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**THE CONTEXTS OF ORGAN PERFORMANCE EDUCATION IN  
SELECTED EUROPEAN COUNTRIES**

Jan Lorenc (a)\*, Kateřina Juklová (b), František Vaníček (c)  
\*Corresponding author

(a) Jan Lorenc, Faculty of Education, Univerzita Hradec Králové, Rokitanského 62, 500 03 Hradec Králové III,  
Czech Republic, jan.lorenc@uhk.cz, +420 493331143

*Abstract*

Education in organ performance is defined by curricular documents that indicate its educational content, aims and methods. These reflect specific sociocultural contexts that are unique for specific countries. Our aim is to delineate the sociocultural contexts that have had and still have influence on the contemporary form of organ performance studies. The typical elements of educational tendencies of each national curriculum in the two European “organ powers” (France and Germany) and in the Czech Republic are identified. This research is based on content analysis of undergraduate and graduate organ performance programs curricular documents. The frequency and intensity of the learning process, educational content, and pedagogical aims and methods are taken into account. The personal testimonies of organists (performer-professors) are an important source, alongside documents describing the recent past and current state of education, always acknowledging cultural context. Despite similarities throughout the European countries, features of organ education typical of specific countries were found in those studied. The historical and social memory of each nation goes some way towards defining these. “Kirchenmusik” and “historische Aufführungspraxis” phenomena exist in Germany; France has the symphony organ and the “ordinary” instrument; the Czech Republic has organs outside churches, in secular halls. In Europe, organ performance at the tertiary education level is currently taught in undergraduate and graduate study programs. Even though there are similar tendencies among them (stylistically sensitive interpretation and an emphasis on the individuality of the instrument and the performer), it is possible to capture essential accents of specific national schools.

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**Keywords:** Organ performance, Tertiary education, Music education, Curriculum, International comparison, Sociocultural contexts.



## 1. Introduction

Education in organ performance is a wide field reaching from the elementary to professional level. The object of our interest is tertiary education. In the European tradition, two distinct national schools of organ performance have come into profile: German and French. These two “organ powers” have significantly influenced and continue to influence organ performance not only in Europe but throughout the world. The environment of Czech organ playing has traditionally been influenced by the so-called south German organ school. Since the last century, however, the Czech school has been seeking out further inspiration at the international level and thereby enriched the Czech national tradition. In order to examine this more closely we undertook a research trip to musical institutions in Germany and France, where we consulted scholarly literature and conducted interviews with local professors of organ performance. Thanks to the Bologna Process, which began in 1999 in thirty-one European countries, it has become easier to compare the educational systems of individual countries on the basis of their curricula. The result of the process has been organization of study in undergraduate and graduate programs at the level of tertiary organ performance education.

## 2. Problem Statement

For our research topic of tertiary education in organ performance, we selected three representative educational institutions, whose undergraduate and graduate curricula correspond to the system established by the Bologna Process. They are as follows:

- *Hochschule für Musik und Theater "Felix Mendelssohn Bartholdy" Leipzig* (HfM), representative of the German school;
- *Conservatoire National Supérieur de Musique et de Danse de Paris* (CNSMDP), representative of the French school;
- *Akademie múzických umění v Praze* (Academy of Performing Arts of Prague) (AMU), representative of the Czech school.

Although the curricula of these schools are uniformly regulated according to European guidelines, they exhibit certain specifics (e.g. the length of the study program; course offerings; and educational focus, aims, or content) that are subject to the traditions of the individual national schools. Stefan Nusser (2006) has examined these specifics from the perspective of the development of organ performance education in the German context in his dissertational work (2008). The Paris conservatory yields a dissertation that deals with the history of instruction in organ improvisation at the institution of the same name (JUTTEN 1999). Josef Kubáň mentions instruction in organ performance at the Prague Conservatory (the predecessor of AMU) (Holzknecht, 1961).

## 3. Research Questions

The questions can be arranged into three categories:

- i. What does organ performance education in the selected countries have in common?
- ii. What is unique to organ performance education in the selected countries?
- iii. What are the causes of these unique tendencies in each individual country?

#### 4. Purpose of the Study

Our aim is to identify the typical elements or tendencies in organ performance education against the background of curricular documents. Each of the three selected institutions has its own syllabus that reveals the basic features of the educational process. By describing these, making comparisons among them, and critically interpreting them, we can arrive at our stated goal.

A further task is to outline sociocultural contexts that have had and continue to have influence on the contemporary form of the study of organ performance in the countries themselves.

#### 5. Research Methods

Our research makes use of a number of sources of data and is based on the content analysis of curricular documents of undergraduate and graduate organ performance programs in the countries compared. Taken into account are the frequency and intensity of the learning process, educational content, and pedagogical aims and methods. A further source of information are partly structured interviews with organ performers working in education, as well as content analysis of documents describing the recent history and contemporary state of organ education with regard to the relevant cultural context.

