Musical identity formation
Investigating the social, personal, musical, and educational factors

Introduction

Music and one’s self perform a profoundly intimate and highly complex relationship. The role of music in constructing one’s identity might be stronger and deeper than any other human engagements (see Bowman 2004). Therefore, it is an illuminating question which personal traits might support the decision to become a performing artist or a music teacher. In German and Baltic music academies the training in both tracks are basically similar, i.e. all students obtain an artistic education on their major instrument. The decision between education and performance evolves either before choosing a degree program, during the studies or after program. Anyhow, this process is governed by a bunch of interacting and sometimes conflicting motives arising from social, psychological, cultural and educational actions.

All efforts towards a better understanding of the complexity of the identity formation from youth to adulthood will enrich our knowledge of social and cultural implications of humans’ involvement with music. In recent years personal and professional identity which has developed within and through music calls for an increasing attention because it affects the professional behavior and determines the degree of job satisfaction. Overall it constitutes an important aspect of health and well-being. This aspect gets even more challenging since many antagonistic forces act on the individual personality by social and cultural demands, by means of educational structures, and also by powerful role models in teacher-student relation during professional music training. However, little is still known about the structure and development of different personality factors that act on musical identity of young musicians and teachers over lifetime (see Lamont 2011). The present study focuses on the identification of psychological and social influences on the emerging identity, developmental changes in the process of identity formation and on individual and group differences between students and professionals.

Theoretical Background

Personality develops within a highly complex interaction of individual and social factors (Burland 2005). Anthony Kemp has described the psychological foundations of the characteristics of musicians’ personalities (Kemp 1996). A first broad overview on musicians’ development over the lifespan was presented by Maria Manturzewska (Manturzewska 1990) followed by Heiner Gembris (Gembris 2006). In the context of the present study it is particularly important how different factors change regarding their efficiency during the transition from students to professionals. A musician’s identity is central to the career decision (Burland 2005, 233). Here it is seen as one aspect that contributes to the future decision of becoming a teacher or a performing musician.

Based on findings from former research on musical identity and the development of self-concepts a cross-sectional study was performed to detect social, personal, musical and educational implications for individual differences which arise from education and the respective job requirements for teachers and performers. Developmental changes might be supported by the activities and challenges of a particular occupation and their respective training programs. Therefore, music students from different programs (performance vs education at a music academy and university) were investigated and compared with...
experienced professional musicians in orchestras, choirs, or music schools. Because of this kind of complexity different age and training groups are needed to be investigated. Therefore the results from a multivariate analysis and a factor analysis are used to identify particular factors and their impact on music identity formation which, then, may lead into a critical view of educational structures and teaching attitudes in professional music education.

Musical identity is a psychological construct (Spychiger & Hechler 2014) that consists of various components which are mainly based on personal, social, emotional and musical competencies, and which shapes the musical self. It is always “about who, through musical doings of all sorts (listening included) we are, and about whom we are in the process of becoming” (Bowman 2004, 5). Shaping an identity in one’s social life makes an important part of development and education and terminates in the state of remaining a distinctive self under varying conditions. Motivation, practice and commitment complement individual personality traits in shaping the identity (Dweck 2000). Its development results from formal and informal education and appears as a transitory or temporary behavior as well as a deeply grounded and sustained attitude. Consequently, a musical identity reflects the way of how an individual presents him/herself in a cultural and social context as a result of musical experience, commitment, and practice (Evans & McPherson 2015).

MacDonald and collaborators differentiate between “identities in music” (IIM) and the different function of “music in identities” (MII) (MacDonald et al. 2002). Identities emerge in music by “the way people view themselves in relation to the social and cultural roles existing within music” (Hargreaves & Marshall 2003, 264) whereas their identity in music refers to “the ways in which music may form a part of other aspects of the individual’s self-image” (ibid.). However, both aspects interact and perform a mutual exchange. Thereby, Hargreaves and collaborators introduce an important and necessary distinction regarding the function of music during the process of identity formation. The music one preferably listens to and performs, plays an important role in shaping the musical environment; here, the music is the actual agent in identity formation. However, the musically established identity in any style or genre (e.g. as a rock musician or a historically informed baroque music specialist) also determines selection of the preferred music henceforward. Therefore, the musical identity that has been shaped by dealing with particular sorts of music, determines the music that will be selected and will furnish the future musical environment. In short, music shapes the identity which equally impacts on music as an essential part of life. As shown by MacDonald and collaborators (2002), musical identity results from the interaction between personal preoccupations or determinations and socially and culturally transmitted arrays of styles and genres.

