# THE TRAINING PATHS OF THE ACCOMPANYING PIANIST: THE CASE OF PORTUGAL AND LITHUANIA

The training paths of the accompanying pianist: the case of Portugal and Lithuania

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#### Abstract

The study aims to discursively identify similarities and differences in the training path of the accompanying pianist in high music education systems in Portugal and Lithuania. In order to answer the research goals, we took a qualitative, descriptive and interpretative approach. For the comparison of the parameters of the educational system of Portugal and Lithuania we used the four stages: (i) description; (2) interpretation; (iii) juxtaposition; (iv) comparison. The results reveal some differences between the two countries in training paths of the accompanying pianist.

#### Resumo

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Palavras-chave: Pianista acompanhante; Ensino de Música; Portugal; Lituânia.

**Keywords:** Accompanying pianist; Music Teaching; Portugal; Lithuania.

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# INTRODUCTION

The accompanying act took on a particular and predominant role during the different periods and moments of the Western Music History. In this context, Kurt Adler (1985, p. 7) highlights that this act is "almost as old as the human species". When we draw the timeline, its characteristics, roles and actors are visible. For example, a prehistoric man performed accompaniment through percussive rhythms. In Ancient Greece, we can find some of the principles of the accompaniment of choral music and dance. For Adler (1985, p. 7), Greece "may also be called the mother of modern choral and dance accompaniments, for which a strong incentive was provided by the Olympic games".

In the early Middle Ages, the only music with accompaniment was popular. During the Renaissance, the lute was the most popular accompanying instrument. In the Baroque era, the art of accompaniment suffered a significant advance. Key instruments are constructed, and the encrypted bass appears. This system initiates the professional accompanist called *maestro al cembalo* (musicians who in the 17th and 18th centuries performed the continuous bass part and coordinated the interpretation of the singers of the Baroque opera.) The birth of the genre opera, baroque string sonatas with accompaniment by harpsichord reinforce the role of the accompanying pianist and show the virtuosity of the continuous bass part. In the classical period, the accompanying part becomes more rigorous. According to Dorian (1966, p. 155), with the "classical period as a turning point, the score script becomes increasingly binding. (...) What the composer wants is more and more frequently shown in detail".

The appearance of the pianoforte elaborated by Bartolomeo Cristofori helps in the composition of classical sonatas, where the accompanist would collaborate with the instrumentalist (Chamber Music). The accompanying art culminates in the romantic period. For Dorian (1966, p. 221), Schubert "elevated the piano accompanist to the status of an interpreter, with duties and rights equal to those of the singer". The evolution of song art (Lied) contributes to the history of piano accompaniment/collaborating pianist.

Since the pianoforte appearance, the interpreters have been divided into three categories: soloist pianist, chamber musician and accompanying pianist.

 Chamber pianist: dedicated to the chamber music repertoire, who plays with other soloist instrumentalists in a group and each has his part with the same degree of importance.

- Répétiteur pianist: this pianist works "with singers, where, in addition to performing the part of the work related to the piano, he also guides the interpreter on other issues such as pronunciation, the technical part of singing proper, presence on stage (scene)" (Coelho, 2003, p. 947).
- Accompanying pianist: The areas covered by the accompanying pianist are vocal, instrumental, choral and dance work, perform all types of arrangements, orchestral cuts and adaptations together with vocalists or instrumentalists. According to Martin Katz (2009, p. 3) "the word "accompanist" has been almost universally replaced. The old title seems to strike many as pejorative, demeaning, or indicative of a lack of self-esteem, as a result, a different word for this specialized art has come into common usage today: collaborative pianist".

