The Struggle for Contentment in Music:

An Investigation of Self-Authored Attitudes in Practice and Performance

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Abstract

This paper explores links between desire-based attitudes and their possible inhibitive affects in music practice and performance. Specifically, this study utilises phenomenological research methods to investigate self-authored attitudes in music practice and performance, and investigates the use of Calm Abiding Meditation techniques to ascertain the effectiveness of these techniques in generating and sustaining an attitude of ‘contentment’ in music practice and performance. Embedded in this study is the premise that desire for external attainments, and high self-esteem (particularly if the self-esteem is located in one’s performance ability) on the journey towards musical mastery, and the ‘flow-on’ affects from efforts to achieve mastery, may have a negative impact for some musicians.

Three considerations frame this investigation: 1) Desire is linked to discontentment, 2) Gratitude is linked to contentment, and is a possible response to desire-based problems, and 3) Gratitude can be cultivated utilising Calm Abiding Meditation techniques. Chapter One establishes my personal interest in this field of enquiry. Chapter Two defines the terminology within the context of the study, and explores the dynamic of external attainments, self-esteem, desire, contentment, and discontentment as an interplay which brings fluctuating experiences in practice and performance. Chapter Three explains the research methodology, which is based on completion of twenty five structured meditation sessions designed to respond to inhibitive experiences. Chapter Four offers a phenomenological analysis of data collected, and seeks to define the following: 1) to construct an overview that captures the core dynamics of desirous attitudes in practice and performance, and 2) to construct an overview that captures the core ideas about the development of gratitude as a response to desire-based struggles.
Declaration

This is to certify that

- The thesis comprises only my original work towards the Master of Music Performance (by Research) degree;
- Due acknowledgement has been made in the text to all other material used;
- The thesis is between 10,000 and 15,000 words in length, inclusive of footnotes, but exclusive of tables, maps, bibliographies and appendices.

[Signature]

Sionen Edwards
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Chapter One Introduction

1.1 Introduction

Q: Will anyone ever match the genius of Mozart?
A: No.
Thankyou – now can we get on with our work?

In his book Effortless Mastery, accomplished jazz musician Kenny Werner writes that, “Music can shoot through the musician like lightning through the sky if that music is unobstructed by thoughts. Therefore, the elimination of thoughts is a very relevant issue.”

Assuming in this context that thoughts inhibit creativity in performance, Werner’s assertion provides an interesting point of discussion to examine the influence of thoughts in musical activity. This paper investigates the dynamics of desire-based inner dialogues and self-authored attitudes that may impede the outcome of ‘contentment’ in music practice and performance.

As an improvising guitarist I experience ‘contentment’ as a state of mind that is fulfilled, relaxed, is not obsessive, and is not haunted by past negative experiences. I generally find the act of making music to be a cause for enjoyment, and I have at times experienced blissful states whereby I perceive a focused connection with other performers and with audience members too. On occasions such as this I may find myself in a meditative state, whereby my senses appear to simply ‘receive’ sonic and physical stimuli, and music is able to flow uninterrupted. When in this state my ‘ordinary’ mind is able to relax, or switch off temporarily, and I am able to better attend to my ideas and explore concepts which are not immediately apparent in other contexts.

3 Key terms are defined in Chapter Two.
4 For the purposes of this research ‘negative’ is defined as a view or action which brings about an experience of struggle/discontentment, and ‘positive’ as a cause for happiness/contentment.
I often contemplate the links between my thoughts and ensuing actions in practice and performance, and I note that my internal efforts towards musical mastery may not always prove to be beneficial in the long term. In performance I may feel ‘glued’ to my cognitive mind and I am unable to fully enjoy the moment. As I shall outline below, I can also project negative moods upon my psyche, which I find hard to negate. In such circumstances my mind will rigidly relate to musical experiences from a myopically negative perspective. My joy is diminished, and I instead tend to concern myself with foundational approaches to music, which are best addressed in the practice room, and not on stage. In essence I am not relaxed, and tend to perform ‘from my head’ rather than simply play. I unduly create pressure upon myself, and I find it hard to let go of such negative experiences to the point where my self-esteem may be negatively affected.

It is in response to these experiences that I conduct my investigation. As a Buddhist practitioner I am interested in adapting formal meditation techniques to my music making. I seek to affirm that in daily musical activities, mental peace can be developed pro-actively despite inhibitive attitudes, or attitudes which cause dissatisfactory outcomes, and I conduct my investigation in relation to my own music practice. I explore desirous attachment towards positive musical outcomes, and desirous aversion to negative musical outcomes, and specifically, I investigate the interplay of attitudes towards external attainments, and self-esteem in practice and performance, with a view to understand how they may perpetuate experiences of discontentment. My research is based upon the assertion that contentment and discontentment are not passive experiences dictated by external circumstances, but are pro-active, self-authored responses to perceived phenomena.

Although desire generally plays an important and beneficial role in day to day musical activities, I make the case that high levels of desire are a cause for misapprehended views on the path towards musical mastery, and as such I may hinder satisfactory outcomes by what I crave. I therefore explore the notion that desirous attitudes colour the domain of experience and may underpin any facet of musical activity.

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5 An external attainment is broadly defined as any accomplishment which may be desired by a musician in practice and performance. For a detailed explanation see section 2.3.
6 Domain of experience is described as the combination of elements necessary for the experience to occur: thoughts, feelings, perception, the object of perception, and actions in relation to the object.
In this context I research the application of formal meditation techniques as a stimulus for the development of ‘gratitude’ as a means to redefine and re-author experiences which hinder the outcome of contentment. Three considerations frame this investigation:

- Desire is linked to discontentment.
- ‘Gratitude’ is linked to contentment, and is a response to desire-based problems.
- ‘Gratitude’ can be cultivated utilising a meditation technique known as Calm Abiding Meditation.⁷

Although these preliminary findings are subjective in nature, it is my hope that they will help to inform future research in music practice and teaching methodologies, and help musicians to observe beneficial desires from those that are inhibitive, and thus better apprehend their own role in generating attitudes towards practice and performance. Arguably, an investigation directed towards apprehension of self-authored attitudes is beneficial, because as noted author Csikszentmihalyi states, “Only if we understand the way subjective states are shaped [can] we master them.”⁸

1.2 Research Methodology

My research is based on analytical techniques as defined by Clarke Moustakas in *Phenomenological Research Methods*,⁹ with a focus on analysis of verbatim transcriptions of autobiographical meanings of experience.¹⁰ I employ horizonalisation reduction methods¹¹ to unravel the elements of experience in research practice, and to study the elements and their interrelationships. Specifically, my process has been to:

- Articulate my personal interest and experience in this field.
- Define the terminology within the context of the study.
- Explore the dynamic of external attainments, self-esteem, desire, contentment, and discontentment as an interplay in practice and performance.

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⁷ Appendices A and B detail the specific techniques employed.
¹⁰ See Appendix C – Transcriptions from Meditation Sessions.
• Complete twenty five structured meditation sessions designed to respond to inhibitive or dissatisfactory experiences.
• Document my experiences in a practice diary.
• Construct an overview that captures the core dynamics of desirous attitudes in practice and performance.
• Construct an overview that captures the core ideas about the development of ‘gratitude’ as a response to desire-based struggles.

To contextualise the theory that underpins this investigation, I have mainly drawn from a theoretical field comprising a nexus of Buddhist concepts on desire and meditation techniques, and Western psychological papers on happiness and self-esteem.

Chapter Two defines and contextualises the research terminology, Chapter Three outlines the research methodology, and Chapter Four offers a phenomenological analysis of the diary entries.
1.3 The Nature of the Issue – Personal History of Confusion and Struggle

To cover all the earth with sheets of hide –
Where could such amounts of skin be found?
But simply wrap some leather round your feet,
And it’s as if the whole earth had been covered!

Likewise, we can never take
And turn aside the outer course of things.
But only seize and discipline the mind itself,
And what is there remaining to be curbed?\(^\text{12}\)

I have at times struggled to develop and sustain deep feelings of contentment despite my love of music and long career in performance. I sought strategies to dissolve internal problems, and I wished to develop a simple response to the feelings of insecurity and dissatisfaction that had plagued me despite what I felt to be a successful career which included two years’ regular employment on national television, performances at major international festivals, collaboration with many great musicians, regular income, and a stable teaching career in music performance and theory.

I was often challenged when working towards broad or specific musical goals, and ensuing negative experiences stayed with me and did not completely dissolve over time. I observed that I had created mental blockages and subtle ingrained negativity towards my musical pursuits. These attitudes were inhibitive because they enticed attachment and aversion to my musical ideas and practice concepts long before they were fully realised. In essence I unnecessarily concretised my vision of musical attainments, which resulted in dissatisfactory experiences whereby I doubted not only my ability, but my career choices.

I sought varied responses to these problems, such as changes of musical genre, manipulation of textural, harmonic, and rhythmic elements, free improvisation, and acquisition of new instruments and equipment, but could not eradicate my obstructions, which seemed to be deeply ingrained into my psyche.

My difficulties were compounded by a level of ignorance, whereby I was unable to decipher the specific triggers for my discontent, and I struggled to comprehend the disparity between what I felt to be a fantastic career, and ensuing discontentment. Despite my difficulties, there were also times when clearly I felt good about myself and my practice, but was unable to articulate the causes.

Through the examination of Buddhist literature (particularly teachings on Calm Abiding Meditation), I began to regard desire-based yearnings as merely unfounded, self-authored promises for greater musical attainments and higher status, and that negative experiences were strongly linked to internal attitudes, and were not exclusively reliant on external circumstances. I observed that my desirous thinking enticed me to exert effort towards goals that proved to be unsatisfactory. One specific example was that when I was in the early stages of my career, my aspiration for high self-esteem was linked to how many paid performances I was doing on a weekly basis, and needless to say, I was not a contented musician!

Prior to commencement of this research paper, I had implemented practice techniques (designed to overcome inhibitive attitudes) by the aforementioned Kenny Werner, and I found his approach to be genuinely helpful – to a point. Werner’s guided meditations focus on contextualisation of self-esteem in practice and performance, and encourage the use of the affirmation that “I am a master,” as a pre-emptive attitude, and as a response to struggles.

Werner establishes an important assertion that underpins the direction of my inquiry. He declares that musicians can practice and perform from a peaceful, inner mental space that transcends cognitive thought:

> The Inner Space is the place where joy, pleasure and fulfilment – worldly or otherwise – are available in unlimited supply . . . A true master is not just a master of technique or language, but of himself. He can sit serenely in the centre of that space while performing his actions to perfection.¹³

To attain this state of mind, Werner cautions against allowing expectation to distract from, or influence the cultivation of that space:

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¹³ Werner, Effortless Mastery, 79.
Detachment is an essential quality for one to become established in that space. Expectations create agitation in the mind, and then merging with one’s self is not possible. The fear of not getting what we want is predominant in Western society, but the never-ending quest to satisfy “needs” masks our deepest desire: oneness with the divine force and we seek union in the pursuit of externals. We think that if we have enough of what we want, we will be safe. But from that inner space, one realises that everything one needs and desires already exists within.\(^\text{14}\)

Although with effort I had managed to enter the ‘Inner Space’ and negate fear-based experiences, I was not able to quash ingrained negative attitudes to practice and performance. Based on Werner’s conceptions, Buddhist theory on desire and meditation, and Western psychological dissertations, I investigate the antithesis of detachment. I propose that desire is a cause of attachment in music practice and performance, and may prove to impede satisfactory outcomes.