Former research has demonstrated that musical identities reflect the individual understanding of the “closeness” of an activity to the self: how much does one feel that an activity shapes the self (Kessels & Hannover 2004). Based on this theoretical approach Maria Spychiger and collaborators have developed a multidimensional scale for their empirical investigation of identity building factors (Spychiger al. 2009). Their analysis clearly indicates that cognitive components perform the strongest effect on the musical identity in professional musicians and music workers while the more “spiritual” aspects were most prominent in amateurs (ibid., 3). Other studies have focused on teacher identities (Ballantyne et al. 2012; Welch et al. 2010), on cross-cultural studies (Green 2011a; b) and on learning styles that influence the process of becoming a musician (Lonie & Dickens 2016).

The empirical approach of this study concentrates on the internal factors of the personality and external training factors embedded in the training programs of the different focus groups (performers vs. educators). It is also aims to disclose developmental processes that arise from the professional experience in an occupation as a performing
musician or a music teacher. Consequently, this implies a dynamic model of identity formation which amalgamates influences from family background, education, training and professional demands. Additionally, there are also powerful personalities such as instrumental teachers, peers, or performers who guide students as an ideal and function as an orientation mark. And all of these single impact factors interact and support or inhibit the process of identity formation. This finally leads to a multilayer pattern of personal preconditions and environmental influences that result in the particular musical identity.

On the other hand, it is quite obvious that there is not only one identity which rules out any other option, rather every person performs different identities simultaneously according to social roles, individual preferences, and professional demands. Nevertheless, it seems appropriate and expedient, especially in view of study programs in higher education, to untangle the manifold influences that finally shape a musician's professional identity as an artist or educator. For this, we focus on measurable aspects of personality traits and musical conditions and intend to follow the development of different ages and training groups. Therefore, the main research questions are: What are the main factors that determine the identity formation in musicians? Which processes can be observed through age and can be associated with developmental changes? What are the specific traits within different groups according to their training and professional background?

Method

Participants
A total of \( n = 107 \) subjects from Estonia participated in the study. Music students from different programs at Estonian Academy of Music and Theatre (performance vs education, \( n = 47 \), mean age 25.5 years) and older professionals (performing musicians vs teachers in schools and music schools, \( n = 60 \), mean age 44.9 years) with at least 15 years of occupational experience were compared. Finally, a group of pupils (\( n = 12 \), mean age 18.5 years) of a special music high school was added which served as a reference group. The study was conducted in 2014 at the Estonian Academy in collaboration with local institutions.

Design
Since the main idea of the study is to identify short-term and long-term influencing factors a cross-sectional design was performed where music students during their study course and professionals after at least 15 years of occupational experience are investigated. Therefore, this sample consists of educators and performers in two age groups. Therefore, a two-factor design was employed (Table 1).

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<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>professionals</th>
<th>students</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>performing musicians</td>
<td>G1 ( n = 15 )</td>
<td>G5 ( n = 11 )</td>
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<tr>
<td>teachers in publ. schools</td>
<td>G2 ( n = 31 )</td>
<td>G4 ( n = 36 )</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>teachers in music schools</td>
<td>G3 ( n = 14 )</td>
<td>[G5 ( n = 11 )]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>total</td>
<td>( n = 60 )</td>
<td>( n = 47 )</td>
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</table>

Table 1. Two-factor design
Procedure

After expressing their consent, all participants filled in an online questionnaire indicating personal data (age, gender, education, actual status, socio-economic status of the family, family background, start of instrumental instruction etc.). Then, participants performed a Music Identity Scale (MIS) which was specifically designed for this study and modifies Spychiger’s Scale of Musical Self-Concept (Spychiger et al. 2009). The MIS consists of 40 statements that refer to personal (P), social (S), educational (E) and musical (M) judgments. The participants ranked all statements in a 6-point Likert scale (see appendix). These components shape a four-factorial plot of each participant which reflects the typical structure of dominant factors for individuals and groups (see figure 1).