Concerning the primary skills of the soloist and accompanying pianist, we can indicate (1) technical mastery of the instrument; (2) knowledge of musical styles and forms; (3) quality of the tone; (4) individual study ability. These skills are essential for an accompanying pianist. Despite the current understanding that places him as a second-rate pianist or as an artist in the background, the technical and artistic performance of an accompanying pianist requires several qualities that a soloist pianist does not always exhibit. The most important are:

- Sight-reading: This competence can be acquired through daily work, developing rapid reaction, global understanding: content, form, harmony and character, rhythmic pulse, and the ability to distinguish between primary and secondary material. According to Martin Katz (2009, p. 278) "For a collaborative pianist, however, the ability to grasp things quickly and deliver an unpolished perhaps but perfect reading for a rehearsal, audition or lesson is essential. Life for a successful collaborator is life in the fast lane, which would be impossible without this special skill".
- Ability to transpose: This skill is used in singing accompaniments, rarely in transposition instruments or in reducing orchestral scores. For the pianist and accompanist Coenraad Valentyn Bos (1949, p. 119) the "accompanist who is proficient in transposition will be in a much better position to serve the soloist than the one who does not possess talent or training for this important aspect of the art".
- Ability to simplify: This task depends on each accompanying pianist. It is necessary to have imagination, to know the orchestral score very well, to reduce and adapt to your technical and musical abilities. According to Gerald Moore "Some of the notes must be sacrificed, and the accompanist will not only have to practice hard, but he will also have to use great discernment in deciding what to leave out" (Moore, 1943, p. 63).

- Ability to improvise: In this critical aspect, the accompanying pianist's creativity and imagination. Here we include cypher bass and opera recitatives. Often in the score, only a harmonic skeleton appears, with no musical interest, in these situations the accompanying pianist shows his ability to improvise.
- The sound balance and acoustic aspects: For Katz (2009, p. 137) "If I cannot hear my partner, I am certainly too loud". According to pianist and accompanist Jaime Mota (2015, p. 74) "sound balance requires constant concentration, especially in cases where the instrumental or vocal part wanders between the high, medium and low registers". It is essential to rehearse in the auditorium before the performance. Each room has different characteristics. It is essential to know the instrument, taste the pedal, decide to open the lid of the grand piano. According to Adler (1985) differentiates three types of accompaniment according to the balance with the soloist: (a) accompanying pianist familiarizes orchestral accompaniments with timbre and instrumental articulation; (b) background accompaniment in lyrical, dance or virtuous pieces; (c) the pieces that take advantage of the possibilities of all instruments, allowing the musicians to enjoy themselves.
- Flexibility and quick reaction capacity: The accompanying pianist must always look at the soloist's melodic line and quickly react to any mistake or leap by his colleague. According to Coenraad Valentyn Bos (1949, p. 95) it "helps greatly to adopt the attitude of always 'expecting the unexpected 'and not be disturbed when it arises. One may well remember that "anything may happen in public concert".
- Peripheral vision and in-depth and specific knowledge of each instrument and song:
   Particularly the breathing, articulation, individual and particular attack of each instrument or knowledge of languages is an indisputable advantage, in the case of singing. Peripheral vision is essential to follow the breaths, the bow changes of the string instruments, the entries and the end of the sentence.
- Teamwork, communication and understanding: Be flexible and know how to deal with a wide variety of instrumentalist personalities.

The profession of the accompanying pianist has not always been adequately appreciated and valued. On many occasions humiliated and considered the shadow of the soloist. In this context, Gerald Moore (1943, p. 1) states: (...) "there is more glory and glamor in the career of a solo pianist. His name is printed in big letters, whereas the accompanist's name is put at the foot of the bill". Many pianists not being able to have a solo career for any reason end up dedicating themselves to accompaniment. On some occasions, these musicians do not give themselves entirely to the profession because they do not feel the taste and passion for it. Often in the concert programs, the names of the