### 1.4 Dimensions and Limits to the Research

Authors such as Meyer 1956, Sloboda 2005, and Storr 1992, are among many who have investigated emotion and meaning in music, and Werner has, for example, contextualised practice methodology within the field, and yet I find no literature for musicians that specifically investigates methods to elucidate the internal origins of dissatisfactory experiences. In order to clarify the issues described above, I investigate the following questions:

- Will Calm Abiding Meditation practice increase awareness of desire-based problems in musical activities?
- How might desire for external attainments and high self-esteem restrict my ability to develop and maintain contentment in practice and performance?
- Is ‘gratitude’ a possible antidote to desire for external attainments and high self-esteem?
- Can Calm Abiding Meditation practice be adapted towards the cultivation of ‘gratitude’?
- Does the reading of a motivation and dedication formalise and enhance the practice?

For the purposes of clarity I will briefly outline some boundaries that this investigation does not cross:

\(^{14}\) Ibid., 78.
• The research is not directed towards the complete eradication of desires, or experiences of discontentment, but seeks to better understand the cause and effect relationship at play.
• The research is not conducted on the assumption that all musicians experience the difficulties described.
• The research practice does not seek to measure specific musical improvements in practice and performance.

My enquiry is confined to my own experiences in this field, and accepts that the identified problems do not occur on a consistent basis. I acknowledge limits to my ability to objectively analyse the outcomes of the research practice despite my best intentions. I am mindful that these negative experiences arose in the first place due to my lack of awareness of my own thoughts and attitudes.
Chapter Two Definition and Context of Terms

An artist completes the music of his soul, of his mind. It is not automatic; it is very often a conscious effect, an effect that results in another effect. This shows that it is not enough for us to learn art or to pursue it, but in order to complete it we must understand the psychology of art, through which one accomplishes the purpose of one’s life.  

In this chapter I begin with an investigation into the dynamics of discontentment, and conclude with an exploration of ‘gratitude’ as a possible response to inhibitive or dissatisfactory experiences. Diagram 1 offers a visual representation of how discontentment may be proactively self-authored and perpetuated in practice and performance:

Diagram 1 Experience of discontentment in practice and performance

Csikszentmihalyi writes:

This paradox of rising expectations suggests that improving the quality of life might be an insurmountable task. In fact, there is no inherent problem in our desire to escalate our goals, as

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long as we enjoy the struggle along the way. The problem arises when people are so fixated on what they want to achieve that they cease to derive pleasure from the present. When that happens, they forfeit their chance of contentment.\textsuperscript{16}

In my practice I observe a desire-based ‘cycle’ of discontentment whereby unchecked desire towards, or away from an external attainment may align with valuation of self-esteem, which in turn redefines my personal relationship to the external attainment. To elaborate, I propose the following:

- A cause and effect relationship exists between the duration and depth of discontentment with levels of desire.
- Desire ‘colours’ perception of external attainments and/or self-esteem. I create value judgements of attractiveness or unattractiveness, which perpetuate attachment or aversion.
- Desire is reinvigorated in relation to the external attainment, and as a consequence can prompt unskilful actions, and perpetuate a negative feedback-loop of discontentment.

I explore these claims below, and in order to make positive progress towards contentment, I suggest that each element of experience must firstly be perceived, recognised, and then contextualised on a personal level.

\subsection{Discontentment}

The Etymological Dictionary suggests that ‘struggle’ is derived from the German word \textit{straucheln}, meaning “to stumble,”\textsuperscript{17} and my research defines discontentment as an experience of suffering (from subtle to gross), which may be viewed as an ‘inner’ stumble – as a result of desirous attitudes. I propose two resultant experiences of discontentment: The struggle of not attaining what one wants, and the struggle of attaining what one doesn’t want.

2.2 Desire

*Raising the threshold of desire . . . creates an endless cycle of self-deception: like the horizon, our desires always seem to stay ahead of where we are. This cycle of hope and disappointment lies at the heart of consumer capitalism . . . Even if we do come out in front of our peers, the chances are we will start to compare ourselves with those on the next rung of the ladder. Our new discontentment causes us to set our goals higher still.*

For the purpose of this investigation I define ‘desire’ as an active mental process of wanting, yearning, craving, and longing that I may knowingly or unknowingly create in my mind. I propose that unbound desire underpins musical activity in the following manner:

2.2.1 Desire ‘colours’ perception of phenomena

I propose that in some instances the possibility of discontentment is linked to misapprehended perceptions of phenomena, which are due to desirous attitudes. If, for instance, I perceive my musical skill levels via overt desire, I create (author) a benchmark, and rank my skills against those whom I deem to be better, less proficient, or on par with my abilities. I may as a consequence construct desire-based extremes within my mind, and yet these perceptions may not necessarily be valid or accurate.

Lama Choedak Rinpoche, the Tibetan Buddhist meditation master, describes the link between desire-based perception of phenomena, and dissatisfaction. To paraphrase:

> When we apprehend an object we knowingly or unknowingly label it as either attractive or unattractive based on our desire towards the object, or desire to reject the object. Thus the more we accommodate desire towards an object, the more we expose ourselves to dissatisfaction in relation to that object.

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19 Lama Choedak Rinpoche has completed a three-and-a-half year solitary meditation retreat under the auspices of His Holiness the Dalai Lama.
Buddhists consider that desires are insatiable, and can unsettle the mind, and the effects of these desires to be akin to drinking salt water. Geshe Loden\textsuperscript{21} describes desirous attachment as a pro-active and deluded state of mind that encompasses desire, attachment, clinging, possessiveness, grasping, and passion. He writes:

Desirous attachment is a mental factor that perceives external or internal objects as attractive, exaggerates their attractiveness and wishes to possess and retain them. With desirous attachment it is very difficult to separate the mind from its object. Desirous attachment is like mental glue and clings to the object of desire. Other delusions stain the mind as dirt stains a white cloth, whereas attachment is like an oil stain soaked into the cloth. It is relatively easy to remove ordinary dirt through washing, but because oil absorbs so thoroughly into cloth, it is very difficult to clean away. Because attachment clings to the object of desire so strongly, and holds on to retain it, it is as though the mind of desirous attachment absorbs into its object. Like separating oil from cloth, it is very difficult to separate attachment from its object.\textsuperscript{22}

Diagram 2 contextualises desire-based attachment in music practice and performance:

\begin{flushright}
\textbf{Diagram 2} Desire-based attachment in practice and performance
\end{flushright}

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{21} Geshe is a title bestowed upon Buddhist monks who have undertaken a rigorous course of study requiring approximately twenty years to complete.
\textsuperscript{22} Geshe Acharya Thubten Loden, \textit{Path to Enlightenment in Tibetan Buddhism} (Melbourne: Tushita Publications, 1993), 418.
\end{flushright}
2.2.3 Desire can prompt unskilful actions which result in discontentment

Leonard Meyer, the composer, musicologist, and author writes that “knowledge and experience often colour or modify our opinion about what is heard,” and I observe within myself that desirous attachment can influence my domain of experience, and lead to unskilful actions such as fear-based performances, doubt-based performances, or inaccurate judgements about my perceived abilities, or circumstances.

If I cling to a past positive experience I may overtly yearn to improve on it for the future, I may be dissatisfied with my current level of attainment, I may concretise the experience and impede future progress, or I may inflate my perception of self-esteem. If I cling to a past negative experience I may cultivate unnecessary concerns for the future, or relate perceptions of self-esteem to my failures, and hence lose self-confidence. I propose that desirous attachment may also influence and distract me from the present moment if my mind is concerned with the past or future in this manner. Finally, desirous attachment may lead me to yearn to present myself in a positive light in front of my peers, and entice me to unnecessarily obsess about what others think about me. Table 1 summarises how desire-based attachment may inform and dominate my musical experience:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Desire-based Perception</th>
<th>Experience</th>
<th>Desire-based Action</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>High self-esteem</strong></td>
<td>Insecurity based on desire to maintain high self-esteem</td>
<td>Attachment towards external attainments that are perceived to bolster high self-esteem</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Authored view of self</td>
<td>Insecurity based on aversion to low self-esteem</td>
<td>Aversion to external attainments that are perceived to diminish high self-esteem</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Low self-esteem</strong></td>
<td>Insecurity based on aversion to low self-esteem</td>
<td>Attachment towards external attainments that are perceived to bolster high self-esteem</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Authored view of self</td>
<td>Insecurity based on desire to maintain high self-esteem</td>
<td>Aversion to external attainments that are perceived to diminish high self-esteem</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1 Affects of desire on perceptions of self-esteem, and ensuing actions

I consider these covetous paradigms to prompt obsessive behaviour, and if left unchecked can last for many years – long after the initial experience has taken place.

2.3 External Attainments

I propose that desire for external attainments is not inherently a reliable cause for contentment in practice and performance. External attainments are defined as the attainment of any accomplishment such as higher wages, stage presentation, improved technical facility, acceptance by peers, or any other observable achievement (past, present, or future) that might appeal to a musician. For the sake of brevity, I have elected to include the descriptor; ‘attainment of knowledge’ despite the disputation that it is an ‘internal’ attainment.

Researchers Lyubomirsky et al. (2006), whose interest is to study human happiness, published a report on the differences between happiness and self-esteem, and their findings contend that external attainments are not a consistent cause for happiness. They write:

The literature on happiness is marked by the robust finding that "external blessings" - namely, demographic variables and life circumstances - are less important than a happy disposition. For example, smaller-than-expected correlations have been found between well-being and objective variables such as income, age, gender, race, occupation, education, religion, children, and life events in both younger and older adults (see Diener et al., 1999; Lyubomirsky, 2005, for reviews; see also George, 1978). 24

Choedak (2004) is more direct. He states:

Even those much sought after qualities – be that pleasure, fame, success, or any of the things that we seek in life, they are themselves transitory. They are transient. It may have taken a long time to gain it, but to perish it takes no time. Most people do not realise this . . . without realising that that very thing they seek so much is actually ruinous to their own well-being because they will be trapped in thinking that fame is good or pleasure is good or success is good. These things are only temporarily good, but not for long. It is not harmful because it is transitory,

but because what we tend to like, we become attached and addicted to. We become over-
dependent on it.25

Sloboda (2005), a music psychologist, offers a practical example of how attachment to ritual of
tradition (external attainment) may compromise contentment for concert pianists:

[The] tradition of performance lays on the performer the duty to come up with something new,
an interpretation which allows us to see the composition in a different light, to make manifest
aspects of the music which are normally latent. The commercial realities of performance often
press performers in this direction. Why should someone pay money to listen to a performance
which is not distinctively different from the one they heard the other day (whether in live
performance, or on a recording)? Repp (1997) has provided conclusive documentation of the
reality of this pressure towards individuality. In a series of analyses of solo piano performances . . 
he was able to show that amateurs conform more closely to an average interpretation than do
professionals. Some professionals are, however, very close to the average, so we can rule out
the notion that the average performance is in some sense the result of lack of skill or
appropriate musicality. We could see such professionals as operating on ‘faithfulness to the
score’ as their interpretative philosophy. On the other hand, the most extreme performances, as
measured on a variety of dimensions, including speed, exaggeration, etc. are almost always
those of ‘world class’ professionals. Typically, many of these performers do things which are not
obviously prescribed by the score. Yet, in order to be received as a legitimate performance of the
work in question, their interpretative decision must in some way be able to be seen as ‘fitting’
the music. Not every exaggeration will be acceptable.26

2.4 Self-esteem

I investigate desirous attachment to self-esteem as inhibitive in practice and performance
because as Werner writes:

We as musicians must surrender to the ocean of our inner selves. We must descend deep into
that ocean while the sludge of the ego floats on the surface. We let go of our egos and permit
the music to come through us and do its work. We act as the instruments for that work.27

27 Werner, Effortless Mastery, 13.
Werner observes that, “Many of us have formed an unhealthy linkage between who we are and how we play,” and based on the literature below I recognise self-esteem as a self-authored construct, and contend that desirous attachment to self must be responded to in order to cultivate contentment.

