

Exploring and comparing differences in performance anxiety and coping strategies between contesting and non-contesting brass band players

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Article Info.	Abstract
<u>Date Submitted:</u> November 2023 <u>Date Accepted:</u> March 2024 <u>Date Published:</u> May 2024	Although performance anxiety has been studied within a variety of musical contexts, such as orchestral players (ICSOM, 2015; Papageorgi, Hallam & Welch, 2007) choral singers (Ryan & Andrews, 2009), and pianists with high levels of skill (Yoshie, Kudo, Murakoshi & Ohtsuki, 2009), a relatively limited number of established studies have been carried out amongst brass band players; with most studies focused on the aforementioned’ mental health (Williamson & Bonshor, 2019). We therefore argue that the current study is somewhat unique as it explored and compared performance anxiety and coping strategies of contesting and non-contesting brass band players: thus, addressing the gap in the current knowledge. The research was a mixed method study and followed a sequential explanatory design. The quantitative data involved the use of the <i>Kenny Music Performance Anxiety Inventory</i>(K-MPAI) (Kenny, [revised] 2009) whilst qualitative data involved interviews with contesting and non-contesting brass band players. The latter was achieved to augment and explain the quantitative data further (Cresswell & Cresswell, 2018; Punch, 2014). Findings suggested contesting brass band players experience heightened performance anxiety compared to their non-contesting counterparts, and experience significantly more physical symptoms and worries regarding self-scrutiny and the scrutiny of others. Furthermore, it was implied that discussions regarding performance anxiety within the brass band community were ‘non-existent’. In relation to coping strategies, the most effective methods were ‘preparation and practice’ and having a ‘positive mental attitude’ (PMA), whilst alcohol and beta-blockers were the least effective. Recommendations for future research and factors requiring more detailed research should be given to understanding how performance anxiety affects performers on the contest day and immediately afterwards, the attitudes towards females in brass banding; and studies i.e., longitudinal, cross-sectional, or case studies on international brass banding communities in relation to performance anxiety and/or its discussions should be focused upon.

1. Introduction

Music listening and playing has been shown to have a positive impact on our everyday lives (Groarke & Hogan, 2017; Gross & Musgrave. 2016, 2017), with therapeutic properties being demonstrated through studies (Silverman & Hallberg, 2015), however, for many musicians, music performance anxiety (MPA) can be a major issue (Ackermann, Kenny, O’Brien & Driscoll, 2014; Burin & Osorio, 2017, Gross & Musgrave. 2016, 2017).

MPA is a response experienced by a performer in which stress levels go beyond the ordinary arousal state and can cause cognitive, behavioural and somatic symptoms (Kenny, 2010; Matai & Ginsborg, 2017; Osborne & Kenny, 2005). Studies such as that of Papageorgi et al. (2011) have shown that different music contexts have varying levels of MPA, for instance, classical and orchestral musicians have heightened levels of anxiety in comparison to popular, jazz, and Scottish traditional musicians. Papageorgi et al. (2011) conclude that further research is required however that focuses on in-depth comparisons between other informal and formal music contexts.

Research shows there are numerous factors which contribute to a performers MPA; with low self-esteem, perfectionist views, negative self-concept, sensitivity to evaluation by others' judgement, limited performance experience, and competitive playing being the most predominant. With regards to the last of these, Yoshie et al. (2009) was able to demonstrate that individuals placed in a competitive situation as opposed to a non-competitive one had elevated heart rates, sweat rates and EMG readings; thus, showing the physiological and physical impact and pressure that competitive playing has on individuals. Studies have found musicians use an array of adaptive (helpful) and maladaptive (unhelpful) coping strategies. The most common adaptive strategies include meditation, exercise, prayer, CBT, and deep breathing, whereas maladaptive strategies such as substance abuse is reported as being frequently used by musicians (Kenny and Halls, 2017; Osborne & Kenny, 2008; Papageorgi, Creech & Welch, 2011; Papageorgi, Hallam & Welch, 2007; Ryan & Andrews, 2009; Yoshie et al., 2009).