Our research makes use of theoretical and empirical methods:

- theoretical: analysis, synthesis, comparison, and critique
- empirical: coding in qualitative research, interviews and interpretations of responses

#### 6. Findings

Our findings consist of comparison of study plans according to their individual components. They also include characteristics typical of organ performance education in specific countries, and ultimately, the definition of contemporary education tendencies that apply to all the subjects compared. The data are interpreted with regard to the results of interviews with organ professors and simultaneously to the socio-historical contexts that are based on the knowledge of the literature.

##### 6.1. Comparison by individual elements of the curriculum

The data come from comparison of the study plans of specific institutions: Parcours d'études (CNSMDP), Modulordnung, Study Schedule (HfM Leipzig), Study plan, Syllabus (AMU Prague).

##### 6.1.1. Length of study

Despite the uniform division of study into undergraduate and graduate programs according to the Bologna process, our study shows that different programs have different lengths.

**Table 01.** Length of study by number of years

	CNSMDP	HfM Leipzig	AMU Prague
Undergraduate degree	3	4	3
Graduate degree	2	2	2
Total	<b>5</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>6</b>

### 6.1.2. Study programmes in which organ performance is taught

Even though our priority is to focus on Organ Interpretation (OI), we should also mention other majors where organ performance can be found.

**Table 02.** Organ performance in undergraduate and graduate study programmes

	CNSMDP	HfM Leipzig	AMU Prague
Study programmes	Organ interpretation	Organ interpretation	Organ interpretation
	OI and Musicology (only undergraduate degree)	Church Music “Kirchenmusik”	
	Organ improvisation	Church Music and Music Education “Schullmusik”	

### 6.1.3. Major courses within Organ Interpretation study programmes – undergraduate and graduate degrees

Further compulsory art courses connected with performance on the instrument are included in Organ Interpretation study programmes. Individual schools show specific tendencies.

**Table 03.** Compulsory art courses in the Organ Interpretation study programmes

CNSMDP	HfM Leipzig	AMU Prague
Organ performance	Organ Literature	Organ performance
Organ improvisation	Liturgical Organ	Organ improvisation
-	Piano/Cembalo	-
-	-	Organ Seminar
-	Concert Praxis	Concert Praxis
-	Science of Organ Interpretation	Poetics of Interpretation Performance

### 6.1.4. Aims and focus of study

This summary introduces the aims and focus of study in accordance with individual cycles (undergraduate and graduate). Using keywords, the table lists the competencies that students are expected to develop and other characteristics typical for specific educational institution.

**Table 04.** Aims and study focuses in accordance with the degree

	CNSMDP	HfM Leipzig	AMU Prague
Under-graduate degree (UGD)	Playing technique and means of expression	Playing technique and means of expression	Playing technique and means of expression
	The artist as an individual	The artist as an individual	The artist as an individual
	Broad repertoire	Broad repertoire	Broad repertoire
	Artistic independence	Artistic independence	Artistic independence
	-	Theoretical reflection of artistic activity	Theoretical reflection of artistic activity

	Basics of style interpretation	Basics of style interpretation	Basics of style interpretation
	-	Liturgical practice	-
	Practical contexts of professional occupation (internships)	-	-
	Two organ professors according to need	-	-
	Playing from memory	-	-
	Partially self-studied concert programme	-	-
		Pedagogy of organ playing	Pedagogy of organ playing (optional)
Graduate degree (GD)	Theoretical reflection of artistic activity	(see UGD)	(see UGD)
	Advanced style interpretation	Advanced style interpretation	Advanced style interpretation
	Creating a specific repertoire	Creating a specific repertoire	Creating a specific repertoire
	National aspects of art	-	National aspects of art
	Completely self-studied concert programme	Completely self-studied concert programme	Completely self-studied concert programme
	-	Advanced liturgical playing	-
	Organ pedagogy	Organ pedagogy	Organ pedagogy (optional)

### 6.1.5. Contents and repertoire exams

Educational contents are defined by checking results after a certain period of study. The most significant are so-called final exams, which are basically organ recitals at the end of the first cycle of study.

**Table 05.** Final undergraduate exams (recital) – as the entrance examination to the Graduate programme

		CNSMDP	HfM Leipzig	AMU Prague
Maximum length		50 mins.	60 mins.	80 – 90 mins.
Playing from memory		Yes (except contemporary pieces)	Partially (20 mins. of the programme)	No
Mandatory pieces	Time for preparation	6 weeks	5 weeks	No
	Studying	Individually	Individually	

**Table 06.** Contents of final undergraduate exams (recital) – as the entrance examination to the Graduate programme

	CNSMDP	HfM Leipzig	AMU Prague
Pre-Bach repertoire	1 French piece, 1 Latin or Anglo-Saxon piece	1	1
J.S.Bach	1	1 1 trio sonata	1 1 trio sonata
Romanticism	2	1	2
Contemporary music	1	1	1

### 6.1.6. Intensity of teaching in Organ performance as a major course

**Table 07.** Weekly hour subsidy for the major course organ performance throughout the whole study

CNSMDP	HfM Leipzig	AMU Prague
1h 15 min	1h 30 min	1h 30 min

### 6.1.7. Form of teaching in Organ performance as a major course

All three institutions provide an individual organ lesson once a week. For the Paris conservatory, a common class (*classe commune*) is also typical, which takes the form of an interpretative or theory/discussion seminar once a week. Other institutions organize so-called organ seminars.

