

ANOTHER SIDE OF THE ORCHESTRA: AN INTERVIEW STUDY

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Background

An orchestral career has often been looked upon with awe by the public. A contract position with a well known orchestra is highly regarded among players, and often the target of competitive auditions. Yet, orchestral lifestyle is not easily captured from the outside. While some researchers have been able to penetrate group barriers and gain the confidence of orchestra members for a single-episode interview, such data may not portray the issues in a highly valid manner. Moreover, questionnaire data even when obtained from face to face interactions might not touch on emotional issues.

Aims

To survey professional orchestra players via multiple-episode structured interviews following mood induction procedures.

Method

54 professional symphony orchestra musicians (from 4 major British contract orchestras) were interviewed eight times over a 10-weeks period. The interviews were packaged as a sensitivity

training program, offered on-site in rehearsal halls, with the backing of national performing arts medicine and counseling organizations. Structured interviews were conducted on an individual basis, and followed abbreviated progressive muscle relaxation exercises employing guided affective imagery and music. The data, in the form of descriptive narratives, were examined using qualitative approaches including content analysis.

Results

The study found 9 attributes perceived as 'gains' to an orchestral career and to stage performances; a similar number of 'risks' and 'costs' were identified and validated. In addition, 'the audience' usually described as an active co-participant in music performances, was more often perceived as playing an adversarial role. Finally, the study indicated that just about half of the musicians assessed their performance abilities on a 'limited' to 'good' level.

Conclusions

The study depicts a differing portraiture of full time contract symphony orchestra musicians than is usually seen in single episode interview studies.