The measurement of self-esteem as a gauge for happiness has long been of interest to researchers, and the strong connection between happiness and self-esteem must be acknowledged. Lyubomirsky et al. are among those who describe these obvious links:

Happiness and self-esteem are so intimately related that it is difficult, if not impossible, to separate them conceptually. Indeed, happiness may not be possible or realisable without a healthy dose of self-confidence and self-acceptance.29

Social psychologists Baumeister et al. (2003) investigated self-esteem as a cause of important consequences in life. Their “mission was to conduct a thorough review of empirical findings emphasising the most methodologically rigorous research studies – to ascertain whether high self-esteem is in fact a cause of positive or negative outcomes.”30 They determined that, “Self-esteem has a strong relation to happiness. Although the research has not clearly established causation, we are persuaded that high self-esteem does lead to greater happiness.”31

As stated earlier, I investigate the experience of discontentment as linked to desirous attachment towards high self-esteem in practice and performance, and I propose that my practice is not enhanced by high self-esteem. I observe that self-esteem is a fluctuating experience in relation to musical activities whereby I can feel good or bad about myself dependant on my perceptions.

Baumeister et al. conclude that high self-esteem is not in itself a sufficient cause for better external attainments:

Overall, the benefits of high self-esteem fall into two categories: enhanced initiative and pleasant feelings. We have not found evidence that boosting self-esteem (by therapeutic

28 Ibid., 51.
29 Lyubomirsky, Tkach, and Dimatteo, "What Are the Differences between Happiness and Self-Esteem?," 364.
31 Ibid.: 1.
interventions or school programs) causes benefits. Our findings do not support continued widespread efforts to boost self-esteem in the hope that it will by itself foster improved outcomes.\textsuperscript{32}

They define self-esteem as a self-authored construct:

Self-esteem is literally defined by how much value people place on themselves. It is the evaluative component of self-knowledge. High self-esteem refers to a highly favourable global evaluation of the self. Low self-esteem, by definition, refers to an unfavourable definition of the self.\textellipsis\ thus, high self-esteem may refer to an accurate, justified, balanced appreciation of one's worth as a person and one's successes and competencies, but it can also refer to an inflated, arrogant, grandiose, unwarranted sense of conceited superiority over others. By the same token, low self-esteem can be either an accurate, well-founded understanding of one's shortcomings as a person or a distorted, even pathological sense of insecurity and inferiority. Self-esteem is thus perception rather than reality. It refers to a person's belief about whether he or she is intelligent and attractive, for example, and it does not necessarily say anything about whether the person actually is intelligent and attractive.\textsuperscript{33}

The etymological roots of the words 'self' and 'esteem' also paint self-esteem as a self-authored (and perhaps highly valued) construct which may imbue us with feelings of separateness from other 'selves':

'Self' is derived from Germanic and Northern European words meaning "one's own person . . . separate, apart." 'Esteem' is derived from the Latin word, aestimare, "to value, appraise," perhaps ultimately from ais-temos, "one who cuts copper," i.e. mints money . . . as we would now use estimate; sense of "value, respect."\textsuperscript{34}

In conclusion, I return to Lyubomirsky et al., who, despite acknowledging links between self-esteem and happiness, concede that self-esteem is not a consistent, or reliable cause for contentment:

Although self-esteem may seem crucial and adaptive for happiness, it does not provide an adequate description of happiness and may be unrelated to many of our most happy or unhappy experiences (Parducci, 1995). Just as a good income, a good job, or a good marriage does not

\textsuperscript{32} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{33} Ibid.: 2.
\textsuperscript{34} "Online Etymology Dictionary." (accessed May 22, 2011).
guarantee happiness (see Diener, 1984; Diener et al., 1999), high self-esteem is not a sufficient condition for happiness.\(^{35}\)

In this context I explore the cultivation of gratitude as a response to desirous views of self-esteem and external attainments, which result in dissatisfactory experiences.

### 2.5 Gratitude

I explore the cultivation of gratitude as a simple response to the complexities of desirous attachment, and perceptions of self-esteem, and view it as an expansive practice, whereby I can, for example, negate desirous attitudes if I recall and reconnect to a linage of favourite musicians, and also bring to mind the actions of those music industry workers, family, and friends who have directly or indirectly supported my efforts to practice music. I test the notion that development of gratitude will diminish desire for high self-esteem and external attainments, and positively influence my domain of experience in relation to my musical endeavours.

The *Oxford Dictionary* defines gratitude as, “appreciation of kindness; thankfulness.”\(^{36}\) My research acknowledges this definition, and proposes the following additions: Gratitude is a mental attitude that can be cultivated for use as a tool on the path to musical mastery to transform negative perception of phenomena. Gratitude can be cultivated both pre-emptively, and in response to dissatisfactory circumstances.

Diagram 3 offers a visual depiction of how gratitude may breed contentment in practice and performance:

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\(^{35}\) Lyubomirsky, Tkach, and Dimatteo, "What Are the Differences between Happiness and Self-Esteem?," 364.

Post and Neimark (2007), summarise the findings of research studies conducted on the efficacy of gratitude towards psychological, and health benefits. They contend that:

- Gratitude has profound health effects.
- Gratitude begets joy.
- Just five minutes of gratitude can shift the nervous system towards a calm state.
- Gratitude is correlated with positive social behaviour and health.
- Gratitude can reverberate down the years.  

In relation to their finding that ‘gratitude begets joy’ they write:

A 1998 Gallup survey of American teenagers and adults found that 95 percent of respondents felt at least somewhat happy when expressing gratitude, and over half felt extremely happy. People who see themselves as grateful – to others as well as to creation in general – are healthier, more energetic and optimistic, more emphatic, and less vulnerable to clinical

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depression. They make more progress toward important personal goals. This is true even when scientists factor out other contributors like age, health, and income. Grateful people tend to be less materialistic and thus more easily satisfied with what life brings them.\textsuperscript{38}

I aim to link experiential outcomes such as these to my musical practice through the application of meditation techniques.

2.6 Contentment

\textit{If you lack contentment, no matter how much wealth or how many possessions you have acquired you will be no different from a beggar.}\textsuperscript{39}

‘Contentment’ is derived from the mid 15\textsuperscript{th} century French word \textit{contenter} and is a “sense evolved through [words such as] ‘contained,’ ‘restrained,’ to ‘satisfied,’ as the contented person’s desires are bound by what he or she already has.”\textsuperscript{40}

In the context of my study I suggest that a contented musician’s desires are bound by understanding that they are self authored responses to phenomena encountered in daily activities. Professor Rosemarie Parse (2001) examined the structure of the ‘lived experience’ of contentment and determined that contentment is an important outcome in life, and observes that it can be cultivated based upon choices in life situations:

Contentment is a human experience inextricably intertwined with feeling satisfied, tranquil, and happy (Pearsall & Trumble, 1995). It is a satisfaction, a chosen way of being with the moment that arises in the context of feeling satisfied—not satisfied with activities or endeavours that are cherished. Contentment “requires being who you are—no more and no less” (R. A. Johnson & Ruhl, 1999, p. 48). The experience of contentment is important to human health and quality of life.\textsuperscript{41}

\textsuperscript{38} Ibid., 30.
\textsuperscript{40} “Online Etymology Dictionary.” (accessed May 22, 2011).
In general terms, contentment may be defined as an experience of happiness, satisfaction, wellbeing, or lack of suffering. My investigation considers three premises: Firstly, contentment is an active experience, and is for instance, an outcome of self-authored attitudes. Secondly, contentment is subjectively measured in relation to the experience of discontentment. Thirdly, I conduct my inquiry with the pivotal understanding that contentment is a variable experience, and can be changed subject to self-authored attitudes in practice and performance.

Lyubomirsky et al. describe the positive affect of contentment upon the domain of experience:

Since subjective well-being is commonly defined as an aggregate of life satisfaction and the balance of affect, it is not surprising that happy individuals demonstrate both global satisfaction with their lives (see Diener, 1984; Argyle, 1987; Myers and Diener, 1995, for reviews) and satisfaction within specific life domains, such as work, recreation, friendship, marriage, health, and the self (A. Campbell, 1981; Argyle, 1987; Eysenck, 1990; Lepper, 1996; Diener et al., 1999). An influential "top-down" view is that happiness influences one's outlook, which "colours" one's perceptions of specific domains (Stones and Kozma, 1986; Feist et al., 1995; Veenhoven, 1997). However, evidence also suggests that happiness results in part from a summation of various domains of satisfaction (Feist et al., 1995).\(^\text{42}\)

In this context my research seeks to observe a cause and effect relationship between contentment and low levels of desire in practice and performance. In summary, I consider that contentment may be cultivated from a capacity to deepen awareness of my thoughts, to manage overt desirous attitudes, and to develop gratitude in relation to my circumstances.

\(^{42}\) Lyubomirsky, Tkach, and Dimatteo, "What Are the Differences between Happiness and Self-Esteem?," 369.
Chapter Three  Methodology

Always be content.
Though you have no property,
If you know contentment
You have the purest wealth.
The contented incubate eggs of wealth
In their brood-houses.
People with desire
Cannot experience this.  

Upon the topic of meditation, Pauline Oliveros, a pioneer in the field of electronic composition and creator of “Deep Listening” techniques writes:

Meditation in all the meanings of the word is found and defined in diverse religions and spiritual practices. Meditation is used in all its rich variety of meanings to calm the mind and to promote receptivity to concentration . . . whether one is dwelling on something carefully and continually, or engaging in a serious study of a particular topic, planning or considering an action, meditation both religious and secular is attention engaged in particular ways. There is emptying, expansion and contraction of the mind; there is relaxation or “letting go” and focus (attention to a point). Meditation implies discipline and control.  

Choedak describes Calm Abiding Meditation as a set of techniques to develop calmness and sustain it.  I research Calm Abiding Meditation as a means to create an environment that allows me to observe how my mind might author desire-based experiences, and ‘stew’ them until they are seemingly a deep part of my very fabric of existence. Each practice session consisted of two main segments and was conducted according to the following sequence:

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43 Rinpoche, Liberation in the Palm of Your Hand, 480.
44 Pauline Oliveros, Deep Listening (Lincoln, NE: iUniverse, 2005), xxiv.
45 Lama Choedak Rinpoche, Calm Abiding Retreat (Canberra: Dharma Works, 2002).
STEP 1

I would read the following personalised motivation:

My mind has long been lost in search of happiness without knowing the transitory nature of contentment, transitory nature of self-esteem, and the links between desire and discontentment, and gratitude and contentment. Turning back the harmful force of desirous and ‘selfish’ habitual inclinations, I will develop gratitude and will not allow my mind to wander from the search for contentment.

I am very fortunate to be able to play music and follow my passion:

I am free from many miseries that afflict others.
I live in a peaceful, wealthy land and have enough to eat and a roof over my head.
I have all my sense faculties, and am mentally healthy.
I am physically healthy and without pain.
I have been supported by uncountable musicians and teachers of music.
I am not persecuted for playing the music I love.
My studies are paid for by the taxpayers of Australia.
I have work as a musician and have an opportunity to teach others music.

