



Experiencing Passion as an “essentia vitae” of Educational Biographies of Eminent Musicians From Cracow

Doświadczenie pasji jako „essentia vitae” biografii edukacyjnych wybitnych krakowskich muzyków

ABSTRACT

RESEARCH OBJECTIVE: The aim of the paper was to discuss a function of passion in professional personal lives of eminent Cracow musicians.

THE RESEARCH PROBLEM AND METHODS: The paper raises the problem of the role of passion in the process of shaping musical eminence, answers the question of the scope of experiencing it as well as it manifesting in activities of outstanding individuals. In conducted research and interpretations, the qualitative perspective and biographical method were applied. The leading technique was problem-concentrated qualitative interview, partially structured, carried out with ten eminent instrumentalists.

THE PROCESS OF ARGUMENTATION: The theoretical basis for this reading of the experience of educational biographies was provided by the Model of Authentic Vocation of J. Weller and the Dualistic Model of Passion of A. Bonneville-Roussy, G. Lavigne and R. Vallerand. The interpretations of the research material described the topography of experiencing passion.

RESEARCH RESULTS: The article describes autonomous passion associated with musical mastery, instrumental motivation to practice, as well as distinguishes important factors that determine the experience of passion, persistence or burnout (tenacity, ambition, community transfer, conflict of motives, work overload), and concretizes the qualities of musical passion of outstanding musicians: professionalization, love of music, integrity, creativity, strength and determination in pursuit of goals, as well as humility in the face of challenges.

CONCLUSIONS, INNOVATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS: Deciphering the senses and meanings that prominent Cracow musicians attributed to passion suggests that it was autonomous, harmonious and instrumental, motivated by the pursuit of mastery, and that the trajectories of the

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musicians' professional biographies were a manifestation of a "professionalization of passion," which formed the core of their educational experience and constituted and defined their life creed.

→ **KEYWORDS:** **PASSION FOR MUSIC, EXCELLENCE, MASTERY, EDUCATIONAL BIOGRAPHIES, PROFESSIONALIZATION OF PASSION**

STRESZCZENIE

CEL NAUKOWY: Celem artykułu jest ukazanie funkcji pasji w życiu osobistym profesjonalnym wybitnych krakowskich muzyków.

PROBLEM I METODY BADAWCZE: Podjęto problem roli pasji w kształtowaniu się wybitności muzycznej, odpowiedzi na pytanie o zakres jej doświadczania, a także przejawiania się w działaniach osób wybitnych. W badaniach i interpretacjach kierowano się perspektywą jakościową, metodą biograficzną. Technikę wiodącą stanowił skoncentrowany na problemie jakościowy wywiad częściowo ustrukturyzowany przeprowadzony z 10 wybitnymi instrumentalistami.

PROCES WYWODU: Teoretycznych podstaw tego zakresu odczytań doświadczeń biografii edukacyjnych dostarczył model autentycznego powołania J. Weller oraz dualistyczny model pasji A. Bonnevillle-Roussy, G. Lavigne i R. Valleranda. W interpretacjach uzyskanego materiału badawczego opisano topografię doświadczania przestrzeni pasji.

WYNIKI ANALIZY NAUKOWEJ: W artykule scharakteryzowano autonomiczną pasję związaną z mistrzostwem muzycznym, instrumentalną motywację do ćwiczeń, wyróżniono także istotne czynniki decydujące o przeżywaniu pasji, podtrzymaniu lub wypaleniu (upór, ambicję, transfer środowiskowy, konflikt motywów, przeciążenie pracą), a także skonkretyzowano cechy muzycznej pasji osób wybitnych: profesjonalizację, miłość do muzyki, uczciwość, kreatywność, siłę i determinację w dążeniu do celu oraz pokorę wobec wyzwań.

WNIOSKI, INNOWACJE, REKOMENDACJE: Odczytanie sensów i znaczeń, które przypisywali pasji wybitni krakowscy muzycy pozwala przypuszczać, że miała ona charakter autonomiczny, harmonijny i instrumentalny, motywowany dążeniem do mistrzostwa, a trajektorie zawodowych biografii muzyków były przejawem specyficznej „profesjonalizacji pasji”, która stanowiła rdzeń doświadczeń edukacyjnych, konstytuowała i definiowała ich credo życiowe.