For analysis, the individual scores are clustered according to age groups, occupational activities or training programs. Additionally, measurements of cognitive advancement, musical aptitude and personality factors were taken from the last two parts of Raven's Standard Progressive Matrices (SPM) (Raven 1990), Gordon's Advanced Measures of Music Audiation (AMMA) (Gordon 1989) and a short version (S 5) of Costa & McCrae’s NEO Five Factor Personality Inventory (Costa & McCrae 1992; Konstabel et al. 2012) which is based on a 60-item questionnaire for measuring 30 facets of the Five Factor model. MIS, Raven’s SPM and the Personality Inventory (S 5) were presented online. All data were statistically analyzed with SPSS 22. A multivariate analysis and a factor analysis of the four dimensions of MIS were performed. For the group comparison a two-sample t-Test was employed.

Results

Since both cohorts (students and professionals) constitute a rather homogeneous selection of musically active and highly trained subjects, no relevant differences can be found with regard to the start and attendance of instrumental training and the parental support within a similar social background. The starting conditions for both musical cohorts are very similar. However, the performance and education groups reveal enlightening differences. Generally, both groups are clearly separated by S 5 and MIS. The internal consistency of MIS is very high (Cronbach’s Alpha 0.89). Regarding music aptitude and cognitive scores, personality factors and identity components there is no significant differences between school music teachers and instrumental teachers since both groups work as educators. However, music education and performance students exhibit significant differences. The cognitive scores according to the Raven’s SPM are significantly higher in performance students than in music education students and school teachers (p = .039). The personality factor extraversion of S 5 is lower in musicians than in teachers (p = .023) whereas agreeableness is higher in performance than in music education students (p = .041). Finally, the educational and musical components of MIS are more pronounced in education than in performance students (p = .039).

The comparison of music education students and professional school teachers unfolds a remarkable development over time. While performer students and professionals exhibit no significant changes in all dimensions of the personality factors and the identity scale, music education students and professional music teachers strengthen their profile regarding extraversion (p = .026) and conscientiousness (p = .023) and extend their social (p = .001) and musical (p = .004) orientation (MIS). This is also confirmed by the results of the comparison between performers (professional orchestra players, choir singers) and music teachers in public schools. These groups perform significant differences in music aptitude (p = .001), cognitive development (p = .002), extraversion (p = .003) as well as regarding the social (p = .035) and the educational (p = .017) components of MIS. A general comparison of all students and professionals confirms these findings (see Table 2).
Furthermore, a multivariate analysis of all tested dimensions exhibits a significant correlation only for musical ability scores and cognitive development ($r = .334$).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Factors</th>
<th>F</th>
<th>t</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>Sig. (2-tailed)</th>
<th>Mean Diff.</th>
<th>Stand. Error</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>extraversion</td>
<td>1,181</td>
<td>-2,049</td>
<td>105</td>
<td>.043*</td>
<td>-.10651</td>
<td>.05199</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>openness</td>
<td>1,790</td>
<td>-2,085</td>
<td>105</td>
<td>.039*</td>
<td>-.7854</td>
<td>.03766</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>social (mean)</td>
<td>.518</td>
<td>-2,810</td>
<td>102</td>
<td>.008**</td>
<td>-.33175</td>
<td>.11804</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>musical (mean)</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td>-2,612</td>
<td>104</td>
<td>.010**</td>
<td>-.30913</td>
<td>.11836</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2. t-Test for independent variables for two factors of the personality scale (S 5) and two of the musical identity scale (MIS). Extraversion and openness as well as social and musical dimensions exhibit a significant difference in the transition from student to professional.

Therefore, the profiles of the different groups which are derived from the MIS data draw a clear picture of the dominant components regarding the development of characteristics for each subject group (see figure 1).