To have the opportunity to play and compose music or to be involved in any art form is an incredible opportunity that should not be underestimated. Music is not merely about what I would desire for my own happiness; rather it is about connecting with others and recognising the service of others. I will practice and perform from a selfless state by developing gratitude.

The aim of the motivation was to focus my attention, to distinguish the meditation session as a specific tool for cultivation of gratitude, and to reaffirm that in this case, the meditation techniques are not simply about relaxation, or stress reduction.

STEP 2

The first half of the meditation session consisted of observation of the Seven Point Meditation Postures for a period of ten minutes.46 There are two main aims for this activity:

46 See Appendix A – Seven Point Meditation Postures.
The first aim is to deepen concentration. To pay diligent attention to each of the postures allows one to cut through the torrent of thoughts, as each posture provides a point of focus for the mind. Secondly, the aim is to deepen the attitude of patience when desires arise. Patience is considered to be an appropriate response to any desire to move the body, or release the postures. Bodily mindfulness allows one to ‘sit well’ with the body and racing mind, and thus by implication to ‘sit well’ with one’s mind of desire in musical activities.

**STEP 3**

The second half of the session involved a combination of QROB techniques with an adaption of the Tonglen practice.\(^{47}\) *Tonglen* is Tibetan, and means “giving and receiving.”\(^{48}\) The goal of this meditation technique is to completely eradicate self-cherishing by focusing on others as being more important than oneself. As Sogyal Rinpoche writes:

> When you feel yourself locked in upon yourself, Tonglen opens you to the truth of the suffering [of others]; when your heart is blocked, it destroys those forces that are obstructing it; and when you feel estranged from the person . . . it helps you to find within yourself and then to reveal the loving, expansive radiance of your own true nature. No other practice I know is as effective in destroying the self-grasping, self-cherishing, self-absorption of the ego, which is the root of all our suffering and the root of all hard-heartedness.\(^{49}\)

On the in-breath I would visualise a person from my past, or from the present, and imagine them to be approximately one metre in front of me, with direct eye contact. Whilst inhaling I would recall specific actions those people had done on my behalf (directly or indirectly), or I would recall their perceived qualities for which I was inspired.

On the retention of the breath I would imagine that I had relived the positive experience of benefiting from their actions, whilst maintaining as clear a memory as possible. On the out-breath, I would look into their eyes, and (mentally) say “thank you,” and I would imagine releasing any perceived desirous attitudes. I allowed myself to vary the visualisations as required, but would keep the practice simple, and make every effort to not be distracted. I encouraged myself to recall certain people, or ensembles I had played in, if I felt it to be of benefit. I generally changed visualisation after every three QROB.

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\(^{47}\) See Appendix B for an explanation of QROB and Tonglen.


\(^{49}\) Ibid.
STEP 4

I would next read the following dedication:

I am so lucky to be healthy and have spare time to play music. I offer my gratitude to everyone who has helped me to do this practice, either directly or indirectly. Whatever I have accomplished is due to the hard work and kindness of others, and I shall dedicate today’s efforts on their behalf.

Thanks to my teachers, their teachers, generations of musicians who have inspired, those who I have played with, the tax payers and government who are paying for my tuition, the instrument makers, mother earth for providing the raw materials to make the instruments, those who work hard to run music events I play at and those who participate and attend.

The intention of writing a dedication was to formally conclude the meditation practice, and tie it to my musical activities.

STEP 5

I immediately recorded my observations onto a Dictaphone for transcription\(^{50}\) and phenomenological analysis of the core dynamics of desirous attitudes in practice and performance, and the core ideas about the development of ‘gratitude’ as a response to desire-based struggles.

During the research practice period I would make effort to spontaneously implement these techniques when about to practice or perform. If time would not permit this, I would try to be mindful of gratitude in the moment. At all times I attempted to use daily musical activities as an opportunity to watch my mind for desirous attitudes.

\(^{50}\) See Appendix C – Transcriptions from Meditation Sessions.
Chapter Four Observations and Analysis

4.1 Analysis of Elements of Experience, and their Interrelationships

In distilling the key autobiographical meanings from my practice diary I confirmed the following elements of experience:

4.1.1 The process depends on identifying and changing perceptions. The process takes time and effort, as habitual thoughts are powerful, and to observe the workings of the mind is difficult.

4.1.2 Gratitude is a general cause for contentment in music practice and performance, and is challenging to incorporate into daily music activities.

4.1.3 Desire is pervasive, and is linked to distraction, which is constant and thus inhibitive.

4.1.4 Self-esteem is more subtle than desire.

4.1.5 Motivation and attention to process is important.

General overview

My analysis confirms Calm Abiding Meditation as a viable practice for the cultivation of contentment, and confirms the prevalence, and dissatisfactory nature of desire in my everyday musical activities. I observed contentment as a subjective, self-authored experience, which is variable, and I experienced fluctuating levels of contentment in short bursts.

Twenty five Calm Abiding Meditation sessions were sufficient to gain only a general insight into desire-based attitudes. I anticipated that I might catch desirous thoughts as they arose in relation to external attainments and self-esteem, but was unsuccessful. I was however able to retrospectively recall and re-author certain dissatisfactory situations from my past as a direct result of the techniques. The Calm Abiding Meditation sessions were most successful when I made concentrated effort to read the personalised motivation, and was able to attentively create clear visualisations.

I conclude that it was overall a beneficial experience to utilise Calm Abiding Meditation as a formal response to my desire-based difficulties. To conduct the research practice I had to create times in the day to cultivate gratitude, and I contemplated how best to conduct the process for
hours before I actually commenced the meditation sessions. I found it most beneficial to complete up to three meditation sessions within a day.

Importantly, despite the twenty five meditation sessions, I found it difficult to remember to cultivate gratitude before practicing or performing music, and I observed that experiences of contentment quickly faded after the formal sessions were completed. This suggests that long term benefits are dependent upon ongoing and consistent application of the techniques.

Distraction proved to be the main obscuration to the research practice and I consistently found it difficult to maintain focus. I conclude that future investigations in this field may be enhanced by implementation of dedicated preliminary exercises (such as the Seven Point Meditation Postures) aimed at deepening and sustaining concentration.

I experienced waning motivation during the span of twenty five meditation sessions. In the earlier sessions I observed a burst of inspiration, whereby the meditation methods seemed to work effectively, and yet the sessions became harder to commit to towards the end of the practice period.

This research practice did not directly prompt transcendent musical experiences as per Werner’s methodology. I determine however, that as I was more keenly aware of how my mind attaches value judgements to musical experiences, I cannot discount these meditation techniques as a cause for negating expectation and agitation in the mind.

**The core dynamics of desirous attitudes in practice and performance**

The distillation of the diary entries revealed the following elements of experience in relation to desire:

- Desire is constant.
- Nature of desire is very hard to observe, and its dynamic changes constantly.
- Desires are inhibitive because they distract me.
- Desire is not a ‘pretty thought’ to work with.
- When I am discontented it is hard to remember to be mentally vigilant about desire.
- Desire for high self-esteem is very difficult to observe.
The core ideas about the development of gratitude as a response to desire-based struggles

The distillation of the diary entries revealed the following elements of experience in relation to gratitude:

- Gratitude can be cultivated, but requires effort.
- Gratitude is a cause for contentment.
- Gratitude can negate desire.
- Gratitude is a general antidote to specific desires.
- Gratitude is expansive.
- Gratitude can be applied retrospectively.

The experience of contentment in practice and performance

The distillation of the diary entries revealed the following elements of experience in relation to contentment:

- Contentment is a positive feeling.
- Contentment is linked to lack of desires.
- Contentment may help to heal past hurts in practice and performance.

4.1.1 The process depends on identifying and changing perceptions. The process takes time and effort, as habitual thoughts are powerful, and to observe the workings of the mind is difficult

My diary entries characterised the research practice as a procedure of observation of mental processes, and recognised that they can be changed if needed:

“What I need to keep in mind is that I am investigating a process. This research investigation is not strictly about kicking the winning goal. It is about observing mental processes.” (Session 2)

“Desire is not a pretty thought to work with – Admitting to yourself not only that you need things in your career, but that you want more than what you need.” (Session 16)
“I came to the realisation that these practices are about working to change your perception.” (Session 18)

“This process is about understanding perceptions in practice and performance, and recognising that these perceptions can be changed because they are based upon desires. So if I’m thinking about other musicians who I think to be “better than me,” it’s about changing that perception, so I’m using these tools to recall those musicians who I think are better than me, and who make me feel inferior so to speak. And I’m just recalling their good qualities in a positive light, so I’m remembering some great things that they have done or said to me – they’ve actually helped me, and so in that sense that’s why I think it’s about changing perceptions, and it’s about using perceptions as a tool in order to move towards contentment.” (Session 19)

As stated, I observed a ‘honeymoon period,’ whereby the earlier sessions seemed to be beneficial and the initial experiences of contentment were very positive and encouraging. However, much effort was required to complete the research practice, despite positive benefits observed. I encountered a loss of momentum right when I felt as if I was achieving something important for my contentment:

“It definitely does something for you – for your gratitude. Just to remember these people.” (Session 3)

“Maybe I am now discovering the causes of discontentment – that . . . I don’t have the skills to recall the efforts of others.” (Session 5)

“I think it is going to take a lot longer to really ingrain these ways of thinking before I can be mindful of them when I am performing and rehearsing and practicing.” (Session 13)

“It feels like hard work sometimes – To sit down and re-programme your way of thinking.” (Session 16)

“I am really just noting that my habitual thoughts are must stronger than I realised.” (Session 21)
“It is going to take a lot longer to unravel these desire-based problems than twenty five sessions. I can see that already, but yet that good things are happening. It makes sense that eight hours of meditation practice will not be enough to unravel more than twenty years of gross and subtle problems!” (Session 21)

“Here I am wanting to cultivate the gratitude, which I think will help me to develop contentment, yet sometimes my mind doesn’t want to go there – not naturally.” (Session 21)

“So I am experiencing some sort of “gratitude fatigue,” or something along those lines. My mind just doesn’t want to go through the process at the moment.” (Session 21)

“When I try to focus on the task at hand it is as if my mind gets quite foggy. I can’t seem to focus on the task.” (Session 22)

“To develop gratitude is a very complex task. It involves pro-actively choosing to redefine what you think your role is as a musician, and to make effort in making changes. That is complex, because you bring to the table lots and lots of thoughts and memories and experiences, which all need to be re-authored, or to develop a new look or view of those experiences, so in that sense it is a complex task.” (Session 23)

Difficulties were experienced when attempting to change a desire-based view of an experience, or to re-author my attitudes towards musical endeavours from the past and present:

“Seeing that my mind habitually thinks in certain patterns is difficult to see. I guess in essence these practices are bearing fruits even though I feel that I’m not gaining much ground, I’m definitely observing my mind on a more acute level. The question is “how do I respond to what I’m seeing?”” (Session 13)

“I find it very hard to realise that I actually desire things constantly. In retrospect I can see it clearly – in the moment I can’t.” (Session 13)

“These techniques I am practicing I think initially are about recalling past experiences and getting used to changing self-authored attitudes, and maybe in a number of years I will be able to live and breathe it.” (Session 23)
“Sometimes these practices can feel a bit contrived when you are sitting down, trying to deliberately recall past events and so on, but that is in itself, is not an argument against the efficacy of these practices. It just means that it is a new way of thinking which takes effort. Never at any time have I found that these practices grow my desires. They are actually quite humbling.” (Session 24)

4.1.2 Gratitude is a general cause for contentment in music practice and performance, and is challenging to incorporate into daily music activities

My findings conclude that gratitude can be cultivated in formal meditation sessions, and that it is a positive response to self-authored views of my musical activities which I deem to be inhibitive. I observed that the development of gratitude is an expansive experience, which is only limited by my imagination, yet my diary entries determine that gratitude functioned only as a general antidote to desire-based problems.