The brass banding context

To date, brass band studies are limited, albeit they do cover an array of topics such as comparisons of informal and formal UK brass band contexts, studies that focus on award winning school brass bands (outside of the UK), and wellbeing of brass band players (Barsden, 2017; Jones, 2007; Williamson & Bonshor, 2019); however, it must be acknowledged that discussions regarding MPA and/or coping strategies are limited – the likely reason for this is that in the grand scheme of things, the brass band community is diminutive when compared to orchestral, classical, and choral communities and so perhaps does not receive the attention it perhaps deserves. Although studies are minimal, studies highlight the positive and potentially negative issues associated with brass band playing in the UK (Williamson and Bonshor, 2019). Williamson and Bonshor (2019) conducted an online survey of UK brass band players ($n = 346$) which focused on five key areas of wellbeing, namely physical, psychological, social, emotional, and spiritual wellbeing. They used descriptive statistical analysis alongside thematic analysis to establish their findings and found that although brass band playing can enhance respiratory function, improve body posture, and can aid everyday mental health and social interaction, the physical demands of playing an instrument and the challenges that contest brass banding presents such as

competitiveness and the emotional highs and lows of winning and losing may be contributing to heightened MPA in these musicians. In conclusion, they acknowledged more in-depth research was needed to address the impact contest brass banding may have on individuals.

Holman (2018) stated there are over 2,000 individual brass bands in the UK alone, with 4 or 5 major brass band contests occurring annually in the UK, in addition to many regional and/or local contests that might be unaccounted for (4barsrest, 2022). Compared to other music contexts, the brass band context is distinctive for its 'contesting', with most other music contexts such as choral and orchestral, only scheduling 1 or 2 contests a year (Tolley, n.d). With research hypothesising that contest brass banding could be a predominant factor of heightened performance anxiety in these players (Williamson & Bonshor, 2019), and research from alternative music contexts such as classical, demonstrating heightened MPA and a multitude of symptoms when placed in a competitive situation (Yoshie et al., 2009), addressing brass band players MPA and the coping strategies used will enhance our understanding of both the contesting, and the non-contesting musician and will allow for better education on the best and worst strategies one could use when trying to manage MPA. Consequently, you could also argue that the aforesaid might improve wellbeing for many i.e., those in the wider brass band community and other musicians.

Studies to date have used different methodological approaches for instance; surveys (Fishbein & Middlestadt, 1987; ICSOM, 2015; Ryan & Andrews, 2009; Williamson & Bonshor, 2019), anxiety scales (Osborne & Kenny, 2008; Yoshie et al., 2009), descriptive self-reports (Osborne & Kenny, 2008), and physiological monitoring methods such as heart rate, sweat rate and EMG readings (Yoshie et al, 2009); however, very few have employed an interview process and/or used mixed methods (Ackermann et al., 2014). The researcher felt it was important to include an interview process alongside an original questionnaire, and the *Kenny Music Performance Anxiety Inventory* (Kenny, [Revised] 2009) because they are an effective way of accessing people's perceptions and meanings of specific situations, and when combined with the other measures interviews also provide depth (Punch, 2014). One could therefore argue this study will address a potential gap in the kind of evidence and understanding that these kinds of methodological approaches can provide.

The aim of the current study is to compare differences in performance anxiety and coping strategies in contesting and non-contesting brass band players, and the research questions are as follows: 1) What are the main causes of performance anxiety and do the factors of performance anxiety differ between contesting and non-contesting players?, 2) What coping strategies do brass band players employ and do they differ between contesting and non-contesting?

2. Method and findings

This research utilised a sequential explanatory approach i.e., a quantitative phase followed by a qualitative phase, whereby an online questionnaire alongside the *Kenny Music Performance Anxiety Inventory*(K-MPAI) (Kenny, [revised] 2009) was undertaken, followed by semi-

structured interviews. A mixed-method approach enabled for different questions to be investigated at different points of the study, so for instance, the questionnaire and K-MPAI was conducted to determine the players experience levels, demographics, coping strategies and performance anxiety scores, whereas the interviews were undertaken to augment and explain the findings from the questionnaire and K-MPAI (Cresswell & Cresswell, 2018; Punch, 2014).