→ **SŁOWA KLUCZOWE:** **PASJA MUZYCZNA, WYBITNOŚĆ, MISTRZOSTWO, BIOGRAFIE EDUKACYJNE, PROFESJONALIZACJA PASJI**

Introduction

One cannot fully experience humanity without passion. It constitutes the purpose of human action (sometimes life), guides and energizes our aspirations, modifies our needs and expectations, gives us courage, and helps us to survive moments of doubt, and

criticism from others. On the other hand, passionate individuals can be seen as “strange,” and passion can be a sign of a compulsive and obsessive behavior, something that breeds interpersonal problems. It can express itself in everyday activities and rare ones, such as the creation of works of art, music or literature. It is therefore interesting to ask to what extent it can manifest itself in the activities of outstanding people?

The subject of this study is the biographical experience of outstandingly talented musicians in the context of their experiencing of passion. The cognitive goal of the discussion is to show the function that passion played in the lives of eminent musicians, as well as to supplement the problem field of musical brilliance in the socio-cultural discourse with aspects connected with passion. The research question associated with this objective is as follows: What is the role of passion in the shaping of musical excellence? To fully answer the question we must clarify the following contexts, phrased as fact-finding queries and concerning the interpretation of the phenomena that Schütz calls the constructs of colloquial and scientific thinking (2006, p. 869):

- How did prominent musicians describe the experience of passion?
- What areas of activity related to passion did the narrators indicate at different stages of their building of musical excellence?
- What factors were important for the passion of outstanding musicians to last?
- What definitions, meanings and significances did outstanding musicians ascribe to passion?

Research methods and tools

When considering the subject and the area of this research, I decided that a qualitative strategy, which is part of the humanistic paradigm (Gierczyk & Dobosz, 2018, p. 26), would be the most fitting method. More specifically, the study relies on the biographical methodological perspective (Denzin & Lincoln, 1990; Lalak 2010; Urbaniak-Zajac, 2017; Rzepa & Leoński, 1993) and uses its techniques for collecting, compiling, analyzing and interpreting empirical material (Kubinowski, 2011). The biographical method puts the human being at the center of interest and seeks to understand his or her beliefs and individual history in a natural setting. Such a presentation of biographical experience, in the form of a narrative, provides an opportunity for a balance sheet of life and is linked to the idea of “idiography” (Całek, 2011), that is, finding the singularities of an individual’s unique path of development.

The key source of information and the main technique was a qualitative semi-structured, problem-focused interview (Kvale, 2004). With this method and technique, it is possible to obtain data mapping the different timelines and socio-cultural perspectives of biography creation, so the strategy in question becomes an “in-depth” exploration (Silverman, 2007, p. 59), which gives the researcher access to individual meanings and subjective experiences, because “biography expresses the opacity of our lives and the ambiguity of the meanings given to them” (Bednarz-Łuczewska & Łuczewski, 2012,

p. 101). As Demetrio points out, what distinguishes the biographical method from other research approaches is the meeting of the perspectives of the researcher and the narrators, the “communicative rapprochement” (2000, p. 142) in the course of collecting material. The research is also flexible due to the possibility of “dialogue between the researcher and the data” (Straś-Romanowska, 2000, p. 33), as it is the researcher who ultimately deciphers the meaning given to passion in the narratives.

Ten interviews were carried out with prominent Cracow instrumentalists singled out for research through a strategy of community choice. Thus, the group of individuals who have achieved mastery in the field of music was selected purposively (Rubacha, 2011, p. 124). As the concept of “excellence” is problematic – it is relative and debatable – the validity of selecting “recognized artists” was verified by means of an interview with a music critic, a long-time editor-in-chief of PWM.

