choose from when they have a chance to get into higher or deeper levels of music study. This would be very beneficial to student development of musicianship in the long-term.

Implications

After I considered these three themes from data, approaches to chamber literature, technique and teamwork, and music of living composers, I realized that there are implications for chamber ensemble coaches and directors, students, and living composers, as well as for future researchers.

Recalling the data collected from the survey, all the participants in the survey expressed that teamwork was needed to learn to play together expressively as a group, and as an ensemble. Coaches or directors mainly work help the students to develop their own teamwork capability in a coaching process. Many participants in the survey express that score study is a duty of directors or coaches in order to master the piece. As a string ensemble coach or director, the goal of this coaching process is to help the students become successful, improve their skill of chamber music playing, and enjoy the course process. With this general goal in mind for coaches or directors of chamber string ensembles, I encourage chamber ensemble coaches and directors to find comfortable and simple ways to approach chamber literature and context to help students not only play as group but also to play their pieces expressively at all grade levels. As seen in the evidence given in the previous section, music is always about expression, and we should always work to improve over time. To build a mutually trustworthy environment with communication between members, I would encourage chamber coaches and directors to work to build a caring
Running Head: Use of Musicological Context: Collegiate Chamber String Ensemble Coaches

and positive chamber group community in which to share and create music during the ensemble

playing process. I also challenge chamber ensemble coaches and directors to coach the ensemble

in a more flexible and respectful way, by allowing the ensemble members to share their own

thoughts with the group.

As one respondent expressed it, ‘introduc[ing] the pieces of similar style and study[ing]

the piece[s] of [the] same composer would help students understanding the piece they are

working on.’ I encourage students in collegiate chamber string ensembles to listen to pieces that

are in a similar style and from same composer as those they are playing in order to help build an

understanding of the context and styles that they are working on in their chamber music. I

encourage students to be aware of other parts of the piece in ensemble, rather than just their own

part. Since other respondents expressed that, ‘different courses should have different goal[s] or

focus[es].’ I also encourage students to be sensitive of the knowledge that they have learned from

other music related courses, and strive to apply those in their ensemble playing. In addition, I

would encourage all the students in collegiate chamber string ensembles to attempt to have more

communication with their other ensemble members, during the music making process.

In the data, a couple of participants expressed that pieces by living composers are
difficult for undergraduate level students to play. Therefore, I also encourage living composers to
try to work together with different levels and kinds of chamber ensemble groups whenever
possible. Creating the music together in conjunction with chamber ensemble groups and talking
to them would help chamber musicians learn better how to understand the original musical
thoughts of the composer. It is may also give ensemble group members motivation in their
making music. But, above all, it would increase the style selection and repertoire availability to
In order to further this study, I next plan to extend my research on chamber ensemble coaching to consider how coaches and directors can better reach students who are not music majors in a university setting, but who will be community members who might continue to play chamber music as a hobby after graduation. I hope to find out what the influence on these students might be and how music may influence other parts of their life. Another direction in which I hope to extend this research is find out how chamber ensemble groups could best work with living composers to shape the way different chamber ensembles might evolve in the coming years, including both the styles of literature available to them and expanding instrumentation options.

In conclusion, this project on use of musicological context by collegiate chamber string ensemble coaches and directors included a short introduction to the thesis question and information about the research project in chapter one. In chapter two, I provided a review of literature related to coaching string ensembles which focuses on leadership, teamwork, and cooperation, using other senses of the body, and musicology and musicianship. In chapter three, I described how I designed this research project and approached the collection and analysis of data. I explained each step of my process and shared my method of analysis. In chapter four, I reported both terms of descriptive statistics and qualitative analysis from my study including the seven questions from the survey. I included all the participants’ own words from their responses and designed pie charts and bar graphs to summarize quantitative data from multiple choice and Likert scale responses. In chapter five, I then presented a discussion of my findings concerning the three themes: approaches to chamber literature, technique and teamwork, and music of living
Running Head: Use of Musicological Context: Collegiate Chamber String Ensemble Coaches

composers. Then I discussed implications for chamber ensemble coaches and director, students, and living composers, as well as my plans for future research.