3. Study One: Questionnaire and Kenny Music Performance Anxiety Inventory (K-MPAI, Kenny, [revised] 2009)

3.1 Method

Participants

Three hundred and forty-eight (Contesting $n = 263$, non-contesting $n = 85$) participants completed the questionnaire study. There was an almost even male to female ratio in both groups (Contesting females $n = 133$, Contesting males $n = 130$. Non-contesting females $n = 43$, non-contesting males $n = 41$), with most being of a White British Ethnicity (259 of the 263 contesting participants were of White British ethnicity, whereas 84 of the 85 non-contesting participants were White British. The age of the participants was varied, however most were aged between 18 and 64 years of age, with a notable decline in participants from the 65 and over category (Contesting $n = 9$, non-contesting $n = 5$).

Materials and procedure:

As stated prior, the questionnaire study was presented in two parts: 1) an original questionnaire and 2) the *Kenny Music Performance Anxiety Inventory* (K-MPAI) (Kenny, [revised] 2009).

The original questionnaire included **28** questions that focused on gaining relevant information on the participants demographic status', player experience, and understanding their coping strategy usage. With regards to the *Kenny Music Performance Anxiety Inventory* (K-MPAI) (Kenny, [revised]2009), this is a **40-item** inventory based on Barlow's (2002) emotion-based theory of anxiety disorders (Sheriff & Yoong, 2015). It explores the following components: 1) Proximal somatic anxiety and worry about performance; 2) Worry/dread (negative cognitions) focused on self/other scrutiny; 3) Depression/hopelessness (psychological vulnerability); 4) Parental empathy; 5) Memory; 6) Generational transmission of anxiety; 7) Anxious apprehension; and 8) Biological vulnerability (Kenny, [revised] 2009).

Participants completed the questionnaire study online and was distributed through email, social media, and via a series of published articles on brass band associated websites. The study was approved by the ethics committee at the University of Huddersfield (SREP/2018/056).

3.2 Findings

Study One: Questionnaire Study*Physical symptoms and MPA*

Contesting players were more likely to experience proximal somatic anxiety and worry about performance more than their non-contesting counterparts; with contesting players more likely to **experience a dry mouth** (K12, Contesting M rank = 182.5, n = 263, non-contesting M rank = 149.75, n = 85, U = 9074, Z = -2.6, p = .008, r = .14), have an **increased heart rate or a pounding chest** (K22, Contesting M rank = 183.9, n = 263, non-contesting M rank = 145.42, n = 85, U = 8706, Z = -3.1, p = .002, r = .16), **experience shaking or trembling** (K36, Contesting M rank = 181.26, n = 263, non-contesting M rank = 153.88, n = 85, U = 9425, Z = -2.2, p = .03, r = .11), and encounter **sleep disturbances** prior to performance (K34, Contesting M rank = 184.03, n = 263, non-contesting M rank = 145.01, n = 85, U = 8671, Z = -3.2, p = .001, r = .17).

Self-scrutiny, judgement from others and MPA

Contesting players focused more on self or others scrutiny as opposed to their non-contesting counterparts. Worries regarding **a negative reaction from the audience** (K18, Contesting M rank = 180.8, n = 263, non-contesting M rank = 155.1, n = 85, U = 9527, Z = -2.08, p = .04, r = .11), **a bad performance ruining careers** (K21, Contesting M rank = 184, n = 263, non-contesting M rank = 142.05, n = 85, U = 8419, Z = -3.6, p = .00, r = .2), **not thinking they had played well enough** (K25, Contesting M rank = 181.5, n = 263, non-contesting M rank = 152.7, n = 85, U = 9328, Z = -2.3, p = .02, r = .12), **and replaying performances in their mind** (K32, Contesting M rank = 183.7, n = 263, non-contesting M rank = 146.15, n = 85, U = 8768, Z = -3.02, p = .002, r = .16) were all issues concerning these players. Moreover, contesting players had **fears about their own judgement prior to performing** (K39, Contesting M rank = 182, n = 263, non-contesting M rank = 151, n = 85, U = 9180, Z = -2.5, p = .01, r = .13), however; slightly contradictory to this, the findings did also demonstrate they were more likely to **remain committed** to performing than the non-contesting players (K40, Contesting M rank = 182.33, n = 263, non-contesting M rank = 150.26, n = 85, U = 9117, Z = -2.6, p = .009, r = .14).