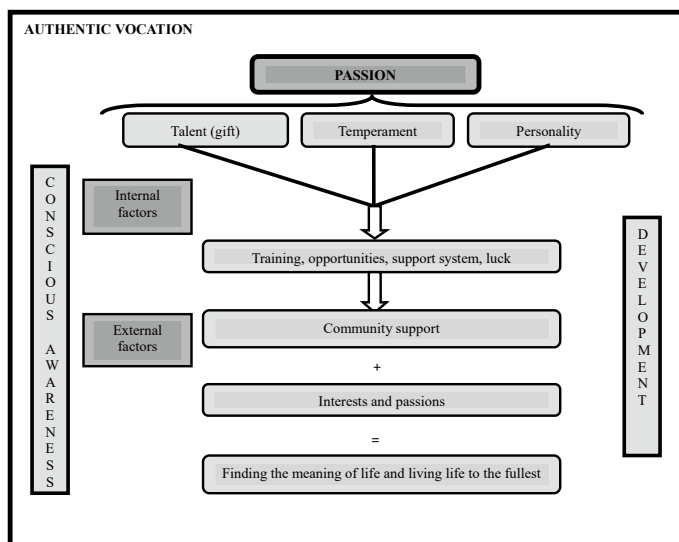
Understanding passion for music

The theoretical basis of the research revealed the ambiguity of how the concept of passion is understood, as few publications on the subject point to various features and dimensions of this phenomenon. In the introduction to the book *On others' and our own passions*, professors, editors Dudzikowa and Nowak define genuine passion as a lived value, which “like existential dialogue, [...] constitutes an experience that is not communicated, but lived and experienced in mutual relations” (2015, pp. 8–9). Czerepaniak-Walczak specifies that it is “a force that pushes and prompts action, an emotion that triggers activity” (2015, p. 54). In turn, Popek (2015) describes passion as a sequence of evolving attitudes, conditioning human activity, starting with curiosity, gradually turning into interest, enthusiasm, aspiration, up to an attitude, but notes that passion can be something dysfunctional, when it turns into obsession, mania or narcissism.

Passion at different stages of life is also a factor which is distinguished in many concepts and models of greatness. It is construed as elation, or “flow” (Csikszentmihalyi, 1996); fierce and persistent action, or “grit” (Duckworth, 2016), an immanent motivation that distinguishes outstandingly gifted individuals (Renzulli, 2002). According to Kunat (2015), passion also has a positive impact on creative processes, and opens up prospects for new solutions.

There are also descriptions of passion in the lives and work of musicians. Combining the characteristics of personality, temperament and talent, passion is a generator of musical development, as illustrated, for example, by the following Model of Authentic Vocation by Weller (2004, p. 255).

Figure 1. Authentic vocation



Source: based on Weller, 2004, p. 255.

In contrast, in a study based on the Dualistic Passion Model, Bonneville-Roussy et al. (2011) found that almost all musicians exhibited two types of passion: autonomous passion, which internalizes the action process, and/or instrumental passion that relates to their strategy of work. According to these researchers, it can be assumed that the presence of passion may be one of the most powerful components regulating psychological well-being. Musicians who experience harmonious passion engage in music in synergy with other aspects of their lives (family, sports and hobbies), while their commitment to instrumental activity is motivated by the pursuit of excellence, so they are not burdened by social pressures and feel satisfied with their lives. For musicians who experience obsessive passion, on the other hand, it is a kind of addiction; they feel an unbridled desire to play and practice, as well as a need to confront others. Obsessive passion is therefore destructive, causes frustration, and can lead to disorders (Bonneville-Roussy and Vallerand, 2018).

Topography of spaces of passion – areas of experience of outstanding musicians

According to the findings, outstanding musicians experienced passion in many spaces of their lives. It also seems that, as confirmed by Bonneville-Roussy and Vallerand (2018), it was commitment that helped them persevere through the long, uncertain and demanding

path of education, and that it determined how instrumentalists set themselves the goal of becoming a master. As one of the narrators put it: “it doesn’t matter what role they assume in these activities, what matters is that they have a chance to realize their musical passion in their work (EB).”¹

Autonomous professional passion

The interviews clearly showed the narrators’ involvement in the blossoming of music as a field. The artists carried out many concert plans, projects, and were engaged in recording and promoting Polish music abroad. Activity and passion, therefore, was a prerequisite for any musical endeavor and a condition for obtaining mastery (Vallerand et al., 2022). Jazukiewicz notes that professional work, too, can be a place and a means for pursuing passion, if it is treated as a value that “engages you and gives you a sense of satisfaction [...] because both work and passion require a person’s conscious involvement: finding purpose, overcoming hardships, staying focused and enjoying one’s activities, skills and direct experiences, and even going beyond selfishness and egocentrism” (2017, p. 95). The autonomous passion of outstanding musicians helps them energetically realize their many goals, and appreciate the values they derive from engaging with music, as highlighted by the following statement: “I wanted to develop, I wanted to get better and better” (EB). Unwavering commitment was also evident in concurrent teaching work: the masters’ support of the younger generation of musicians.

