

**Research Brief:**  
**Instruction Process on the Violin Performance of Great Teachers at Vietnam National Academy of Music**

**Somjit Saysouvanh, Suphanni Luebunchu, and Atha Nantachak**  
*College of Music Mahasarakam University,  
Khamriang Sub-District  
Kantarawichai District, Maha Sarakham Province, Thailand*

**[Abstract]** The Vietnam National Academy of Music has carried on Violin Performing Studies, developing it and searching for ways to promote it at universal standards. Many great teachers at the Vietnam National Academy of Music are accepted as quality violinists. Some of them have received the Best International Violinist Award. This qualitative research is aimed at investigating the instruction of the violin teaching process on violin performance of great teachers at the Vietnam National Academy of Music. A sample group of 34 people, consisting of 10 violin academic teachers, 10 teachers in other musical branches and 14 music experts researchers in instruments were observed, were interviewed, and participated in a focus group. Research data were examined by means of a triangulation technique, and the findings were presented by means of a descriptive analysis.

The findings revealed that the great teachers had instructed their students from the kindergarten level to the university level. The instruction process on the violin performance at all levels was alike; it began with preparation and operation and ended with evolution. The differences among all levels were the difficulty and the complexity of performance techniques.

**[Keywords]** violin instruction process; Vietnam National Academy of Music; Indicators of best practices in music teachers

### **Introduction**

The earliest stringed instruments were mostly plucked (e.g. the Greek lyre). Bowed instruments may have originated in the equestrian cultures of Central Asia, an example being the tanbur that originated in modern-day Uzbekistan or the kobyz (kazakh), an ancient Turkic, kazakh, a stringed instrument, or the Mongolian instrument, the Morin Huur. Turkic and Mogolian horsemen from Inner Asia were probably the world's earliest fiddlers. Their two-stringed, upright fiddles were strung with horsehair bows and often featured a carved horse's head at the end of the neck. The violins, violas, and cellos we play today, and whose bows are still strung with horsehair, are a legacy of the nomads (Smithsonian Center for Folk Life and Cultural Heritage). It is believed that these instruments eventually spread to China, India, the Byzantine Empire, and the Middle East, where they developed into instruments such as the erhu in China, the rebab in the Middle East, the lyra in the Byzantine Empire, and the esraj in India. The violin in its present form emerged in early 16<sup>th</sup> Century Northern Italy, where the port towns of Venice and Genoa maintained extensive ties to Central Asia through the trade routes of the Silk Road.

The modern European violin evolved from various bowed stringed instruments from the Middle East (Hoffman, 1997) and the Byzantine Empire (Kartomi, 1990). It is most likely that the first maker of violins borrowed from three types of current instruments: the rebec, in use since the 10<sup>th</sup> century (itself derived from the Byzantine lyra and the Arabic rebab), the Renaissance fiddle, and the lira da braccio (derived from the byzantine lira). One of the earliest explicit descriptions of the instrument, including its turning, was in the *Epitome Musical* by Tambe de Fer, published in Lyon in 1556. By this time, the violin had already begun to spread throughout Europe (Panum, 1939).

Violins and other Western musical instruments were first introduced in 1856 by French soldiers and government officials during the occupation of Vietnam. In 1927, the French government established a school of music called Nhạc Viện Việt Đông - Conservatoire d' Extrême Orient. The first group of

famous Vietnamese violinists, such as Do Tinh, Nguyen Van Giep, Nguyen Xuan Khoat, and Do Van Lanh, graduated from there. Although Vietnamese musicians had been influenced by classic French music from 1927 to 1954, only a few could lead the life of a violinist. In 1954, Vietnam established a school of music called Truong Am Nhạc Vietnam (Vietnam Conservatory), and Violin Studies in Vietnam have increased as an important vocational subject since then. Moreover, the government has attempted to raise Violin Studies in Vietnam to international standards.

During the first years of passing the long cruel war, many Vietnamese musicians searched for ways to improve their skills; some tried to practice with the great teachers in the country, and some went abroad to learn techniques of violin performance from foreign masters. When they came back home, they dedicated their life to teaching students, and some of their students became the famous violinists and great teachers in violin performance who were accepted worldwide.

Many Vietnamese mastering violin performance were promoted to National Artists and appointed as government officials working for the Performing Arts Department and as teachers working for schools of general education and schools of music. Some of them were specially assigned by the government to be the great masters of violin performance in many countries, such as Mexico, Germany, Russia, Singapore, Japan, Korea, and Thailand

Thus, the situations mentioned above are the main sources of inspiration for encouraging the research entitled Instruction Process on Violin Performance of Great Teachers at the Vietnam National Academy of Music. This research may lead to the development of instruction processes in this field for other countries. The main purpose of this research was to investigate the instruction process on the violin performance of great teachers at the Vietnam National Academy of Music.