Non-contesting band players and lower confidence levels

Another focus of Study One was to establish whether there was a relationship between the non-contesting players who had played in a contesting band before with those that had not. After conducting *Mann-Whitney U tests*, statistically significant results were found; non-contesting players who had not played in a contesting band previously had **less confidence in their ability to perform well even when they had prepared** (K7

– ‘Yes’ to having played in a contesting band before $Md = 37.5, n = 56$, ‘No’ to having played in a contesting band before $Md = 52.5, n = 28; U = 504, z = -2.7, p = .007, r = .03$), and they were **more likely to recall being anxious early on in their musical studies** as opposed to the non-contesting players that had played in a contesting band before ($K20$ – ‘Yes’ to having played in a contesting band before $Md = 37.03, n = 56$, ‘No’ to having played in a contesting band before $Md = 53.4, n = 28; U = 447.5, z = -2.9, p = .003, r = .03$).

The findings implied that a lack of confidence and early onset performance anxiety may influence a player’s decision to forego playing in a contesting band; thus, this was further investigated by conducting individual semi-structured interviews.

The link between preparation and practice and MPA

Mann-Whitney *U* tests were performed to analyse the relationship between the contesting group of players and preparation and practice. **Contesting players who did not state they did employ ‘preparation and practice’** as a coping strategy were said to feel **less in control of their life** ($K1$, section three – ‘No’ to using preparation and practice $Md = 133.98, n = 255$, ‘Yes’ to using preparation and practice $Md = 68.75, n = 8; U = 514, z = -2.4, p = .01, r = .009$) and were **more likely to give up on worthwhile opportunities** ($K24$, section seven – ‘No’ to using preparation and practice $Md = 133.95, n = 255$, ‘Yes’ to using preparation and practice $Md = 70, n = 8; U = 524, z = -2.4, p = .01, r = .009$) when comparing them with the contesting players that did state they used the aforementioned; thus implying preparation and practice is an important factor in alleviating contesting brass band players anxiety. This will be discussed further in the interview study (Study Two).

4. Summary and Outcomes of Study One Findings

The aim of Study One was to establish contesting and non-contesting brass band players demographic information, the factors and symptoms of MPA, and the coping strategies used by the aforementioned brass band players.

Study One found contesting players experienced more physical symptoms and were more likely to be self-critical or fear scrutiny of others as opposed to their non-contesting counterparts. Moreover, when analysing the non-contesting players, Study One found those who had never played in a contesting band before had lower confidence levels in their ability than those who had previously played in a contesting band.

The findings demonstrated there were many coping strategies employed by the brass band community, however, there were some noteworthy statistical significances with regards to the contesting group; with those who did not reportedly employ preparation and practice as a frequent coping strategy being more likely to feel less in control of their life and give up on worthwhile opportunities.

After consideration, the aim of Study Two will be to explore brass band players experiences and perceptions relating to the symptoms and/or factors of MPA and will focus on understanding the different coping strategies in-depth. Moreover, because Study One implied performance anxiety was widespread amongst brass band players, and was significantly heightened in contesting players, it was accepted that Study Two should also explore the prevalence of performance anxiety discussions within the community to ascertain whether this could be a potential factor of heightened MPA amongst these players.