Despite the positive diary entries below, I found little conclusive evidence that gratitude could be easily cultivated during daily musical activities. It was quite difficult to recall the techniques when about to go on stage to perform, and I was only marginally better when practicing. I generally became more aware of opportunities to develop gratitude, but these opportunities did not arise spontaneously. I realised that the problems described have prevailed for a long period of time, and as such could not be completely understood and eradicated in twenty five sessions. The fact that I was able to shift my attitude towards some specific past events that had continued to bother me suggests that my attitudes are self-authored, and can be changed.

I observed that visualisation techniques are very powerful. I found it to be most beneficial to simply visualise the faces of other musicians whilst employing QROB. After approximately ten sessions I expanded the practice to include recording artists, instrument makers, teachers, students and parents who had a positive impact on my musical career. The diary entries describe increasing confidence in the techniques:

“In trying to practice the gratitude, it was like trying to unblock something that was completely blocked.” (Session 1)
“I did start to develop genuine gratitude and I’m almost ashamed that I haven’t thought this way for the last twenty odd years of playing music. Just to flip the coin and to realise other people’s efforts is humbling. Does that bring contentment? I guess in a sense it does. It completes a loop.” (Session 3)

“I just visualised their face, and I looked directly into their eyes, so I made it a very personal experience, and as I was visualising them, rather than having any words. I was just visualising them and inhaling – I was close to them. Less than a metre away from them in my visualisation – Inhale and remember what they did for me on a specific occasion, or over a period of many years. Tried to dissolve the self-cherishing at my heart and breathe back “thanks”.” (Session 3)

“I was struck by the gravity of what I am doing. I am actually paying attention to my needs for happiness, and that’s an important moment in my journey as a musician.” (Session 4)

“These techniques are definitely bringing a sense of contentment. Even at the very least just to make effort in developing gratitude does bring about contentment. I think that just knowing that I am trying to do something to alleviate problems is satisfying regardless of the result. Just knowing that you are making the effort is good.” (Session 8)

“I could at times slip straight into feeling gratitude, and I think I have described that feeling of it being quite open when you are in a mood of gratitude. You just keep finding new people, and you are reconnecting and you are growing your connections with people. And that does bring a sense of contentment.” (Session 14)

“I have been thinking that the development of gratitude is not targeted at specific desires. It is not specific gratitude for a specific desire-based problem – attachment or aversion. But rather it is about changing the perception of the object in order to lower general desires.” (Session 20)

“I can’t say with certainty at the moment that the gratitude gets rid of specific desires in the moment, but it’s just a general shift of attitude that is observable. I think on that basis with applied effort over a long time I would really be able to see how I inhibit myself with desires.” (Session 24)

“Gratitude really is an expansive attitude.” (Session 24)
4.1.3 Desire is pervasive, and is linked to distraction, which is constant and thus inhibitive

My diary entries suggest that desire is rife, yet can be difficult to observe in practice and performance, and can distract from the present moment.

Distraction was mentioned in all but one of the diary entries, which pose the question about efficacy of music practice and performance under the sway of distraction. I began to understand how easily I can fall prey to my desires, in that when distracted, I am completely unaware of the activity of my mind in practice and performance. The Seven Point Meditation Postures were effective in providing a basis for observing distraction, yet twenty five sessions were not enough to begin to negate distraction:

“So desire is hard to see in the moment, and when I am discontented it is hard to remember to be mentally vigilant about desire, and this is particularly true when I am on stage too. I think it is going to take a lot longer to really ingrain these ways of thinking before I can be mindful of them when I am performing and rehearsing and practicing.” (Session 13)

“Distraction seems to be a huge hurdle to overcome to change my self-authored attitudes.” (Session 1)

“This is my third session today, and I was expecting my concentration to be able to increase, and distractions to decrease but that didn’t happen.” (Session 6)

“It is very interesting this notion of just how distracted I really am, and how unaware I am of how I am thinking. That’s a real revelation, and in that sense it is no surprise to me that I’ve ended up being discontented. I don’t even know how I got there!” (Session 12)

“I find it very hard to observe habitual thoughts, and yet the figures are showing that I am consistently distracted, and I’m unaware that I’m distracted. I’m distracted and I don’t know it.” (Session 16)

“What I am currently observing makes me wonder how inefficiently I really practice my music, or how un-attentive I am to my own performances.” (Session 16)

“It was a fairly distracted practice once again.” (Session 24)
I conclude that the combined effects of desire and distraction are a potent force in dictating the experience of discontentment. Desire-driven distraction towards external attainments masks the observable affects of yearning, as my mind is focused on the object of desire, and not upon desire itself.

“I have [been] thinking that my desire to attain the perceived qualities of other musicians is a distraction, and leads to fear-based performance, particularly when performing in front of these people. What I can say is that practicing gratitude does not leave room for those desires to arise.” (Session 21)

“Desires are inhibitive because they distract me. They keep me in the past, or they make me think about the future.” (Session 24)

“How do you find contentment despite a completely dull and distracted mind?” (Session 22)

4.1.4 Self-esteem is more subtle than desire

I investigated the experience of discontentment as arising from desirous attachment towards high self-esteem in practice and performance, yet in reality I was only barely aware of self-esteem during the meditation sessions.51 The exceptions were when my feelings of self-esteem were in high or low extremes. Towards the end of the twenty five sessions I was beginning to observe my desire for external attainments, but had not developed the skills to link this with desire for high self-esteem:

“The desire for high self-esteem: It is very hard to see that when I am in the middle of doing these particular practices. So whether that means I need to deepen my skills so that I have got time to think of high self-esteem, or whether or not that should form the basis of another study, is something to think about.” (Session 6)

51 I was however, able to retrospectively observe fluctuating perceptions of self-esteem.
“It is this lack of awareness that can cause problems. I find it hard to see my desire for high self-esteem – I think because I am so distracted. I find it a little easier to see my desire for external attainments, but not much easier.” (Session 8)

“I recognise that my feelings of self-esteem fluctuate from moment to moment almost – depending on what I am perceiving, anything external, or what I’m thinking, so anything internal. Both these things have an impact on feelings of self-esteem.” (Session 13)

“I think whilst developing gratitude, I have to keep in mind how hard it is first of all to observe desire, and its nature. I think it does tie in with self-esteem, but we are just so habituated to wanting to sound a certain way, or to wanting things out of our career that it ties in somehow.” (Session 15)

“The transitory nature of self-esteem is important in developing gratitude. We need to see that our views of ourselves are not fixed – That they fluctuate, because otherwise there would be no point in doing these practices.” (Session 17)

4.1.5 Motivation and attention to process is important

The reading of the personalised motivation at the start of each practice session provided a strong sense of formalised rituality, and deepened my efforts to cultivate contentment. An important factor is that I wrote a personalised script to recite. It helped me to direct my mind to the tasks at hand and to recall the importance of the practice for my long term benefit.

As the sessions progressed I found myself reading the words more slowly, and pausing to reflect on the meaning. I observed that it was beneficial to edit the motivation as needed, and that this helped to create a deeply personal experience that went to the core of the perceived problems.

The reading of the motivation also helped to deepen my concentration, and may be an important tool for future research participants not willing to employ the use of the Seven Point Meditation Postures to develop concentration:
“I realised that with the reading of the motivation and with the dedication – that has to be done very pro-actively. I am thinking that I won’t get the benefits by just reading the words. I need to pause a little bit after each sentence, and really connect with it on my own level.” (Session 4)

“If I really focus on the words of the motivation, and I am really very attentive to my postures, or to the breathing and so on, I feel like I gain better results.” (Session 10)

“The reading of the motivation is becoming more important, and I’m slowing down and reading it and contemplating each section within each passage.” (Session 18)

The reading of the dedication did not have as much observable benefit as was hoped. Reasons for this may be either that it was not written with the same diligence as the motivation, or that I was rushing the reading of the dedication so as to document my experiences in my practice diary. I was anticipating that the reading of the dedication might be a ‘sealer’ for the meditation practice, but this did not prove to be the case.

“I find that the reading of the motivation is very, very beneficial in setting up a feeling that I am doing something special, and it helps me to bring attention to what I am doing, so it is valuable on that point. The Dedication – I need to pay more attention when I do it. I tend to rush, and want to pick up this Dictaphone and start speaking, so at this stage it doesn’t feel as beneficial, but that is due to my impatience to start collecting the data.” (Session 10)

4.2 Conclusion

I conducted this research in order to better understand inhibitive internal attitudes that I bring to my practice and performance of music. My intention was to affirm that mental peace can be developed pro-actively despite prevalent inhibitive attitudes.

This study adds new knowledge to general literature on music practice and performance, and in particular desire-based, self-authored attitudes. The preliminary findings may lay the foundation for future research in this field and offer musicians a way to deepen their personal perspective, and respond to experiences which inhibit the experience of contentment.
I explored a personalised and creative meditative practice as a simple and positive response to my struggles, and determined that general benefits (particularly through self-observation) may be gained in practice and performance, although the practice must be done on a consistent basis over a long period of time in order to enjoy sustained benefits. I determined that desire and yearning in musical creativity can affect my actions to the point whereby they may inhibit the enjoyment of musical attainments. I observed that the reading of a personalised motivation provided a strong basis for positive experiences in the meditation sessions and in practice and performance.

I conclude that there are varied levels of apprehension of desire-based attitudes in music practice and performance such as the ability to recognise the dynamics and dissatisfactory affects of desire generally, the ability to recognise desire for external attainments, the ability to recognise desire for self-esteem, the ability to observe interplay between all elements described, and the ability to recognise and respond to desire-based distraction in a manner which sustains the experience of contentment. I observe four levels of engagement with desire-based problems which may bring benefit to musicians:

1) An ability to strengthen emotional intelligence, whereby musicians can distinguish on a personal level between what is inherently beneficial, and what is inhibitive.
2) An ability to respond to desire-based problems, either as they arise, or retrospectively.
3) An ability to pre-empt, or eradicate destructive habitual thought patterns.
4) An ability to view desire as a cause of distraction.

4.3 Recommendations

To further the line of enquiry on desire-based experiences in music practice and performance, studies may be investigated on several fronts, for example, links between desire and distraction, desire and fear, desire and motivation, and the links between desire-based distraction and musical efficacy.
BIBLIOGRAPHY


Appendix A

Seven Point Meditation Postures

The following notes are paraphrased from teachings given on Calm Abiding Meditation by Lama Choedak Rinpoche.²

Brief Overview of Calm Abiding Meditation

Calm Abiding Meditation is an ancient set of meditation techniques that are designed for use in everyday life situations to induce calmness, and remould experiences that cause harm to us or others. Calmness can be sustained by implementing Calm Abiding as a strategy to not treat problems in habitual ways, and to no longer interpret perceived phenomena in ways that are harmful. Essentially, the aim is to seek inner devices for happiness, and free the mind of all incoherent thoughts relating to phenomena. Calmness is achieved by subduing all that is the antithesis of calmness.