It is important to remember that good music always relates to expression, and it is a unique form of art for humans that can foster empathy and understanding worldwide as a product of different eras, regions, cultures. As one respondent wrote in this study, ‘We live in the present moment, not the past. The musical deities of the past are essential, those creating today are the deities of tomorrow, and the fresh inspiration of the present time.’
References


Running Head: Use of Musicological Context: Collegiate Chamber String Ensemble Coaches


Nova Southeastern University, Abraham S. Fischler School of Education. (2020, July 27). Mixed Methods [Presentation].


Appendix A

Informed Consent Form

Informed Consent to Participate in Human Subjects Research

Ms. Qianyi Li, a graduate student in Music Education at the University of Wisconsin-Stevens Point, working under Dr. Rachel Brashier, would appreciate your participation in a research study designed to determine how and in what ways ensemble directors and coaches of chamber string ensembles incorporate musicological context in their work with players. You are being asked to complete an anonymous survey that should take up no more than 15 minutes of your time. Your participation is completely voluntary. The benefit of this study is to generate knowledge about coaching string ensembles.

We anticipate no risk to you as a result of your participation in this study other than the inconvenience of the time to complete the survey.

While there may be no immediate benefit to you as a result of your participation in this study, it is hoped that we may gain valuable information about coaching string ensembles that will be of future value to society.

While this information could be obtained by interviewing you, we feel that the survey is the quickest and easiest method for obtaining this information. You may also choose not to participate as an alternative.

The information that you give us on the questionnaire will be recorded in anonymous form. We will not release information that could identify you. All completed surveys will be kept in a locked file cabinet in the music department office and will not be available to anyone not directly involved in this study.

Your participation in this study is completely voluntary. If you want to withdraw from the study, at any time, you may do so without penalty or loss of benefit entitled. Only anonymous information provided will be retained. All identifiable information will be removed from the study and destroyed or deleted.

Once the study is completed, you may receive the results of the study. If you would like these results, or if you have any questions in the meantime, please contact:

Dr. Rachel Brashier
Director of Music Education
University of Wisconsin – Stevens Point
Stevens Point, WI 54481
(715) 346-2227
If you have any complaints about your treatment as a participant in this study or believe that you have been harmed in some way by your participation, please call or write:
   Anna Haines, PhD
   IRB Chair
   Professor, Natural Resource Planning
   Director, Center for Land Use Education
   2100 Main St.
   Old Main 208
   University of Wisconsin, Stevens Point and Extension
   Stevens Point, WI 54481
   715.346.3799
   irb@uwsp.edu

Although Dr. Haines will ask your name, all complaints are kept in confidence.

By completing this survey, I acknowledge that I have read and understand the information provided to me; that my participation is voluntary and that I may withdraw at any time for any reason.
Appendix B

Survey Questionnaire

Please answer this short (8 Question) survey about your role as a Chamber String Ensemble Coach or Director:

1. Which of the following techniques is MOST important to you in your work as a string ensemble coach or director?
   - Explaining historical context
   - Talking about the composer’s style
   - Score study
   - Promoting new music
   - Using recordings
   - Having the group attend live concerts of another chamber string ensembles

2. Do you think it is helpful to provide lessons or instruction about chamber literature in order to help your students better understand their pieces?
   - YES or NO
   - Why or why not? (optional)

3. Particular pieces require different techniques, in light of their historical context or the composer’s style. How do you approach teaching such techniques in the chamber ensemble setting, when not all student players are at the same technique level?

4. Do you think that as a collegiate string ensemble coach or director who wants their students to be successful, you are be more concerned with?
   A) the students’ understanding of the historical context of the music they are learning.
   B) the teamwork needed to learn to play together expressively as a group.
   Why do you think this is more important for your group's success?
5. How important do you think it is for ensemble coaches and directors to promote new music or the music of living composers when programming for their string ensembles on a scale of 1 to 10 with ten being crucially important and with one being not something you consider when programming?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

If this is important to you, please explain why?

6. How important do you think it is for the instructor or ensemble coach to have mastery of the pieces the group is playing, or at least to have studied the score deeply and be able to provide some historical context to the ensemble players, on a scale of one to ten with ten being it is very important for the coach or instructor to have mastery of the pieces and one being that this is least important to the group’s success?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Why do you think this is so?

7. Do you find more possible for your group to travel to hear live performances or to use recordings?

Yes/ no

8. Is there anything else you have not been asked that would like to add about your work with your chamber strings ensemble(s)?