5. Study Two: Interviews

5.1 Method

Participants

Seven participants were interviewed. Of the three contesting participants interviewed, two were male and one were female. Both male participants had over thirty-one plus years' experience, with the first participant playing in one of the most elite (Championship band) brass bands currently, whereas the second male, although they had played in a Championship band a couple of years prior, was now playing in a First section. With regards to the female contesting player, they had played between 11 and 20 years and played in a First section band.

In relation to the non-contesting interviewees, 4 were interviewed. (Male $n = 2$, Female $n = 2$). Three of the participants had 1 to 5 years' experience, whereas one participant had had 11 to 20 years (male). Moreover, the latter participant was the only individual with contesting brass band playing experience.

Participants were recruited via the questionnaire study.

Materials

The interview schedule contained fifteen predetermined questions, with follow-up questions proceeding participant responses. The topics and questions were influenced and subsequently developed through the Study One findings. Topics explored were brass band history and experience, performance anxiety symptoms, attitudes in relation to performance anxiety, gender and banding, and coping strategies. However, to gain some initial context and enable the interviewer to adapt each interview to suit the individual, short historical brass band profiles for each participant were established at the start.

Procedure

Semi-structured interviews were conducted individually, either face to face or online. The interviews lasted between 30 minutes to one hour and twenty. The interviews were

done at the University of Huddersfield to increase security. Participants were asked to sign a consent form prior to the interview, with signed forms being sent via email.

An interview schedule was read out to each participant, followed by a polite request to switch off any mobile phones to avoid unnecessary interruptions. For analysis purposes, interviews were recorded using a Dictaphone and mobile phone; should one device present with problems, the other would become invaluable.

The study was approved by the ethics committee at the University of Huddersfield (SREP/2019/001).

Analysis

Interviews were analysed using Thematic Analysis, more specifically *Template Analysis (TA)*. Thematic Analysis enables specific themes and patterns to be identified within textual data, making it easier to establish key points in research findings (King & Brooks, 2017). Additionally, *TA* provides a level of adaptability and is efficient i.e., once an initial template is created, subsequent templates can be developed quickly.

TA typically follows a series of steps, and the current study followed a similar sequence. *Familiarisation* (readthrough of two transcripts), followed by establishing significant material that may support the *a priori* themes: in this instance, the themes were established using the Study One findings. Afterwards, potential emergent themes were clustered using a mind-map format in readiness for producing the initial template. Lastly, the remaining transcripts were read; whereby, the second template and final templates were developed consecutively (King & Brooks, 2017).

5.2 Findings

Why play in a brass band?

Participants were asked ‘Why do you play in a brass band?’ to establish if there were any differing factors for those who opt to play in a contest band with those who do not. Although there were some disparities between the two groups, predominant reasons for both groups were ‘socialisation’ and ‘enjoyment’. Additionally, there was a suggestion of two sides to playing in a brass band: a musical and a non-musical side.

Musical account:

‘You get that moment in barber shop singing.... where they all hit that vocal note... you get that ring... and it’s like “Phwoar!”. I am waiting for that moment...you get that buzz moment on stage when you have finished’. (P2, C)

Non-musical account:

‘You build friendships...You get the camaraderie, family and it’s a different place to go to than your normal part of the day’. (P2, C)

Study One suggested those who had never played in a contesting band before lacked confidence, and Study Two supported these findings; albeit, they also highlighted further factors, i.e., personal lifestyle choice, taking a relaxed approach to playing, and not having a competitive characteristic.

Researcher (R): Is it something you would be looking at doing in the future?

P5: No [laughs]

R: Why do you say that?

P5: I’m just not competitive at all, not at all

Additionally, contest brass banding requires significant commitment, with intense rehearsing and practice regimes said to be ‘the norm’; and so, one can perhaps understand why many individuals opt out of playing in a contest brass band.

Contest brass banding increases symptoms and heightens MPA

Study One found those who partake in contest brass banding had increased symptoms and heightened MPA compared to their non-contesting counterparts, and the findings of Study Two support this.