accompanying pianists do not appear. Because of this humiliation, the companions themselves are to blame. In contests and concerts, we can still hear some accompanying pianists read at first sight, without listening to the soloist. It is often a pity to see when a good soloist is disturbed, silently playing his part. Meaningful detailed and deep learning of the accompaniments, looking for time for rehearsals and improvement. A good companion is not born, but it becomes thanks to studies, a lot of practice and continues to be perfect. The pianists Samuel Sanders or Martin Katz think that the status of the accompanying pianist has not yet reached the same level in comparison to other professions. For Martin Katz (2009, p. 277) it is "almost a cliché that any text about collaborative piano will discuss the thanklessness, the inequality and the lack of appreciation inherent in this choice of career. I cannot argue with all of that, those negatives of indeed exist to the same degree, but I am also very mindful of how far we have travelled in the problems and how rewarding it can be". On many occasions, the accompanying pianist in a short time has to prepare a considerable repertoire and with few rehearsals withstand the psychological pressure in the tests, auditions or recitals. These conditions leave at risk the profile and reputation of the accompanying pianist. According to Coenraad Valentyn Bos (1949, p. 161) the "obligations of the worthy accompanist are very great, both to the artists with whom he performs and the public. Nevertheless, the arduous work, continuous service, and great responsibilities are amply

In any music teaching school, whether conservatory or university, the accompanying pianist performs an important job and supports the preparation of works through classes with the student's teacher and rehearsals. The accompanying pianist shows the mistakes of the interpreter, helps with the rhythmic pulse, recalls the instructions given by the teacher, expresses his opinion in the set and musical points. When performing in public, the accompanying pianist supports psychologically, encourages and guides the interpreter. In short, the accompanying pianist within an institution: (a) helps with the preparation of the repertoire; (b) guides in the tests; and (c) supports psychologically before public performances. The purpose of this study is to explore, overviews and summarizes the similarities and differences in the training path of the accompanying pianist in high music education systems in Portugal and Lithuania. In order to answer the research objectives, we took a qualitative, descriptive and interpretative approach. For the comparison of the parameters of the educational system of Portugal and Lithuania we used the four stages proposed by Beredy (1968): (i)

justified by rich musical experiences and human associations".

description; (2) interpretation; (iii) juxtaposition; (iv) comparison. The data collection was organized in two subheadings: (1) The High Music Education systems; and (2) piano accompanying in high music education systems.

# **METHODS**

To carry out this study, it was necessary to take options regarding the objectives under consideration. Thus, because of the breadth of possibilities (classroom practices, didactic resources and assessment of students' knowledge), and the limitations, constraints of extension and diversity in access to each of them, an analysis focused on the programs was chosen. curricula in force in the different institutions, as they constitute the organizing element of many of the decisions / options of teachers and the authors of the various teaching resources available. This procedure of collecting data through the study of documents, "follows the same line of thought as observation and interview" Stake (2007, p. 84). Following the envisaged objectives, it was defined for this stage of the qualitative path that the population would be made up of public higher education institutions belonging to the two systems and whose characteristics corresponded to the following cumulative criteria: (1) public or private higher education institutions belonging to both countries; (2) Public or private Higher Education Institutions that present in their training offer, the cycle of studies leading to the degree or specialization on piano accompaniment. Given that in the curricular plans each institution has a set of curricular units that convey knowledge of the domain under analysis, it became necessary to proceed to a careful assessment of the guidelines enshrined in the programs of some curricular units that are part of each of the curricular plans. This assessment resulted in a list of curricular units/subject areas whose programs were analysed. In parallel, the following sources of information were used: the database of the Directorate-General for Higher Education, available online in the year in which this empirical research was initiated - the year 2020. This database data was up to date with the most recent information on the institutions related to higher education understudy, which present in their training offer study cycles in Music. These data were also complemented, crossed and confirmed with the use of consultations to the Guide to Candidacy - Public Higher Education (2020), published by the Directorate-General for Higher Education for the same year, contacts with the institutions, as well as some research on the internet for crossing and validating all information.

Because of the objectives defined for this study, it was necessary to resort to the construction and use of content analysis grids to facilitate a uniform reading of these programs. In table 1, there is a matrix of relationships between the objectives that guided this research and documentary analysis belonging to the two dimensions under study (Organizational Dimension and Curricular Dimension).