Instrumental passion in everyday life – motivation for practice

Although greatness cannot be “trained,” practice is an indisputable prerequisite for professional musical education. Again, it was passion that was the force behind artists’ work. Outstanding masters referred to the issue of training as follows: “The profession of an artist-musician requires passion, regular, patient and smart practice, consistency in working on oneself, consistency in pursuing one’s goal, creativity, as well as humility in the face of challenges” (BŚ-Ż); “the more one practices, the more one accomplishes, and the more one accomplishes, the more one is motivated to practice” (ZŁ).

Non-musical passions – informal and non-formal areas of improvement

Although musical brilliance can be so powerfully engrossing, non-musical passions often served as ways to deepen one’s understanding of music or inspire more musical

¹ Representative statements of narrators are quoted. The distinctions that indicate the semantic qualification of the categories were made by the authors of the article.

activities. Young outstanding musicians in particular treated these activities as a way to unwind: a respite and an escape from when their passion for music expires, as seeking other opportunities for development, creating an “emergency exit,” especially that the role of an outstanding musician is uncertain. As one of the narrators noted, “one cannot devote one’s life solely to music and practicing. It is necessary to look for many inspirations in order to be able to convey the entire palette of emotions in music later on” (BB).

Trajectories of experiencing passion – intensification, transfer and burnout

Origins and transfer of passion

According to the Model of Authentic Vocation (Weller, 2004), the persistence of passion is a matter of personal predisposition, as well as the coincidental actions of other people, institutions as well as space and time. The artists’ statements did not permit defining a clear moment in life that would entitle someone to the status of a passionate musician. The instrumentalists pointed out, however, that an important time when passion intensified was school years. A child’s “joy of making music,” perseverance, ambition, immanent motivation and the strength of the initial dreams of making music stood out in the memories of those who remained passionate, faithful to their chosen instrument: “But the little stubborn girl only wanted [to play] the piano” (EB), “I was [...] tenacious and determined to play the drums” (MH). According to the outstanding musicians, a moment of reflexive choice and identification with a musical role came in this stage of life: “I made the final decision at the beginning of my studies, when music became my passion.” Youthful passion, boosted by successes, became the orientation for future professional plans and goals, and stimulated the implementation of mature professional projects.

As Romaniuk and Łukasiewicz-Wieleba (2020) argue, “infecting” someone with a passion for music can occur through a family intergenerational transfer. Values, behavioral patterns and a love for a particular art can be passed on in this way. One of the narrators recalled that what shaped her attitude toward music was her observing

the household members who were filled with passion for music... The most important thing for me, however, were the experiences and opportunities that my parents created for me, thanks to which I fell in love with music (ES).

Also peers provided the outstanding musicians with a space they could refer to, where they learned outside of school, and where their passions crystallized and expanded:

I had the chance to learn among friends who were very committed to music... a distinguished group of artists stimulated each other’s musical activities. It was not a competition, but a kind of process of mutual inspiration (ZŁ).

Romaniuk and Łukasiewicz-Wieleba (2020) point out that passion is transmitted through spending time together, so it is not surprising that some of the narrators, even those who do not come from families with musical traditions, declared their desire to transmit their passion to their children by including them in the activities they perform:

I hope that my passion for music, [...] will also become part of our daughter's world. We would like her to come along with us on musical travels, concerts, and for music to become as dear to her as it is to us (BB).

On the other hand, it also seems that it is passion that helps explain why the older instrumentalists continue to remain involved in musical development despite the passage of years (e.g., they act as educators, or jurors of competitions, despite being retired).

Burnout of passion – conflict of motives and dilemmas of role

The interviewed artists pointed out that music filled their personal and professional lives, required sacrifice, and superseded other goals. They made such bitter, pejorative reckoning especially in retrospect, when stating, e.g., that: “all my time is consumed by music and music-related travel” (JP). Sometimes it is precisely this excessive intensity that can cause passion burnout – similar to professional burnout – a sense of being overwhelmed by constant engagement with music. One respondent voiced his awareness of the negative consequences of passion: the way it “hijacks” one’s life and impoverishes or disrupts other spheres of development: “I realized that nothing else but notes and music occupies my life, and that I wouldn’t want this to be the case. Music cannot become your whole life, because at some point you may feel that playing music no longer brings you joy, but only consumes your life” (KK). The result of burnout was limiting contact with music to the bare minimum:

[...] music flows out of every corner, from my every pocket, and in order not to burn out too quickly, I have to find another space for myself... because all our conversations would be reduced to topics of music, repertoire, and that's what I'd like to get away from in the privacy of my home (MH);

[...] the more music-related professional responsibilities I have, [...] the less often I go to the music hall [...] I begin to value silence more than music (KK).