### **Materials and Methods**

A methodology of qualitative research was used for this investigation. The elements of the research were as follows:

1. Research Content: The instruction process on the violin performance of great teachers at the Vietnam National Academy of Music
2. Research area: The research area was the Vietnam National Academy of Music
3. Research sample: 3.1 10 Key – informants; 3.2 10 casual informants; 3.3 14 general informants
4. Research instruments: 4.1 observation; 2. Interviews; 4.3 focus group discussion
5. Research period: One year

The first stage of the investigation is a document analysis. The researchers investigated dissertations and documents concerned with understanding and answering questions concerning the purpose of the research. These dissertations and documents were collected and categorized as a base of knowledge for this research. Question for the data collection were built on the information, which this research framework provided. The second stage is a creation of research instruments, an observation form and an interview form created in this stage. All forms were examined and vetted by experts, and then these forms were improved according to the advice of the experts.

The third stage is a field study. After all appointments had been made, the researchers began to conduct a field study according to the dates of appointments. This field study lasted approximately 12 months, and the data were gathered for responding to the research purpose.

The fourth stage is a data correction and research synthesis. The data were examined and corrected by using a triangulation technique. This technique was used for examining the relation between situations and dates, situations and places, and situations and persons. When everything was corrected, the researchers wrote a research report.

The fifth stage is a presentation. The researchers presented the research report in the presence of a research committee. A descriptive analysis was presented through multimedia. Afterwards, the research report was published by the university press.

### Results and Discussion

Great teachers for this research are Duong Van Chinh, Ta Bon, Nguyen Chau Son, Ngo Van Thanh, and Bui Cong Duy. Almost all of them were born in urban families of well-known musician families, so they have absorbed the sounds of musical instruments throughout their life. They have had good opportunity to practice their skills in violin performance during childhood through the support of their parents. Some of them played the violin as early as three years of age, although the music was not a meaningful melody. These great teachers spent 15 – 20 years studying violin performance from kindergarten to the doctorate level.

For example, Professor Ta Bon graduated from the Central Conservatory of Music in Beijing at a junior degree and the P.I.Tchaikovsky Moscow State Conservatoire at the master degree level; Master Duong Van Chinh learned to play the violin with a Russian expert in the field of violin performance and had a golden chance to practice violin performance in Russia for a long time; Professor Nguyen Chau Son graduated from the Franz Liszt Academy of Music in Budapest, Hungary, with a master's degree in Violin Performance; Professor Dr. NgoVan Thanh graduated from the P.I. Tchaikovsky Moscow State Conservatoire with both the bachelor and master degrees in Violin Performance, and a doctoral degree in Music Education; and Dr. Bui Cong Duy graduated from the Novosibirsk State Conservatoire with a junior degree, and he graduated from the Tchaikovsky Music Institute in Moscow with bachelor, master, and doctoral degrees in Violin Performance.

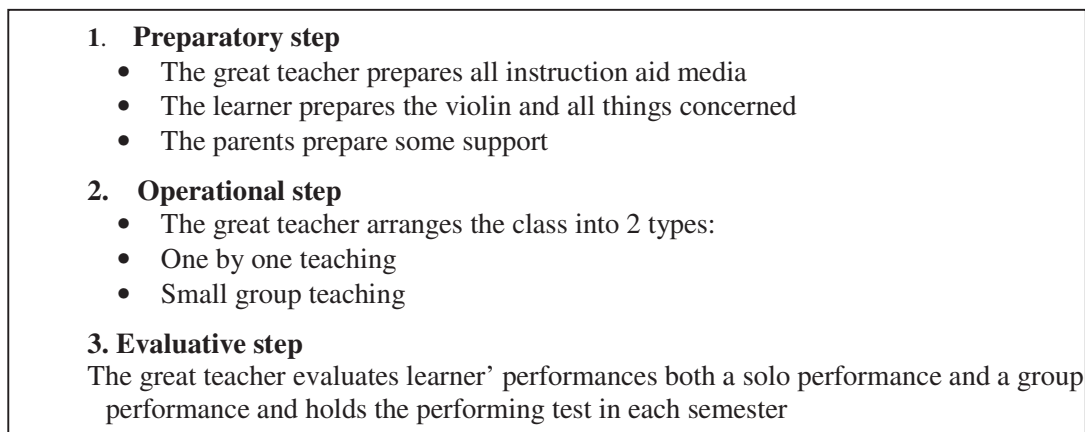
The five great teachers created many notable works for their country, apart from teaching students and writing documents for Vietnam National Academy of Music, such as transmitting techniques of violin performance and as great teachers for other universities in European, Asian, and neighboring countries. They are also sending students to violin performance contests at both the national and international levels, especially sending students to the Tchaikovsky competition in Russia. Many students from here usually won first and second prizes at international concerto competitions, which were held worldwide.

In terms of the instructional process of the violin performance of the great teachers at the Vietnam National Academy of Music, the research revealed that all of them used the institute's curriculum, which was derived from the curriculum of the Tchaikovsky Music institute in Moscow. However, they combined it with Vietnamese philosophy and learning styles of each learner. An overview of the instruction process consisted of preparation, operation, and evaluation.