**Table 1.** Relationship between objectives and dimensions under analysis

Dimension	Main Objective	Specific Objective	
Organizational Dimension (I)	State of the Art of pedagogical practices in programs in the field of Accompanying Piano in Public Higher Education.	<ul><li>Identify academic aspects.</li><li>Identify pedagogical aspects.</li><li>Conception of practices.</li></ul>	
Curricular Dimension (II)	Determine the methodological strategies and assessment of learning most used by teachers in the field of Accompanying Piano.	- Comprehensive training Evaluation;	

# **RESULTS AND DISCUSS**

In Portugal, there are two higher education systems: universities and polytechnic. In the case of universities, there is an adoption of teaching centred on the transmission of knowledge through the study of theory (knowing how to think) and consists of three cycles: (1) Degree (6th level in European Qualifications Framework): (2) Master's degree (7th level in European Qualifications Framework); and (3) Doctoral degree (8th level in European Qualifications Framework). In the case of polytechnic institutes, there is a deeper exploration of practical issues (know-how). In polytechnics, there are only two bologna cycles: (1) Degree; and (2) Master's. In the context of Portuguese education, the prevalence of this division in the offer and academic degrees makes no sense. Currently, there is a general convergence for the legislative change of this perspective, that is, the polytechnic institutes offer to cycle three of Bologna. These systems can be public or private. These institutions are autonomous in defining their curricular plans. However, there are a set of documents and general guidelines that must be followed. In relation to the practice and teaching of music, this artistic area exists in both the university and polytechnic subsystems (public or private). The study programs in music cover the following subjects: Music Performance; Composition, Musical Sciences, Music Education, Music Technology, Electronic Composition and Performance, Music Production, and interdisciplinary study programs. With regard to specialization in piano accompaniment, this only exists in private education and limited to the first cycle of Bologna.

There are two types of higher education institutions in Lithuania: universities and colleges. A university conducts international level fundamental and applied research, experimental development and (or) creates professional art. A college carries out college studies, which are based on professional practice and applied research, experimental development and (or) professional art, provides college higher education and life-long learning (Rimsaite, 2018). Lithuanian higher education institutions are either state or nonstate. University studies consist of three cycles: the first cycle to obtain Professional Bachelor's and Bachelor's degree (6th level in European Qualifications Framework); the second cycle to obtain Master's degree (7th level in European Qualifications Framework); the third cycle to obtain Doctoral degree studies (8th level in European Qualifications Framework). Colleges offer three-year bachelor's degree studies and confer professional bachelor's degrees. Universities offer at least two cycles of studies: bachelor (BA) and master (MA) studies. All higher education institutions in Lithuania are authorized to award degrees by the Ministry of Education and Science of the Republic of Lithuania (in the first and second study cycles), and the Research Council of Lithuania (in the third study cycle). All higher education institutions in Lithuania are autonomous in terms of curricula. However, every programme profile should be based on the national descriptors (general study requirements), and expectations of stakeholders (students, academicians, music industry). The study programmes in music cover the following subjects: Music Performance; Composition, Musical Folklore, Music Theory and Criticism, Music Technology, Electronic Composition and Performance, Music Production, and interdisciplinary study programme (master studies) like the Music Therapy. The Piano Accompaniment only exist in the master studies

Concerning the curricular dimension (Goals, Syllabus, Teaching Methods, Assessment, Teaching Materials), we observe some differences. In the case of learning objectives/results (see table 2), we see that for an accompanying pianist, it is crucial to have baggage from the vast and varied repertoire as technical and musical preparation. I agree with the expression of the pianist and composer Henry Lindo (1916) in the *The Art of Accompanying* he said:

The idea of an accompanist, as it exists vaguely in the public mind, is that he is a pianist who is not competent to play solos; that is supposed to be his chief qualification, and if any further thought were given to the matter, a certain amount of technique, the ability to read fluently and the possession of a sufficiently unobtrusive personality would be considered to be the chief factors that contribute to the making of an accompanist (Lindo, 1916, p.3).