‘You get to a contest... the contest scene itself and the context puts more pressure on you... there’s more chance of going into flight, rather than fight mode... Part of that is going on the contest stage, walk on, put the mutes down, look at the audience and your heartbeats going, you can also see people in the audience’ (P2, C).

The above quote from Study Two best embodies the experiences from those in the contesting group with regards to the pressure they feel when partaking in a contest.

In addition to the above however, ‘shallow breathing’, ‘twitching or shaky legs’, an ‘inability to fill the instrument’ and ‘crying’ were also reported symptoms of MPA for the contesting group; something which the non-contesting group did not report as frequently. Moreover, contesting was said to cause irrational thoughts, with some participants stating they had feelings of not being good enough and were often emotionally drained. Though both the contesting and non-contesting groups were found to place a huge amount of pressure on themselves to perform and felt a significant pressure from others, as with the Study One findings, the Study Two findings found the aforesaid to be more prevalent amongst the contesting players; with pressure from other

band members', 'renowned musicians', 'audience members', 'toxic players' (players who impinge their own anxiety on others), 'adjudicators' and 'conductors' being reported by the Study two participants. With regards to the latter, this was said to particularly affect MPA levels, so for instance, '*conductors who were demoralising*', '*held high expectations*', made guest appearances within the band, and '*portrayed themselves as having less confidence*' were reported to significantly heighten participants' anxiety levels, especially before a contest. In comparison however, a good conductor was described as having the opposite effect on MPA.

'We were backstage and he [the conductor] got us out and instead of giving us the whole 'Come on', he just quietly said 'Gentleman, we are on now for something that has never been done before, but I don't want that to affect you... you are [Undisclosed band] and you are a very good band and can do things that not many bands can, so we are going to go on...and play the music'. (P7, C).

Lastly, during Study Two it was suggested that those who perform at the top of the brass banding ladder so to speak i.e., '*the elite*', require a totally different mindset, with there being no room for MPA. Moreover, participants two and seven suggested that the accepted practice for those who did not perform at the expected standards would also incur ramifications such as '*being replaced/sacked*', could have careers jeopardised, and might be ostracised by the community.

Coping strategies? The best and the worst?

After collating the findings from Study One and Two, it should be accepted there are many coping strategies used to manage MPA, such as breathing exercises, physical exercise, music listening, visualisation, Kalms, communicating with others, chewing gum or gentle biting of the tongue to promote saliva, and continual exposure to the stress, however there were two strategies which stood out more than any of the others: '*Preparation and Practice*' and having a *Positive Mental Attitude (PMA)*.

One overriding feeling from Study One and Two is that 'preparation and practice' and having a positive mental attitude (PMA) is key for improving MPA in both contesting and non-contesting players, with Study Two's participant one response best embodying the mentality of most interviewees feelings towards how preparation and practice can be fundamental in managing MPA, and participant seven's response best representing most of the participants thoughts on how PMA can help when trying to get through a performance.

'if you don't practice it until you can play it right, practice it until you can't play it wrong' (P1, C).

'use the [anxious] energy to get something positive out of it'. (P7, C)

The findings from Study One showed that alcohol and beta-blockers were the least effective strategies, with those who currently used or had used the two strategies said to have higher K-MPAI anxiety mean scores, and though Study Two findings supported this, the latter study was also able to obtain first-hand experiences and perceptions about the aforementioned strategies.

‘[alcohol] should not be used prior to a performance due to the un-professionalism’. (P5, NC).

‘[beta-blockers] are not the best solution... they can easily become a crutch’. (P7, C)

Moreover, with regards to beta-blockers, Study Two participants were also divergent with regards to the emotions that were felt when using them for MPA; with one participant recalling how beta-blockers had left them feeling ‘*no emotion*’, whereas another participant believed they were able to ‘*feel the music, feel the event*’ and ‘*give a good performance*’.

‘*MPA discussions do not exist in the community*’.

There was a strong implication that performance anxiety discussions were not commonplace throughout the UK brass band movement; with fears of ‘*receiving a negative reaction*’ being the leading reason for why players did not speak out; regardless, some of the participants from the current study were open enough to state they may be comfortable discussing their anxieties with a couple of experienced players and/or the conductor of their band.