In the preparatory step, each great teacher prepared all instruction for basic postures of the violin player, musical intervals and scales, etudes, pieces of music, concertos, and sonatas. The great teachers used their violins for a performing demonstration. The learners had their own violin for practicing their performing skills, and they had notebooks for recording some of their faults and the teachers' comments in order to use them as important information for improving their performances. Moreover, each learner had an institute's handbook on violin performance and a music stand at home for practicing performing skills by oneself. The important thing that led the learner to the great achievement was the support of parents and organizations concerned. The great teacher only facilitated learners with instruction media aids and encouraged them to prepare for an operational step.

In the operational step, each great teacher would introduce learners to the elements of the violin and how to play them, then demonstrated the violin performance in the presence of the learners. The demonstration processed through an easy series of notes or scales to complex ones. As for the beginner, basic notes and scales, such as on-stage presence, good manners, and good performing postures were introduced. They also taught discipline in the classroom and concentration on the violin performance. In order to make sure that the learners would be good violin players in the future, the great teacher arranged the class into 2 types: 1) one-on-one teaching and 2) small-group teaching. For one-on-one teaching, each learner was taught how to perform the violin in a standing posture, how to control notes, scales and bowing techniques, such as how to use the chin for gripping the violin. The teacher spent one hour per learner. In the case of small-group teaching, the teacher would introduce the basis of a group performance focused on musical harmony, good memory for notes and scales, group unity, and good discipline.

In the evaluative step, each great teacher would evaluate the learner's performances both as a solo performance and a group performance. Every time the violin performance finished, the teacher promptly evaluated and suggested to the performer something that was incorrect, including assigning him or her a special exercise in order to correct mistakes. The main points used for evaluating were basic postures and manners of the violin player, good memory for notes and scales of the violin player, perfection in a performance of an etude, a piece of music, a sonata, and a concerto of the violin player. Moreover, the performing test would be held three times in each semester. The instruction process on the violin performance of great teachers at the Vietnam National Academy of Music can be seen Figure 1.



*Figure 1. Three steps of instruction*

It can be said that the achievement of instruction process on the violin performance of the great teachers depends on the cooperation of learners, parents of learners, and all persons concerned. This is consistent with Leonhard (1975, pp. 227 – 268), who suggests that the great achievement of instruction process in music performance needed time, a high level of intention of both learners and instructors, and a wide variety of demonstrative techniques. The great teachers mixed Vietnamese philosophy with the institute's curriculum derived from the curriculum of the Tchaikovsky Music Institute in Moscow in order to preserve the cultural identity of the Vietnamese culture. This is consistent with Meeker (2007, p.120), who stated that folk music in Northern Vietnam had changed toward modern music while the government tried to preserve it. It is also consistent with Santos (2009, p. 105), who stated that an economic change affected a change of perpetuation and instruction process on folk music performance of Asian countries, so instructors or artists should make an appropriate balance between folk and modern music. In the case of the development of musical education, Minjewa (1985, pp.12 – 24) suggested that the basic purpose of musical education was to develop both quality and quantity of musical works, musicians, artists, and persons concerned. Pumin (2004, p. 99), and he suggested that factors related to achievement in learning violin of each learner were the home's atmosphere and the parents' support.

### **Conclusion**

The great teachers at the Vietnam National Academy of Music dedicate their lives to teaching musical students in order to promote them to win the prizes of the violin performing competitions at both national and international levels. These research results may be a guideline for the organizations that conduct musical affairs. Moreover, they also benefit instructors or artists who are in charge of this field.

### **References**

Hoffman, M. (1990). *The NPR classical music companion: terms and concepts from A to Z*. New York : Houghton Mifflin Harcourt.

- Kartomi, M. J. (1990). *On concepts and classifications of musical instruments*. Chicago Studies in Ethnomusicology. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Leonhard, C., & House, R. W. (1975). *Foundations and principles of music education*. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. New York: Mc Graw – Hill Book Company.
- Meeker, L. (2007). *Musical transmission: Folk music, mediation and modernity. In Northern Vietnam*. Doctoral Thesis. New York: Columbia University
- Minjewa, P. (1985). *Pedagogy of music*. Sofia: National Academy of Music
- Panum, Hortense. (1989). *The stringed instruments of the middle ages, their evolution and development*. London: William Reeves.
- Pumin, P. (2004). *Factors related to achievement in learning violin*. Ph.d.Thesis. Nakhonpathom: Mahidol University.
- Santos, R. P. (2009). *Transmission pedagogy and education: A critical study of Asian traditional music culture in post-modern times in Thailand and Indonesia*. Manila: University of the Philippines Dilliman.
- The Smithsonian Center for FolkLife and Cultural Heritage. (2002). *The silk road: Connecting cultures creating trust*. The 36th annual Smithsonian Folklife Festival on the National Mall. Washington. D.C. Retrieved from [http://archive.org/stream/silkroadconnecti00smit/silkroadconnecti00smit\\_djvu.txt](http://archive.org/stream/silkroadconnecti00smit/silkroadconnecti00smit_djvu.txt)