From my point of view, not only repertoire of vocal and instrumental accompaniment, but also solo piano repertoire, chamber music, four-handed repertoire, choral or dance repertoire. We can all define this as reading. Convey the desire to try new scores, have the anxiety to read quickly so that you can reach your goals quickly. Before preparing the chosen repertoire, it is essential to encourage interest in comparing editions and recordings. From the orchestral works listen to orchestral and piano recordings to then be able to transmit and take the piano score articulation and phrasing of the instruments. Also develop the capacity for independence and standards like working an unknown work.

Table 2. Goals

	Portugal	Lithuania
Goals	<ul> <li>Promotion of the technical and musical domain in the accompaniment speciality.</li> <li>Progressively developing musical skills that facilitate understanding of the art of accompaniment.</li> <li>Musical development, versatility and adaptability in various collaboration contexts.</li> <li>Offer ample opportunities for the development of a vast repertoire of vocal and instrumental accompaniment.</li> <li>Show all theoretical, conceptual and experimental knowledge.</li> <li>Development of the ability to accompany with style and musicality.</li> </ul>	<ul> <li>Provide knowledge base of follow-up repertoire.</li> <li>Development of artistic skills related to vocal and instrumental accompaniment.</li> <li>Make known orchestral parts of the accompaniments and characteristic Lied song.</li> <li>Development of specific skills for reading at first sight.</li> <li>Development of teamwork skills, detecting and solving problems in the process of creativity.</li> <li>Show how to work in stages in the chosen repertoire.</li> <li>Development of the ability to observe and analyse creative work and be self-critical in the results.</li> <li>Show and transmit the student's most outstanding performance skills.</li> </ul>

Concerning the syllabus (see table 3), there is a concern on both sides for knowledge and interpretation of the repertoire of different styles and genres. Ability to work in a team, not be afraid to express your opinion, have a critical and self-critical point of view. Quick learning is essential in any unknown accompaniment—ability to develop the work independently, simplifying the orchestral scores adapting the unique musical and technical possibilities.

 Table 3. Program Content

	Portugal	Lithuania	
	Interpretation with technical, musical and text accuracy.	Ability to professionally prepare and interpret different styles, genres and musical forms.	
Program Content  Program Content  O C C C C C C C C C C C C C C C C C C	Knowledge of a wide and varied repertoire.	Ability to develop and transmit the musical phrase.	
	Demonstration of stylistic awareness, sensitivity, critical and self-critical awareness.	<ul> <li>Knowledge of history and musical language in cultural contexts.</li> <li>Ability to interpret in public and develop artistic practice.</li> <li>Competence to know how to contact, communicate and collaborate as a team.</li> <li>Critical and self-critical point of view.</li> <li>Ability to work and improve independently.</li> </ul>	
	transposition.		
	<ul> <li>Scores.</li> <li>Understanding all aspects of vocal co-competition.</li> </ul>		
		Dexterity in adapting to new and varied situations and knowing how to deal with and resolve them.	
	Comparison and perception of editions.		
	Ability to control the sound balance.		
	Advanced pedal application techniques.		
	Encourage the interpretation of new works in debut.		
	Creative and effective collaboration with soloists.		

Analysing the teaching methods (see table 4), we can see that for an accompanying pianist, it is essential to read at first sight, through different repertoire or exercises. In my indispensable opinion, I foresaw the preparation of the unknown work. Identifying more technically tricky sites, or uncomfortable passages and looking for exercises and solutions. For Kurt Adler (1985, p. 229) "I simply want to point out that there are several ways of solving a difficult technical problem. The accompanist must search for the best solution compatible with his technical limitations". Fundamental - analysis of the new work, correct articulation depending on the style and indications of the composer, also comfortable fingering through pattern recognition (scales, arpeggios, chords). Breath marking, the definition of times and *ritenutos*, entries and terminations through rehearsals with soloists. Final objective - interpretation at public events. I think that for professional and artistic development, significant participation in competitions, lectures, masterclass.