‘Like if I went to [the conductor] and said ‘oh, I’m messing this bit up because I’m nervous’... I think he would say let’s sort this out, so I would feel comfortable asking him about it’. (P1, C)

Although the findings suggest discussions are scarce, this was particularly true within the ‘elite’ brass band scene, with participants expressing players’ who do present with performance anxiety ‘*tend not to last*’. It is therefore easy to appreciate why many players are perhaps reluctant to confide in their peers if there are potential ramifications.

6. Summary of Study Two findings

Though the questionnaire study (Study One) was integral for attaining demographic information from the brass band players, the coping strategies they used, and achieving accurate MPA levels between contesting and non-contesting brass band players, the interviews from Study Two allowed the researcher to obtain first-hand experiences and perceptions about the aforementioned from the differing brass band communities (contesting and non-contesting); thus, a deeper understanding was achieved.

One question that was not asked during Study One was why the players choose to play in a brass band as the researcher felt this could be addressed sufficiently in Study Two. The findings showed that irrespective of their brass band identity predominant factors for playing in a brass band included ‘socialisation’ and ‘enjoyment’. Moreover, though Study One suggested that a lack of confidence stopped some individuals from engaging with the contesting community, Study two was used to uncover other potential factors, with lifestyle choices, a lack of competitiveness, and having a relaxed approach to playing being further reported.

A fast heart rate and feelings of panic were presented by both groups during both Study One and Two; however, Study Two suggested these were much more prevalent and/or severe amongst the contesting group, with it being suggested that ‘fight or flight’ responses on the contest stage were the norm. Additionally, although Study One and Study Two found that pressure from self and others were the biggest causes of MPA in the contesting and non-contesting community, the Study Two findings also suggested that for those playing in ‘elite’ contesting brass bands, the pressure was the strongest, with it being implied that should a player perform badly, they would face ramifications such as being sacked by the band or ostracized by their community. Moreover, careers were more likely to be jeopardised for those performing at the ‘elite’ level should they ‘have a bad day’.

Study Two found the most effective and ineffective coping strategies were in line with those from Study One, with preparation and practice and having a positive mental attitude being said to be the most effective, whilst alcohol and beta-blockers were the least effective.

One topic that was explored during Study Two was that of performance anxiety discussions, with it being suggested there was a lack of the aforementioned discussions within the wider community; with the predominant reason being related to the fear of receiving a negative reaction. Additionally, findings suggested that discussions of MPA were even more sparse amongst the contesting brass band players due to the competitive nature of this particular community. Moreover, the findings also suggested that such discussions could be even more sparse in the contesting community due to the competitive nature of this particular community.

7. Discussion

This study identified and compared performance anxiety and coping strategies in contesting and non-contesting brass band players, with data collection including an original questionnaire (Study One) alongside the K-MPAI (Study One), and interviews (Study Two). A triangulation method of analysis was utilised, meaning Study One’s findings were validated further via Study Two. Consequently, this approach of analysis will have strengthened the overall findings.

Previous studies show performance anxiety causes many physical symptoms such as an increased heart rate, feelings of panic, and sweating, and can be triggered by countless factors: being in a competitive situation, a lack of preparation or experience, negative self-concept and audience types and perceptions for instance (Hsu, 2012; ICSOM, 2015; Papageorgi et al., 2007; Williamson & Bonshor, 2019; Yoshie et al., 2009); the findings from the current study echo this.