Figure 1. Profiles of the four components of MIS for all groups. P = personal; S = social; E = educational; M = musical.
Here it is obvious that music teachers in public schools exhibit the most pronounced profile with highest consent to all four components whereas professional musicians and performance students are much less explicit. Performance students rank highest in the personal dimension, but exhibit lowest values on the educational factors. This clearly reflects their situation to be strongly focused on the instrument without ancillary educational reflections. Instrumental teachers, however, hold a medium position between both groups and exhibit average means for all four components. The most obvious difference occurs for the controls which are still pupils without a clear social and musical profile.

More differences occur in the personality dimension as indicated by the Big Five personality scale. Musicians and teachers significantly differ regarding their scores of the extraversion and conscientiousness factors. The same results are demonstrated in the two student groups (performers and educators). It is also interesting to notice that all groups exhibit negative mean values with a high distribution for neuroticism whereas extraversion seems to present a significant discrimination factor at least for professional musicians and music teachers as well as for performance and education students (see figure 2). Extraversion corresponds to an open attitude toward other subjects which is psychologically essential in all educational occupations.

![Figure 2. The extraversion dimension of the personality scale for all groups. Differences for professional musicians and teachers as well as for the two student groups are highly significant (**): musicians vs teachers \(p = .009\); performance vs education students \(p = .017\).](image)

The factor analysis with oblimin rotation of the data of all MIS components (personal, social, educational, musical) exhibits four main factors which can be interpreted as theoretical reflection (F1), communicative interaction (F2), interpersonal relation (F3) and professional curiosity (F4). While F1 exclusively incorporates M and E components, F2 P and S components and F3 mainly P components, F4 includes a mixture of all four.
components and therefore is less distinct. Nevertheless, all groups are separated by the factors. Professional musicians strongly load on F3 which reflects their interpersonal relations whereas school music teachers most prominently load on F4 which might relate to their broadly distributed interests. Finally, all students load highest on F2 and indicate the importance of social interaction whereas all teachers similarly load on F1 and exhibit a broad and open interest in musical aspects and training (see figure 3).

![Figure 3. Loading factors for all five sub-groups.](image)

When we cluster all students and adults, opposite profiles based on the loading factors appear (figure 4). Here, students load significantly higher on F2 (.253) than adults (-.198) and perform the only significant difference (p=.02) which clearly reflects a strong developmental impact over time.

![Figure 4. Loading factors of all students (G4 + G5) and adults (G1 + G2 +G3).](image)
If we look at the factors more in detail, professional musicians and school music teachers demonstrate quite opposite characteristics (figure 5). Theoretical reflection and social interaction exhibit negative values in musicians, whereas teachers exhibit positive scores. Conversely, emotional affections perform the highest positive values in musicians. For teachers, however, theoretical reflection, social interaction and personal relations are essential for their professional behavior.

Figure 5. Loading factors for performing musicians and school music teachers.

**Discussion**

If one looks at the data it becomes quite clear that there is not just one main factor that accounts for musical identity. However, there are some essential personality factors that play a prominent role during the process of identity formation for musicians and music educators: extraversion and conscientiousness. This seems very plausible since acting in front of a concert audience or a classroom as a particular form of an audience calls for a more extrovert behavior and openness in the face of others whereas neuroticism would counteract on the musical development. And, of course, conscientiousness is as important for performing artists regarding the musical score as for teachers regarding the needs of the students. As a teacher one relies on reliable and trustworthy attitudes. Another aspect of the identity formation indicates that the traits and dimensions measured by the Big Five clearly separate teachers from performers even at the time of enrollment in the academy. It also appears that attitudes and the appraisal of values reflected by the *Music Identity Scale* (MIS) provide an appropriate measure for discriminating the five groups of students and professionals in both cohorts. Therefore, it seems clear that obvious differences in the structure of the personality of musicians have a strong impact on the decision about their further occupation.
These traits might be genetically determined to some extent, but the social and cultural environment has a strong impact, too. However, the socio-economic and socio-cultural data do not support an early determination by family and education. The familial conditions for starting instrumental instruction are quite similar. Thus, it is likely that additional factors come into play when students successfully turn towards a career as a teacher. Their personality factors such as openness and extraversion focus on social interaction. Similarly agreeableness exhibits highest positive scores for school teachers and performance students since this reflects social components such as cooperation, trust or acceptance which is as important in ensemble play as in classroom teaching. Differences of the interest in educational and social aspects are highly significant for performers and teachers and probably predictive for career decisions and occupational success.