	Portugal	Lithuania
Teaching methods	<ul> <li>Aspects of piano technique.</li> <li>Sound production.</li> <li>Reading at first sight.</li> <li>Working techniques in duos or larger groups.</li> <li>Variety of repertoire: singing, choral and instrumental.</li> <li>Techniques of vocal correction and transposition.</li> </ul>	<ul> <li>Technical exercises.</li> <li>Analysis and preparation of accompaniments.</li> <li>Essay.</li> <li>Discussion.</li> <li>Musical performance.</li> </ul>
Courseware		<ul> <li>Tichý, Vlastimil (1972). Blattspielen für Pianisten. Wien: Universal Edition.AG.</li> <li>Kember, John (2006). Piano Sight-Reading. Mainz: Schott, vol. 1-3.</li> <li>Gartenlaub, Odette (1969-1972). Preparation au dechiffrage pianistique. Paris: Editions rideau rouge, vol. 1-2.</li> <li>Gartenlaub, Odette (1969-1972). Preparation au dechiffrage pianistique. Paris: Editions rideau rouge, vol. 2-3.</li> <li>Note: the material is organized by semesters.</li> </ul>
Evaluation	<ul> <li>Attendance and active participation in classes.</li> <li>Two evaluations: summative and formative.</li> <li>Internal performance and evaluation.</li> <li>External performance and evaluation.</li> </ul>	<ul> <li>Correct interpretation of the musical text of the defined repertoire.</li> <li>Understanding and transmitting the musical style of the work performed.</li> <li>Specific understanding of vocal and instrumental accompaniment.</li> <li>Professional monitoring skills.</li> <li>Artistic expression.</li> <li>Transmission of the style of interpretation based on historical and musical knowledge.</li> <li>Ability to play together.</li> <li>Creativity.</li> <li>Reading at first sight.</li> </ul>

About the evaluation, an accompanying pianist, we have to see the abilities to play together, if he listens to the soloist, if he breathes with him, or is concerned only with himself. In the evaluation process, it is essential that the student not only knows his / her accompaniment part perfectly but also the soloist part. Evaluating we have to consider the technical preparation and the sound balance, parts of soloist and parts of accompaniment. Suppose the student is committed and available to carry out the tests. We cannot forget rhythmic precision, correct musical text, articulation and expression equalled with the accompanying soloist. If your participation is active and creative, you are interested in participating in concerts, contests, masterclass and other activities. Confidence and security are shown and conveyed to the soloist and the public. In my view, it would be interesting that each item of evaluation has a defined percentage and evaluated in public performance.

Analysing the programs, we see that it is imperative to know and perform the broad vocal and instrumental repertoire. In the program, it would be very advantageous to incorporate the works of the XX - XXI centuries to know specific annotation techniques and harmonies. In my view, sonatas should be part of the chamber music repertoire. I find it very important and exciting to incorporate the compositions of the national character. In my view, it would be useful to attach the list of recommended vocal and instrumental works.

#### FINAL WORD

Finally, we would like to leave two notes for continuous reflection and improvement of the formative and artistic path of the accompanying pianist. Thus, we would like to highlight:

- the status of the accompanying pianist must improve. We cannot forget that the accompanist first is a pianist! Iain Burnside Scottish classical pianist and accompanist said: "I hate the term accompanist. You can 't deny there are connotations that it's a secondary entity. But unfortunately, I can't think of a better one. If you insist on being called a pianist, then people think that you're comparing yourself to Sviatoslav Richter. That's not what it's about: you're just asking to be taken seriously in your own right" (Service, 2012).
- it would be advantageous for the development of an accompanying pianist to have an improvisation discipline. It would be beneficial for improvising the ciphered bass, opera recitals or harmonizing a melody accompanying pianists so much need in their daily lives.

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