On the other hand, passion can be marked by obsession (Bonneville-Roussy and Valerland, 2018), a very strong, expressive emotionality. As Penderecki noted, it is “a vibrant and sometimes even predatory experience.” Thus, although negative consequences of passion for music were not always articulated in the biographies of the eminent musicians, we can also find them in their ambivalent trajectories of artistic success: marked by a sense of being overworked, of being emotionally “swamped” by professional

activities, of giving up other areas of development, and of making numerous sacrifices and compromises.

Whenever a musician cut down on or gave up on a passion, it was the result of a conflict of motives, especially those connected with status: lack of success, recognition, with frustration or prioritizing financial gratification over aesthetic values, as revealed in this comment: “Conversations with many musicians confirm my words that work is not their passion, but only a means of making money” (ZŁ), which is a fitting example of Melosik’s thought that “the level of – passion-related – intrinsic motivation is always decreased by [...] imposed goals” (2018, p. 13) and, conversely, commitment increases, the higher the level of autonomy and the more creative the work.

Features of the “sound” of the passion for music of outstanding musicians: harmony or atonality?

In the course of the narrative, the semantic fields of “passion” and “musical excellence” intermingled. The prominent musicians recognized passion as an essential component that accompanied their artistic path, a source of motivation, inspiration and commitment to their activities. They also emphasized the role of integrity: “An outstanding musician is one who can be seen to have passion, that is, he does not deceive him/herself or the listener, [...] he/she is musically truthful and not created by someone” (MH). Passion for music was the core and condition of development for the instrumentalists. Passion was defined in their narratives as “authentic vocation and fondness of music” (ES), “love of music” (EB), and “source of constant inspiration” (AG). They recognized it as a harmonious determinant of the continuous development, as well as a pillar in the trajectory of their educational and professional life course, which has specifically helped them adapt to their new musical role, and in pursuing their goals: “For me, passion gave me the power to discover music, to become introduced to its beauty, and also gave me strength in difficult moments” (BŚ-Ż). At the same time, respondents pointed out that not being ready enough, not being mature enough to make the decision to become fully involved, can negatively affect the image of the entire music community. The threat of this atonality and the disruption of musical development was most clearly expressed in the following statement:

[...] we must steer the student in such a way that he or she understands that music cannot be practiced from time to time, but one must devote oneself to it one hundred percent or give it up. A student who will not work on him/herself with passion, enthusiasm, will later spoil the music market (MH).

Experiencing passion as a definition and credo of the artist's profession – a summary of the study

Passion for music, for creating, for sharing music with another person (student and listener) was a very common (direct and indirect) topic of conversations, which tied together the stories. The meaning that the outstanding musicians gave to the experience of passion can be compared to the “basic tone” in the polyphony of conditions and factors constituting musical greatness. As one of the respondents said, “The motto on my path as an artist-musician-teacher is *Whatever you do, do it with passion!* This way you will overcome the difficulties that this profession is fraught with” (BŚ-Ż). To describe this in terms of color according to the Dualistic Model of Passion, we may suppose that their experiencing passion was autonomous, motivated by authenticity and the pursuit of musical/professional mastery.

What distinguished the passion of outstanding musicians? When transforming from gifted students, through creative and inquisitive students, to invariably, intensely and multidimensionally committed artists, valued by audiences and critics in the course of their lives, the outstanding musicians experienced a kind of peculiar “professionalization of passion,” corresponding to focus and precision in pursuit of their goals. This caused them to genuinely immerse in the space of their interests, as well as to expand them in many directions. Unlike non-professionals, their professional activity was dynamized by autonomous, instrumental and harmonious passion which was the axis of their work, and was part of a lifelong development and learning that had, recalling the findings of Litawa (2019), a unique character. The outstanding musicians defined themselves through passion; it was their “essence” of life, both professional and extramusical – “the highest form of involvement, creativity and active creation of one’s biography” (Dudzikowa & Nowak, 2015, p. 7). Passion, according to the artists, had an energizing and inspiring power, and gave them a sense of freedom and authenticity (Melosik, 2018). In the narratives, “being passionate about music” was the starting point for the constant, multidimensional “becoming” outstanding, ascending to the heights of mastery and musical achievement. Awareness of the role of passion, as immanent to the experience of musical excellence, should be considered in optimizing the education of the gifted, which should focus on the identification of interests, the student’s passion for playing an instrument, and the creation of learning situations that take advantage of students’ passion.

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