Seven Point Meditation Postures: The Symbolism of the Physical Postures

The significance and symbolism of the postures is very important. The commitment to maintaining the seven postures is indicative of the mind’s willingness to sit with the body. The postures are held so as to allow the mind to anchor itself to a point of reference, and thus to develop concentration. The mind is stimulated and engaged with the postures so that it doesn’t wander. The postures are ordered from gross to subtle.

1) Legs

Legs are interlocked in full lotus or half lotus posture.

Sit with conviction. Your legs are not wandering when interlocked, and this posture symbolises your strength and determination to cultivate calmness, and a promise not to move, despite a wandering mind.

² Rinpoche, Calm Abiding Retreat
2) Hands

Back of right hand is placed upon palm of left hand in the lap. Thumbs touching lightly and hands placed below the navel. The joining of the hands is expressive of an attentive mood, and an aspiration to control dualisms, particularly the extremes of rigidity and laxity.

3) Back

The back is kept comfortably straight, the aim of which is to maintain alertness and attentiveness. The straightness of the back is viewed as a barometer of attentiveness, as the back will tend to slouch when attention is directed away from the back posture.

4) Elbows and Shoulders

Elbows are held comfortably away from the ribcage, which promotes full expansion of the lungs. The shoulders are balanced – Not dropping down, or pulled back in any rigid manner.

5) Neck

The neck leans comfortably forward, and the chin drops down slightly. This posture is said to coordinate the position of the head to the rest of the body, and guards against coughing, sneezing, and burping.

6) Mouth

The tip of the tongue touches the upper palate behind the front teeth, with the teeth just touching, and lips kept naturally relaxed. This position helps to avoid extreme dryness and wetness occurring within the mouth, and allows the cooling breath to pass freely between the teeth.
7) Eyes

The eyes are highly sensitive organs, so the aim is to express them serenely. The eyes should gaze into the space a little beyond the tip of the nose, without moving or blinking. They are not focused on anything in particular, yet are not avoiding anything within the field of sight.
Appendix B

Qualified Rounds of Breathing (QROB)

The following notes are paraphrased from teachings given on Calm Abiding by Lama Choedak Rinpoche.\textsuperscript{53}

Background Information

Breathing

Our lifespan is linked directly to the breath. In Calm Abiding Meditation one round of breath is thought to consist of a segment of inhalation, retention, and exhalation. Each segment begins as the previous one finishes, and there is no point of rest in a round of breath.

Relating feelings to the breath

Feelings are thought to be ‘mounted’ on the breath. In other words, we consciously or unconsciously associate breathing with our thought processes. In this sense the breath acts like a conveyor belt for our feelings, and the ensuing feeling is related to the thought, perception and the object of perception. When we feel something, there is a domain of feeling, such as sight, sound, smell, touch, or a knowable cognisant object. In order to cultivate positive feelings, we must know the process of breathing, and how we mount feelings upon the breath.

A feeling is not passive

A feeling is not a passive response to an object, but is an active creation of our own making. For example, are we pleased or saddened by looking at a wall for a long period of time? The wall cannot offer us a feeling of its’ own, but it is our response to the object of perception which defines our feeling.

\textsuperscript{53} Ibid.
We have to be answerable to our feelings whether we are aware or not that we are constructing them. If we are not aware that we are authoring those feelings, then that is why we have unpleasant feelings.

If our positive thoughts are instrumental in creating a positive feeling, then we know that a feeling is not something that happens to us, but something that we do. If we are aware of how we construct pleasant feelings, for example, by looking at, or touching something, we know that there is an active process resulting from our way of thinking that creates for us a pleasant experience.

What happens to us and what we do are different things. What happens to us is passive. We just sit there and it happens to us. When we do things we have to input energy to make it happen. Feelings are actively authored by our own conscious or unconscious mind. There is never a ready-made situation [created by someone else] that makes us experience the feeling.

**Qualified Rounds of Breathing**

**Unqualified breathing**

If we are authoring unpleasant feelings then there is no doubt we are doing it unknowingly. The theory which underpins QROB implies that in everyday activities (including music practice and performance) we are mostly doing un-qualified rounds of breathing, or unconscious breathing. Because the breathing is unconscious, what we mount on the breath is also unconscious. If we are not aware of what we are inhaling, then we cannot know what it carries.

Every unqualified inhalation has an unqualified retention, which means it is toxic. If we have unknowingly inhaled something negative, we will ‘swallow’ it unknowingly, and that means it will be trapped in our body and nervous system until we readily expel it. Until a creative process is implemented to expel the toxic matter from our nervous system (such as trapped feelings in our body) then they will remain there. If we feel sick, tired, unhappy, hurtful, resentful, or guilty, it’s because we unknowingly created the feelings, but we are unable to get rid of them.
Qualified Inhalation

QROB are designed to align positive thoughts with each segment of the breath: To align the activity of inhalation with the contents of a positive thought. As we inhale in this manner, it promotes our wellbeing. The effect of the qualified inhalation is that it makes us feel the benefit of the activity. We feel that the inhalation was wonderful.

A qualified inhalation must be done knowingly in real-time. We can’t do the inhalation first, and have the thought later. When inhaling, we have to create a thought that is positive, and try to feel the benefit as we retain it.

Qualified Retention

The inhalation does not immediately become an exhalation. The changeover from inhalation to exhalation is called retention, no matter how short it is. Our retention is usually very short and not even noticeable most of the time. To increase the awareness of the retention, we focus upon the benefit of the inhalation. We feel the breath enter our lungs through the nostril or mouth, and then permeate, assimilate and redistribute the positive thought throughout the whole nervous system and body (i.e. not just the lungs). We hold the breath as long as is comfortable, and feel the benefit from the tips of the toes to our crown. To qualify the retention segment of the round of breath is to feel the benefit of healing and relief.

Qualified Exhalation

We do not exhale what we have just inhaled. If we imagine our body to be a bottle which is contaminated with dust particles, then when we fill the body with a wonderful liquid, all the particles come to the surface. The particles could be sickness, or trapped emotional feelings, because they do become solidified. Long repressed emotions do become physical ailments and can clog fluids such as blood. There may be a number of other factors at play which produce clogging, but one of the main causes of clogging is psychosomatic – negative thoughts. Grasping, clinging and freezing causes even the fluids to stop flowing.

The retention has brought up the inhibitive experiences (physical or emotional) to the surface, and then they are expelled on the exhalation. We just imagine that they are all coming up, as we tell them to exit. We just exhale – release everything on the breath outwards through the
mouth and the nostrils. All difficulties that weigh us down are released. The negativities are discharged and dispersed into the universe. We have to feel the illnesses and negativities being expelled. The exhalation is qualified because it fulfils an activity. It shortens the lifespan of the suffering within our mind and feelings.

Adaptation of Tonglen Practice

On the inhalation segment visualise the person/situation you wish to recall and recollect the kindness or the importance of the event to you.

On the retention segment, visualise your self-cherishing attitudes dissolving in your heart as black smoke, which dissolves and clears.

On the exhalation segment visualise your gratitude issuing forth, and mentally say the word “thanks.”

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54 ———, The Tibetan Book of Living and Dying, 202-6.
MEDITATION SESSION 1

Generally it went well. I had to mentally talk my way through the seven postures to fight distraction. Distraction seems to be a huge hurdle to overcome to change my self-authored attitudes. I am thinking that the QROB – I’m going to be able to take a personal approach each time. That’s the part that I’m still not sure about - how to actually do it. In this case, on the in-breath I was visualising white, and I was just saying [thinking internally] the word “effort”, meaning effort from all those from the past, and the present. On the retention part I imagined the colour red, and dissolution of self-cherishing at my heart, so all this black smoke being broken up in my heart, which symbolises the self-cherishing, which I think is negative. On the out-breath I imagined the colour blue, and I just said the word “thanks”. So that’s the method I tried this time round. Distraction once again was the big problem, but physically comfortable for the twenty minutes. It is just quietening the mind – I found myself/I pretended I was teaching a class the seven postures rather than being attentive to my own postures! That is a form of distraction, but for the first one, it did help me to maintain focus. In trying to practice the gratitude, it was like trying to unblock something that was completely blocked – I had no idea of what to even conceive let alone practice, but I’m sure that with more sessions I will get used to that.

MEDITATION SESSION 2

This one felt like it went a little deeper than the last one, and a few thoughts occurred to me: I need to be aware that I am becoming attached to the goal. In my thesis I have been writing about attachment, and I am seeing that at play here! I am hoping for the results I need, and becoming attached to getting those results. What I need to keep in mind is that I am investigating a process. This research investigation is not strictly about kicking the winning goal. It is about observing mental processes. That was one thought.
With the QROB, rather than saying words like I did last session, I just focused on faces – of past teachers, present teachers, current students, past colleagues I’ve played with and so on. Whilst it hasn’t changed my life, it has changed my gratitude. It has. It’s just in remembering where I’ve come from and who’s helped me to get to where I am now. It’s something I never do!

So that was very good, and I was still thinking of the three parts to the rounds of breath, and I was qualifying it with just remembering, and still based on that Tonglen, so the inhalation was visualising the person, the retention phase was smoke dissolving at my heart and coming out on the out-breath, and just with the word “thanks”. So a very simple practice. There is something in that. I am hoping that I will be able to go deeper and deeper each session, or maybe I shouldn’t be attached to that hope – I don’t know!

Physically I was a little less comfortable than before (session 1) – I just have a slight stiffness across my middle back, but nothing too serious.

Distraction levels are still very high. This time I was distracted by thinking about what I was going to say into this tape recorder. I was distracted by “oh-remember to say that at the end of the session”, and so on. Also there was general distraction – like a bird walking past the window I was sitting at – would distract my attention very, very easily.

I tried for the last minute or so to remember [the] changing levels of self-esteem, but that’s very hard to find. It’s very hard to remember that your feelings of who you are is changing from moment to moment. I think that meditation will help to deepen this view.

**MEDITATION SESSION 3**

I think I went a little deeper again. It’s good doing three in a day with one hour breaks in between. You definitely get a chance to go a little deeper in one day. What I suddenly realised in that session was that there are just so many people who really have helped me. I did start to develop genuine gratitude and I’m almost ashamed that I haven’t thought this way for the last twenty odd years of playing music. Just to flip the coin and to realise other people’s efforts is humbling. Does that bring contentment? I guess in a sense it does. It completes a loop. It closes the loop. I was thinking about past musicians who have booked me for gigs – Whatever standard of gig it was at.
I recalled their face. Now this is an important thing that I tried this session. I just visualised their face, and I looked directly into their eyes, so I made it a very personal experience, and as I was visualising them, rather than having any words. I was just visualising them and inhaling – I was close to them. Less than a metre away from them in my visualisation - Inhale and remember what they did for me on a specific occasion, or over a period of many years. Tried to dissolve the self-cherishing at my heart and breathe back “thanks”.

It definitely does something for you – for your gratitude. Just to remember these people. I was imagining that in the later sessions I could have a tear running down my cheek – But I won’t be attached to that! I am thinking that for me it could be a good way to do the QROB is this new visualisation. Rather than saying a word, just to conjure up a picture in my mind of someone. It feels a lot more personal. And on the times I was distracted and couldn’t think of anybody, I would just breathe in the white, retain the red and breathe out the blue. Apart from that it was a personalised way of doing it, it helped me go deeper.

Also in this session I tried keeping the visualisation of each individual with me for three rounds of breath. Rather than just the one, so that gives you a chance to deepen your concentration on what those people have done for you.