## 6.2. Particularities of individual traditions

### 6.2.1. France

One characteristic phenomenon of organ performance until 1971 was improvisation, which was at least as important as interpretation and sometimes even more so. Today, apparently in reaction to former tendencies, emphasis is put on the refined art of interpretation. The credit should go to the contemporary professors M. Bouvard and O. Latry, according to whom the organ should become an “ordinary instrument”, i.e. an instrument where the subtly differentiated expression of artistic interpretation is given primacy. The newly established tendency of playing through memory is related to this as well. Contemporary instruments, thanks to technical devices (free combinations), allow the organist to concentrate on the playing itself, when there are no problems with the registration and operation of the additional devices.

A typical feature at the Paris conservatory was instruction on the instrument for the whole class at once. The organ was not an exception. Prof. R. Falcinelli still taught this way in the 1980s. From this tradition was preserved the organ seminar, when the whole class (in the present day, ten students) meets once a week to solve practical, theoretical, and artistic problems together under the expert guidance of their two professors. More than one student can also theoretically come to individual lessons at one time and thus spend the whole afternoon at the organ with their professor. “Given the stricter organization of study programmes nowadays, though, students don’t have time for this anymore. Before, it used to be different,” says Prof. M. Bouvard.

The tradition of the symphonic organ is reflected in the content of instruction. During the final exams, rather than the playing of trio sonatas in Germany, attention is directed toward the Romantic symphonic repertoire.

Emphasis on the self-study of the pieces in a relatively short time period plays a significant role. “Oeuvre imposée” is a typical part of all the exams, with the exception of the final recital of the graduate programme.

### 6.2.2. Germany

The specialty of the German-speaking areas is the emphasis that is put on church music (“Kirchenmusik”), which is taught at specialized state universities (“Hochschule für Musik”) concurrently

with organ interpretation, and for its individual lessons it is the most expensive study program of all. According to the statements of organ professors, all organists study church music as well, thus making it easier for themselves to find a job after graduation. Catholic and Protestant churches are, after the state, the biggest employer in Germany.

In contrast to general European custom, the undergraduate programme takes four years. It is because of the complex conception of the profession of an organist, who very often also has the role of cantor besides the role of an artist. The cantor is responsible for singing, conducting and leading the choir and the orchestra.

In Germany, almost a hundred years ago, the Orgelbewegung movement arose. It sought a return to the aesthetic of the “golden organ era”. That is when the interest in historic organ and the interpretation regarding the style occurred. German methodologies, so-called historical performance practice (Laukvik 1999; Lohmann, 2000), are now a common part of instruction.

### 6.2.3. Czech Republic

The example of the Prague AMU demonstrates a tendency purely toward concert formation. It seems that there is more than one reason for this. One of them is the system of specialized music education. Unlike French and German education, it consists of three components: basic artistic education, conservatories and academies of performing arts (e.g. AMU). Up to a certain level, Czech conservatories fulfill the same role as the German “Hochschule für Musik”, because they are a part of secondary level education and include both general and professionally-oriented music subjects. At the tertiary level, students focus exclusively on issues of concert-giving and interpretation.

A certain Czech specialty pointed out by Czech and French organists is the existence of organs outside of churches. In the totalitarian Communist era, the ruling elite attempted to eliminate the influence of the church in public affairs, including in the realm of culture. The church, and by extension the organ, became undesirable. It became an alternative to build new organs in secular spaces and concert halls (e.g. in Prague, Pardubice, Hradec Králové, Krnov etc.)

## 7. Conclusion

Individual particularities stem from socio-historical contexts as well as from the character of the education system in specific countries. The purely concert-related character of the Prague AMU is a typical example of the elaborate education system in the Czech Republic.

**Table 08.** A two-phase and three-phase system of professional musical education in organ performance

France	Germany	Czech Republic
1. Music School or Conservatory 2. “Conservatoire supérieur”	1. Music School 2. “Musikhochschule” or Conservatory or University	1. Basic Artistic School 2. Conservatory 3. Academy of Performing Arts

Despite the different traditions of individual national schools, we can find common features of contemporary organ performance education at the tertiary level of education. These are the emphasis on virtuosic playing technique and as rich a means of expression as possible. On one hand, students are expected to gain as wide a knowledge of the repertoire as possible, and on the other, artistic specialization in accordance with individual dispositions. Emphasis is placed on a knowledge of stylistic interpretation. Contemporary pedagogy seeks for the individual education of the artist, so that the artist is able to create individually and professionally reflect contemporary art issues.

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