The development of a musical personality starts in early years and increases by intensive education as performed in Music Academies. Here it is not so much the content of the study program or the participation of required courses rather than the social impact by peers and—mainly—the instrumental teacher. According to Burland, students often report that sometimes the instrumental teacher functions as the most important contact person who is relevant to individual development (Burland & Pitts 2007, 303). In particular music education students seem to rely much more on social interaction and theoretical understanding which can be immediately related to educational challenges. On the other hand, performing artists orientate themselves on affective aspects of music and, therefore, accomplish emotional requirements and expressive demands of the music they actually perform or want to perform.

The study also clarifies that personality factors as well as chronological dimensions of age and the amount of time spent in a professional occupation commonly contribute to the musical identity. This is reflected by the differences between students and professional adults in general. The higher load of all student groups on F2 might be due to the fact that students in general are more open to feedback from peers and professionals and rely more deeply on social interactions than adults who have already developed their own professional routine. In this regard, it is quite plausible that the demands and duties of an occupation retroact on the norms and attitudes of a person. While acting and succeeding in a job individuals adopt the standard values which are supported by the profession and at the same time affect the development of their self-concept. When a person works as a teacher for several years his/her attitude becomes strikingly more educational whereas the period of his/her studies creates different life perspectives, professional visions and artistic expectancies. That indicates that professional involvement in the occupation as teacher or performer strengthens the development of the actually felt musical identity.

There are many determining factors that act on an individual during the performance of an occupation which relate to the daily demands and challenges, to a positive or negative feedback from occupational actions and therefore shape the treasure trove of experience. The longer one works as a skilled and passionate performer or teacher the more attitudes and personality factors develop that are relevant for successful work in a profession. The interest in technical aspects of music performance, in the commitment to extensive practice and emotional devotion mark the primary sources of satisfaction during the degree course and later in the occupation. On the contrary, a broader spreading of interest areas, personal and social aspects of music making as well as analytical interest in the music performed indicate a typical orientation of educators.

The present study demonstrates how different dimensions develop over time and differ between groups. The professional training as performer or teacher becomes a core factor of the musical self which often overrides the individually distinct personality traits. There is no evidence of a preponderance of genetically determined parts of individual growth that accounts for the development of a performer or teacher, but rather the
environmental and educational, personal and institutional context of an art institution influences the musical identity formation. Furthermore, it is the strength of a sustaining commitment to and deep involvement in the actual work which shapes and changes attitudes and behaviors. What we see is that it is always a specific, but individually different mixture of influencing variables that work in different context at varying periods.

However, from this study one can only speculate to which extent the different factors actually interact. One may assume that the typical mixture of factors is composed of psychological dispositions and values and attitudes acquired over time. Therefore, all influences from institutional and personal contacts, especially the intense and intimate relation between a student's and his/her instrumental teacher have an enormous impact on the adoption of attitudes, norms and values. To explore and understand the interaction of the different factors in a more general context, it would be necessary to include more subjects from domains other than music to generate a deeper understanding of the hidden processes that are relevant to the formation of a musical identity. This will be extremely important to institutions of higher education and teacher training to model and implement those elements into educational programs that are most relevant to the respective professional behavior and support abilities and areas that help to mold musical identities through music and within the domain of musical activities.

This calls for a stronger emphasis on interpersonal and socio-cognitive aspects in music training courses. With respect to this demand further research should implement more students with different academic backgrounds from various institutions (conservatories, academies, colleges, universities) with the intention to compare their profiles to uncover general core factors and common psychological structures within the developmental process of personality formation.