Physically fairly comfortable, and the twenty minutes as usual has gone fairly quickly.

MEDITATION SESSION 4

This session was completely distracted – well mostly distracted! I had to guide my way around the seven postures with a cognitive mind. I had to literally think “now think of the legs”, “now think of the hands”, and so on. That’s OK, as from the last batch of meditation sessions I remember that happening within the first one [session] too, and I’ll be looking for signs that it [concentration] will increase as I can get a few more sessions in today.

I realised that with the reading of the motivation and with the dedication - that has to be done very pro-actively. I am thinking that I won’t get the benefits by just reading the words. I need to pause a little bit after each sentence, and really connect with it on my own level, and if this
study is done by a group of people I would encourage those people to write their own motivations and dedications – something that is highly personal and meaningful to them.

This session – even though it was distracted I was struck by the gravity of what I am doing. I am actually paying attention to my needs for happiness, and that’s an important moment in my journey as a musician. I like the fact that I am not doing anything just for myself, but I’m remembering people, and remembering their kindness, and acknowledging that. That does give me a sense of peace, and somehow is energising. It re-energises my connection with those people even though they are not here in the room.

In one of the previous sessions I was talking about visualising certain people for three rounds of breath, and I think that that’s a winner for me.

MEDITATION SESSION 5

Once again quite distracted, but a few interesting thoughts occurred to me. First of all it is good to be able to negate feelings of desire through doing this practice. There seems to be something in it. I was thinking that gratitude is a cause for contentment because it is re-affirming past happiness or past good achievements in collaboration with others, or off the back of the hard work of others that I have just enjoyed the fruits of. It is like revisiting happiness or good times in some respects. Visualisation worked again. Earlier on [in previous sessions] I was using words. I was using the word ‘effort’ as I was thinking of general things that people have done for me. I find that it is better to work with specifics – To actually visualise a person. They are not saying or doing anything but they are just there in front of me, and I am inhaling white light and I have recalled those people because of things that they have done for me. That seems to be enough for this practice.

Also a thought has occurred that I am testing concretised views of myself and concretised experiences so I’m trying to be brave and recall people who have wronged me as well. I am trying to think of things that they have actually done that have been good for me because this person or these people in particular who I am thinking of who shall remain un-named have not only come against me in the past but they have also done good things for me prior to that, and so I am wondering if that is a way of healing – getting contentment through a healing process.
It is an interesting experience. At times this feels a bit like hard work actually! Sitting on the cushion and making effort to recall all these great things that have happened to me in the past but maybe I am now discovering the causes of discontentment – that I am not mindful enough to recall this, I don’t have the skills to recall the efforts of others. Physically I was fairly comfortable.

MEDITATION SESSION 6

Quite distracted once again. This is my third session today, and I was expecting my concentration to be able to increase, and distractions to decrease but that didn’t happen. This session was just as distracted as the other two really. I am getting more inventive with QROB, and of course I have realised I can extend my gratitude to the great players as well – those who have recorded some of the music that really lights me up, and so it’s a very interesting process once again to tap into all these great experiences. That certainly helps to deepen contentment.

There is an issue of retaining mindfulness when I am off the cushion. I need to consider that fact that to really ingrain and develop these techniques is going to possibly take a lot longer than twenty five sessions, but that that’s ok too.

The process itself is quite satisfying, and on that point when I am developing gratitude I find there is no room for discontentment. Everywhere you look so to speak you are finding options for developing your own happiness and deepening your contentment by imagining so many musicians.

The desire for high self-esteem. It is very hard to see that when I am in the middle of doing these particular practices. So whether that means I need to deepen my skills so that I have got time to think of high self-esteem or whether or not that should form the basis of another study, is something to think about.
MEDITATION SESSION 7

This session was by far the most distracted I’ve had so far. It was quite ineffective. I sat for over twenty minutes and felt like I hadn’t really achieved much at all! My mind was just flapping around, and unable to stay remotely focused on the tasks at hand. Maybe there are some times of day that are less effective than others for me to do meditation.

I tried very hard to develop gratitude, but didn’t sense that it happened on any effective level at all with this session, so I don’t have much more to speak to. I did try to just keep calmly going back to the postures, and then calmly keep going back to QROB, but I just found that I was thinking about anything but what I wanted to. It’s ok - it’s just a matter of doing the method with the motivation, and trying to get the results, but without being attached to the process.

MEDITATION SESSION 8

Generally went well. I did start off being quite distracted, but I seemed to arrive at a good place of concentration. So in that sense the body postures can help to develop concentration, and they are worth doing before the QROB. I am getting more confidence in the actual technique, and in recalling so many musicians I am definitely starting to be able to start to widen the net, and remember further back to people who have even helped me in very small or obscure ways, such as someone who gave me a pedal for my 21st birthday all those years ago – Just remembering that and having gratitude for it.

These techniques are definitely bringing a sense of contentment. Even at the very least just to make effort in developing gratitude does bring about contentment. I think that just knowing that I am trying to do something to alleviate problems is satisfying regardless of the result. Just knowing that you are making the effort is good.

I do still get distracted in trying to remember things to say into this Dictaphone, so that can be a bit of a distraction, but that’s not that big a deal – it just should be noted that the mind still flaps around.
It is this lack of awareness that can cause problems. I find it hard to see my desire for high self-esteem – I think because I am so distracted. I find it a little easier to see my desire for external attainments, but not much easier. I still end up with things in my hand before I know I’ve done it. Eight sessions in, I feel like I am making progress.

MEDITATION SESSION 9

I was once again quite distracted, particularly with young kids running around in the background the whole time. I felt like the practice was a little forced today. I had to do it out of my cognitive mind and not from an emotional point of view – a bit less. Nonetheless it felt like the time was worth doing. It was worth spending that time. My postures felt very good today. There is definitely something in just holding those postures as best you can – even whilst doing the QROB. It helps some form of humility I think – just to sit there cross-legged and linking your hands together and so on. The actual QROB technique works very well even when distracted! As I say, still worth doing.

MEDITATION SESSION 10

This is the first session of the day. I was completely distracted. I battled with having a Bartok melody flying through my mind, which somehow morphed into Bye Bye Blackbird! I find that the reading of the motivation is very very beneficial in setting up a feeling that I am doing something special, and it helps me to bring attention to what I am doing, so it is valuable on that point. The Dedication – I need to pay more attention when I do it. I tend to rush, and want to pick up this Dictaphone and start speaking, so at this stage it doesn’t feel as beneficial, but that is due to my impatience to start collecting the data.

As usual distraction is the biggest factor by far in trying to develop these qualities. Also attentiveness is very important. If I really focus on the words of the motivation, and I am really very attentive to my postures, or to the breathing and so on, I feel like I gain better results.

I was very distracted today – I was even struggling to think of musicians to work with and to visualise today. Nonetheless it feels like it is very constructive. Even a poor session like this – It
feels like it is worth doing, and like I think I have mentioned before, it feels very positive to just make effort in addressing some issues, so there is no question about the effectiveness of the practice from that point.

The challenge is not to be attached to the end point but just to keep practicing the process.

**MEDITATION SESSION 11**

This session is the second one for the day, and was a little more focused and concentrated than the previous one. Whilst still distracted, I definitely got to a deeper level with my feelings of gratitude. I was able to start recalling some people to work with.

Once again distraction is the major inhibitor of actually accomplishing feelings of gratitude. I find within one round of breath I’ll start with the visualisation someone I’m indebted to, and grateful for their help, and by the end of that round of breath, my mind is somewhere else. I think the fact that I’m distracted does not mean that this practice is not worthwhile. There are definitely some benefits from it.

Holding the postures for a little while first is very good too. Just to try and start to calm that racing mind just a little before doing the QROB. It is well worth doing the two techniques in tandem. So, mindfulness of the postures, and then QROB. It is as if one is the base for the other.

So once again, this being the second session, I did feel a shift in attitude – particularly recalling someone who is deceased, and there is a joy in being able to recall these people and remember what they have done. That is especially gratifying – rather than just forgetting the dead. That seems to be quite a powerful practice. And also I have been recalling living people and the like. Hopefully my next session will go a little deeper again – we’ll see what happens.
MEDITATION SESSION 12

This is the third session for today and the practice is deepening. This one I mainly spent recalling the kindness of past teachers, and that was very beneficial. It’s very interesting once you start recalling and recollecting how many people have helped you. You just feel like you are swimming in a sea of people who will help! You know, right through the past, and if nothing else, that is just a great thing to connect to. Even if these sessions are distracted, that’s still very very good.

There is something very calming about recalling the kindness of others I cant put it into words other than it definitely brings a sense of using gratitude as a tool definitely brings a sense of contentment I guess you would say. It is contenting to recall kindness of others. Initially when I start, it might feel a little contrived, but very rarely actually. It seems to be quite a natural state of mind to jump into.

I have flashes of pride in breathing attentively. It is very interesting this notion of just how distracted I really am, and how unaware I am of how I am thinking. That’s a real revelation, and in that sense it is no surprise to me that I’ve ended up being discontented. I don’t even know how I got there!

So this practice is starting to shed light on past moments of unawareness that have just grown somehow. Thought I’ve allowed to harbour within me become a little more obvious. It still is very very difficult to relate this to feelings of self-esteem, but it doesn’t mean that this practice is not worth pursuing. I think that that is going to be a deeper level of this practice, and it is also very hard because I am so distracted it is funnily enough hard to see my mental events ‘thought by thought.’ It just feels like a cascading stream of mental energy that just won’t shut the hell up!

MEDITATION SESSION 13

I still seem to be afflicted with distraction and also dullness. The mind just feels very lethargic when you try and keep it on topic so to speak. That is an interesting observation. It is distraction and dullness. More distraction than dullness. I have been thinking in that session about the
importance of reading the motivation, and particularly those lines: Transitory nature of self-esteem. I think that that’s important to reflect on during the session because I currently can’t see that at all. But it is true. I recognise that my feelings of self-esteem fluctuate from moment to moment almost – depending on what I am perceiving – anything external, or what I’m thinking, so anything internal. Both these things have an impact on feelings of self-esteem.

And then the next part of line: “links between desire and discontentment.” I find it very hard to realise that I’m actually desiring things constantly. In retrospect I can see it clearly – In the moment I can’t. In terms of this research, this could be graded research if it’s taken further. You start with the basics of writing motivation and just doing the method without desire or attachment to the end point or end goal.

Then the middle thing could be these links I’m currently describing. The third level could be watching the mind ‘thought by thought.’ I think the steps of this method will be graduated if it is taken further.

So desire and discontentment I was talking about. So desire is hard to see in the moment, and when I am discontented it is hard to remember to be mentally vigilant about desire, and this is particularly true when I am on stage too. I think it is going to take a lot longer to really ingrain these ways of thinking before I can be mindful of them when I am performing and rehearsing and practicing.

And the last one is that link between gratitude and contentment. In retrospect when I am sitting here after each session I can say ‘yes gratitude is linked to contentment,’ but when I’m off out in the big bad world it’s very very difficult to remember what I’m learning here on the cushion. So that’s an important preliminary observation.