Although Study One was used to gain statistical data, Study Two highlighted additional stressors faced by contesting players in which Study One could not identify, such as apprehension over contest adjudication and demanding or demoralising conductors/players; with the latter being deemed more noticeable pre-contest when relationships could become challenging. Importantly, these findings are reminiscent of those found by previous studies which also centred on contest adjudication, and the anxiety it induces (Williamson & Bonshor, 2019; Yoshie et al., 2009). Though we are beginning to understand how MPA affects competitive musicians prior to the contest day, it has to be accepted there is limited research how MPA affects musicians on the contest day, and immediately afterwards; thus future research should consider addressing this. Study One showed that regardless of the heightened MPA in which contesting players presented, they were still more likely to remain committed to performing than their non-contesting counterparts. When interviewing participants in Study Two it was also palpable that although contesting does have an emotional impact on these players, with a sense of dread, panic and anxiety often encompassing the players prior to, and whilst being on the contest stage, once a performance had finished, for most, two feelings surpassed the aforementioned if they had performed well: ‘relief’ and ‘elation’. It could perhaps be concluded that the subsequent positive feelings they feel after said performances may outweigh the initial MPA; therefore, motivating them enough to keep performing.

The research aimed to understand why some players are reluctant to join a contesting band, with this mostly attributed to three factors. First, Study One found those who had never played in a contesting band before had a lack of confidence in their ability, and Study Two echoed this. Second, when interviewing non-contesting players from Study who had never played in a contesting band before, a lack of competitiveness and a fear of being judged also emerged as major factors for the aforesaid. Previous studies (Williamson & Bonshor, 2019) support that contest brass banding is competitive and volatile in nature, so it is easy to comprehend how the above factors may influence a player’s decision to join a contesting band or not.

Studies (ICSOM, 2015; Ryan & Andrews, 2009) have demonstrated that ‘preparation and practice’ and having a positive mental attitude (PMA) are the most effective coping strategies for MPA, whilst alcohol and beta-blockers are seen to be the least effective, and the current study findings suggest the same; with Study One showing those who had or did use these strategies had lower K-MPAI anxiety scores, whilst detailed accounts from participants of Study Two participants suggested the above strategies were more superior and did lower MPA. Oppositely, Study One showed those who had used or did use alcohol or beta-blockers had the highest K-MPAI anxiety scores, whilst participants of Study Two accentuated there were ‘*far more superior strategies*’ based on their own experiences. It would therefore be recommended individuals evaluate their situation and seek professional help before perhaps employing the latter methods due to their demonstrated ineffectiveness at alleviating MPA.

The last, and perhaps most significant finding was that the finding from Study Two suggested performance anxiety discussions were significantly limited within the brass band community due to worries about receiving a negative reaction. Moreover, individuals who were interviewed

from the contesting community had significant fears of being open about MPA because they felt this could jeopardise their career if they showed ‘weakness’. The researcher believes to promote better health and well-being amongst these musicians, discussions need to be commonplace and although ‘group effort’ is a fundamental factor of brass banding, players tend to isolate themselves rather than articulate their anxieties which may explain the heightened MPA in these players. Moreover, future research might also want to address the implications of the lack of discussion about MPA within the brass band community and/or could design an intervention which would enhance our knowledge and improve well-being amongst these players.

Brass bands are acclaimed worldwide, however there are very few studies which focus on the international brass band scene, with most focusing on school brass bands as opposed to adult brass bands (Barsden, 2017). Moreover, it is understood the current study is the first of its kind in addressing MPA in-depth, albeit it was based on UK brass band players only; thus studies i.e., longitudinal study, cross-sectional study, or case study that focuses on MPA within the international brass band community should be considered as a way forward for enhancing our knowledge.

8. Conclusion

This study aimed to explore and compare music performance anxiety (MPA) and coping strategies in contesting and non-contesting UK brass band players.

Although the current study found that playing in a contesting band may have a detrimental effect on some individuals, the study accepted there were many social and enjoyment aspects of brass banding that could contribute to greater levels of well-being; and so, the study could be used to inform and educate other musicians and those working in the music education sector.

Although there were two fundamental factors found to alleviate brass band performance anxiety; preparation and practice and having a positive mental attitude, the current study indicated that discussions on performance anxiety in the UK brass band community are ‘*non-existent*’; the researcher (first-author) therefore concludes if we are to promote better health and wellbeing in these players, such discussions need to become ‘the norm’ as it could prove invaluable.

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