There are still questions related to the condition how and why these traits will develop that remain open. Is the individual genetic disposition stronger than institutional and environmental impacts? One may suspect that the various factors at different times act together, and it is most likely that they interact. But this cannot be shown by the present study which only identifies efficient personal characteristics for the investigated groups, but cannot explain the causal relation between personality factors and musical achievement. However, the four dimensions extracted from MIS indicate vital core variables although there are probably other variables like intensive practice and long lasting commitment that may account for the behavioral traits of musical identity. This might be subject to further research.

References


**Musical Identity Scale**

Please, mark the degree of your approval of every statement by circling a number between 1 (= I do not agree at all; this does not reflect my attitude) and 6 (= I fully agree; the statement completely reflects my attitude)! If there is a statement that is not relevant to you because you don’t teach, please, ignore that statement and go to the next!

### Musical Components

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>1</th>
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<tr>
<td>Practical experiences in different musical styles/genres are important for my own performances.</td>
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<td>Music theory helps me to better understand the music I perform.</td>
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<td>Mostly I try to find out about the historical and/or cultural background of the music I currently practice.</td>
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<td>Before I start playing/singing a piece of music I read and analyze the score.</td>
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<tr>
<td>A teacher who does not make music for and with his/her students fails his/her job!</td>
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<td>I often listen to music I am not so familiar with (avant-garde, folk, jazz, hip-hop, non-western music etc.) because it attracts me.</td>
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<td>I enjoy identifying harmonies and following the voicing while listening to music.</td>
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<td>I like to compare different interpretations (performances) of the same music.</td>
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<td>I prefer to attend live performances instead of listening to recorded music at home.</td>
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<td>Estonian music had/has a strong impact on my musical development.</td>
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### Educational Components

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>For me it is important to know different methods of teaching an instrument.</td>
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<td>To be experienced in different techniques of playing an instrument contributes to my musical skills.</td>
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<tr>
<td>A professional musician, namely a music teacher should be able to play more than just one instrument.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Expert musicianship should be based on the familiarity with more than only one musical style (classical, jazz, pop, folk etc.).</td>
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It is of great advantage to be well grounded in skills of organizing different musical activities (e.g. in ensembles, bands, jazz combos, salsa groups, improvisation, folk...).

Group teaching techniques enrich teachers' competency.

I need to know about the agents that influence and determine musical preferences of listeners/the audience.

I strive towards encouraging others (friends, colleagues, students etc.) to attend concerts.

I am going to practice my own musicianship as a model of how to deal with music.

Primarily, I want to be recognized as an estimated performer/practitioner.

**Social Components**

For me it is important to participate regularly in national or international conferences on teaching methods (like: EPTA, ESTA, EMOL, EQ etc.).

Talking with colleagues, peers, friends about educational issues helps to develop my own educational skills.

Very often I talk to my family/friends about my work (advancements and/or problems).

I am interested in getting feedback from the audience in a concert/performance or from my students in class or from my classmates.

Regular personal meetings with my peers, friends or colleagues are vital for my communicative demands.

Collaboration with other people is essential for my professional musical development.

I look for participation in activities of other social groups beyond music since that provides me with the opportunity to meet other people from different cultural backgrounds and with different interests and preferences.

As a musician I intend to communicate only through music.

In my communication with others I try to show respect to deviant opinions.

I get immediately upset and react spontaneously when something happens that I do not like.
Personal Components

Music provides the opportunity to share my emotions with others. 1 2 3 4 5 6

When working musically with others I need to respect the musical preferences of my colleagues/mates/friends/students. 1 2 3 4 5 6

I care about the current emotional status of my colleagues/friends/students 1 2 3 4 5 6

I want to address and talk about the actual problems of my friends/classmates/students/colleagues. 1 2 3 4 5 6

Even when I feel depressed I can still focus on the technical aspects of my own or others' musical practice. 1 2 3 4 5 6

I want myself listening to the preferred music of my friends/colleagues/students. 1 2 3 4 5 6

Dealing with music gives me the feeling of belonging or being part of a bigger entity that encompasses me. 1 2 3 4 5 6

I prefer a repertoire that helps me to develop technical skills. 1 2 3 4 5 6

I enjoy expressing my emotions on stage. 1 2 3 4 5 6

When I work on music I understand that I learn a lot about myself. 1 2 3 4 5 6

Abstrakti