And, “Turning back the harmful forces of desirous and selfish habitual inclinations.” Seeing that my mind habitually thinks in certain patterns is difficult to see. I guess in essence these practices are bearing fruits even though I feel that I’m not gaining much ground, I’m definitely observing my mind on a more acute level. The question is “how do I respond to what I’m seeing?”
MEDITATION SESSION 14

It’s been a little while since I have done these sessions, because I have been typing up my thesis and so I made a deliberate break so that I could be clearer on my definitions and so on. Having come back to this practice, whilst always distracted, I definitely think that I have made some progress. I could at times slip straight into feeling gratitude, and I think I have described that feeling of it being quite open when you are in a mood of gratitude. You just keep finding new people, and you are reconnecting and you are growing your connections with people. And that does bring a sense of contentment.

Of course, having desire in the mind it is hard to even know contentment on a very deep level I guess, but it definitely feels like it is worth doing this sort of practice. The challenge is to remain mindful of these techniques in everyday life – in whatever musical activity I am doing.

I was practicing last night, and I wasn’t mindful of gratitude. I was just focused on the task at hand. I am not saying that that is inherently good or bad, but in light of this research practice, at the moment at least I would like to be more mindful of gratitude whilst playing and performing.

In doing the survey, it’s often a case of being quite unaware of these elements at play, so I think that that’s going to take more time to develop that mental vigilance. So that’s another level of practice to be attained. What I am finding is that there are graded levels of attainment for this type of research.

MEDITATION SESSION 15

I was very distracted for this sit. This is the second sit for today, so it’s interesting that I feel like I was more distracted in the second sit than I was in the first. I’m not sure what to make of that at this point. I was a bit too distracted to keep thinking of people to focus on gratitude. There were some, but not many, but what I did realise was that being half way through I realised that there is a honeymoon period of doing this practice, where it is enticing to start working upon these things that may cause me problems, however, I started to think a bit about “What is the nature of desire in practice and performance?” It is very hard to observe, and its nature is changing all the time. There are different levels of desire, and for many different things. I think
while developing gratitude, I have to keep in mind how hard it is first of all to observe desire, and its nature. I think it does tie in with self-esteem, but we are just so habituated to wanting to sound a certain way, or to wanting things out of our career that it ties in somehow.

MEDITATION SESSION 16

Quite distracted again. It feels like hard work sometimes – To sit down and re-programme your way of thinking. Desire is not a pretty thought to work with. Admitting to yourself not only that you need things in your career, but that you want more than what you need. It’s a bit ugly, but as I said before, I think the benefits are worthwhile.

Although physically I felt comfortable, I was mentally rather agitated, and did not necessarily want to sit down and do this one. This is the third session for today. It doesn’t make me doubt as to whether this stuff is achievable. It’s just a bit like doing exercise when you don’t want to go out and do it!

I find it very hard to observe habitual thoughts, and yet the figures are showing that I am consistently distracted, and I’m unaware that I’m distracted. I’m distracted and I don’t know it and this is probably worth considering as a first step in setting up a practice regime. It is the first thing to be aware of, and future students may even need to spend time understanding distraction. What I am currently observing makes me wonder how inefficiently I really practice my music, or how un-attentive I am to my own performances.

MEDITATION SESSION 17

The sit was generally pretty good. I was still distracted, but achieved a few things. A few thoughts came to me, and firstly the important one I think is that in my survey I am measuring my desire for external attainments and high self-esteem, and general happiness and so on. That, I think, is going to become a by-product of the important work of developing gratitude.
So I think those things are going to take a long time to be seen. What I am really doing is documenting the beginnings of new experiences in music practice and performance from an internal perspective. So I think that they are going to take a bit longer to come to fruition.

Also I was thinking that the transitory nature of self-esteem is important in developing gratitude. We need to see that our views of ourselves are not fixed – that they fluctuate. Because otherwise there would be no point in doing these practices. What would be the point if we were eternally happy or eternally depressed? What would be the point in making effort? So that is something worth noting too.

I was thinking that if this was to become part of a teaching methodology, students would need to understand, and see for themselves the unhealthy effect of desires. That’s obviously a critical point to moving forwards – to acknowledge that of course there are helpful and healthy desires, but to acknowledge that some are not so good in practice and performance. And perhaps for students to identify these things for themselves, and then acknowledge them before beginning the actual meditation process.

**MEDITATION SESSION 18**

Firstly I came to the realisation that these practices are about working to change your perception. To develop inner qualities – changing perception in a way that becomes a useful tool, so that you can get more contentment from the effort that you put in. The reading of the motivation is becoming more important and I’m slowing down and reading it and contemplating each section within each passage.

Particularly the words “transitory nature of self-esteem,” even though I can’t observe this when I’m sitting on the cushion. I think that that is really important, because it is not worth making the assumption that you should feel good about who you are, because that changes constantly. So to not cling to that outcome and desire it incessantly – that’s a realisation that’s slowly dawning.

The links between desire and discontentment: I was thinking about Clive Hamilton’s quote that I put in my thesis, that when you attain something in music, such as a particular status level, or a certain quality of gigs, your mind immediately starts looking for more, which I think is a
symptom of discontentment, whereas the next phrase, “the link between gratitude and contentment,” to stop and acknowledge the people who have helped to get us to where we have got to, it is like a pool of contentment that you can keep jumping into time and time again, and keep recalling efforts that others have done to help you to get where you are.

It’s not just about you and your own practice, that is important, but you’re only practicing so that you can relate to other people, and gain external attainments in relation to other people and so on.

This is practice session 18, and I’m thinking that I’m not going to get any major realisations from this other than that I’ll refine the process of the view that I need to adopt in practice and performance.

MEDITATION SESSION 19

The practice was good in parts, and I was quite dull in other parts so, whilst watching the postures at the start, to develop the concentration – that was actually working. I was reasonably focused on each of the postures and so on. But when I flipped to the QROB, I found that a kind of dullness settled over my mind and I found it difficult to recall people to visualise to develop gratitude. As I’ve said before, I don’t think that this is inherently good or bad, but it is just what I was faced with today. It keeps coming to me at the moment that this process is about understanding perceptions in practice and performance, and recognising that these perceptions can be changed because they are based upon desires. So if I’m thinking about other musicians who I think to be “better than me,” it’s about changing that perception, so I’m using these tools to recall those musicians who I think are better than me, and who make me feel inferior so to speak. And I’m just recalling their good qualities in a positive light, so I’m remembering some great things that they have done or said to me – they’ve actually helped me. And so in that sense that’s why I think it’s about changing perceptions, and it’s about using perceptions as a tool in order to move towards contentment.
MEDITATION SESSION 20

I was quite distracted in this sit, and I also experienced dullness. It was just hard to focus on the task at hand. But having done this practice once again, it never feels fake. It never feels contrived, or that I am creating gratitude for it’s own sake. The connections, even if they are brief, feel quite genuine, and they feel valid. They feel like a valid thing to investigate. I have been thinking that the development of gratitude is not targeted at specific desires. It is not specific gratitude for a specific desire-based problem – attachment or aversion. But rather it is about changing the perception of the object in order to lower general desires. So specific desires are lessened and that’s a bonus, but it’s about embedding a new method or a new approach to music practice for myself. The QROB still works when I am focused on it.

MEDITATION SESSION 21

I am noticing once again a certain level of dullness occurring when I am trying to cultivate gratitude. It doesn’t deter me from the practice, but it is an intriguing experience, because here I am wanting to cultivate the gratitude, which I think will help me to develop contentment, yet sometimes my mind doesn’t want to go there – not naturally. So I am not sure what the cause of that, or the significance of that is. I am really just noting that my habitual thoughts are must stronger than I realised. I think I have mentioned before that it is going to take a lot longer to unravel these desire based problems than twenty five sessions. I can see that already, but yet that good things are happening. It makes sense that eight hours of meditation practice will not be enough to unravel more than twenty years of gross and subtle problems!

So I am experiencing some sort of “gratitude fatigue”, or something along those lines. My mind just doesn’t want to go through the process at the moment. I am expecting this issue to dissolve, just like everything else seems to shift and change.

I notice that my desire for external attainments is getting stronger as I’m getting excited about finishing the actual research component. There is a clinging to wanting to have this magic number of twenty five sessions finished!
I have also been thinking that my desire to attain the perceived qualities of other musicians is a
distraction, and leads to fear-based performance, particularly when performing in front of these
people. What I can say is that practicing gratitude does not leave room for those desires to
arise.

MEDITATION SESSION 22

This is probably the most distracted one I have done yet. I find my mind is distracted, like its
racing around, but yet there is also an element of dullness as well. When I try to focus on the
task at hand it is as if my mind gets quite foggy. I can’t seem to focus on the task. So, even
though I am quite distracted, it doesn’t make me think that I’m on the wrong track at all. But it
does make me wonder about what contentment is – how do you find contentment despite a
completely dull and distracted mind? Or, how is that we end up discontented despite the same
conditions? Is there a link there or not? Just some more things to ponder.

MEDITATION SESSION 23

I was completely distracted from the development of gratitude, but yet in my distraction a few
thoughts occurred to me. First of all, to develop gratitude is a very complex task. It involves pro-
actively choosing to redefine what you think your role is as a musician, and to make effort in
making changes. That is complex, because you bring to the table lots and lots of thoughts and
memories and experiences, which all need to be re-authored, or to develop a new look or view
of those experiences, so in that sense it is a complex task. Twenty five sessions is not going to be
enough to achieve any solid goal, yet I am confident that these techniques do work.

I find that I am just very gradually able to recall gratitude when I am on stage, or when I am
practicing or rehearsing. Sometimes the effort feels like it is lost, and I am distracted, and I can’t
remember to develop gratitude, but when I do it feels right. I was also thinking about a
recording session I did about a week ago, whereby my desire to sound good in this recording
session overwhelmed my ability to play competently. I was unable to achieve what I wanted to
achieve and I found that that would have been a good time to recall gratitude, but I was not
vigilant enough in the moment to recall it other than fleetingly. However these techniques I am
MEDITATION SESSION 24

It was a fairly distracted practice once again. I am coming to the end of the research component, and of course I am reflecting on my thoughts about gratitude versus desire, and I think I have mentioned this before, but it has come back to me again that gratitude really is an expansive attitude, and even just to do as few as twenty-five short sessions has been of benefit simply in the fact that desires are lessened when you are really focused on other people’s achievements, or their help or whatever.

I can’t say with certainty at the moment that the gratitude gets rid of specific desires in the moment, but it’s just a general shift of attitude that is observable. I think on that basis with applied effort over a long time I would really be able to see how I inhibit myself with desires.

I made the point that desires are inhibitive because they distract me. They keep me in the past, or they make me think about the future, and maybe a question for future research is if gratitude would actually do the same thing or not? Is that a cause for more distraction? My focus at the moment is to contextualise the desire so that I am not at least distracted by that in my practice and performance.

Sometimes these practices can feel a bit contrived when you are sitting down, trying to deliberately recall past events and so on, but that in itself, is not an argument against the efficacy of these practices. It just means that it is a new way of thinking which takes effort. Never at any time have I found that these practices grow my desires. They are actually quite humbling.

MEDITATION SESSION 25

I found as usual that I was distracted and desire was very high. I think the excitement at having completed the research component was distracting me from making direct observations.
However if I haven’t said so already, I think within this type of research, or this type of practice, there is definitely a honeymoon period where it all feels like it is working very well, but then after a period of time you feel like you have to roll up your sleeves and do the hard yards to achieve something. I just spent the last session trying to recall many many musicians, and teachers (particularly in this Masters course) who have helped me to get to where I have got to, and encouraged me and so on.

Once again, there is no room for desirous attitudes towards those people when you are thinking in that way about those people, and there is no room to desire any more when you are recalling the great qualities that have been directed towards you.