

## Developing an Assessment Framework for the Major Skill Course to Enhance Student Competency in the Context of Princess Galyani Vadhana Institute of Music

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### Abstract

The Major Skill course is a core component of undergraduate music curricula, playing a central role in developing students' technical performance, artistic expression, and professional readiness. This development project aims to design an assessment approach that is clear, transparent, and aligned with students' competence levels at each academic year—encompassing technical proficiency, artistic interpretation, and learning that responds to individual contexts. The process comprised a review of the institute's existing assessment system, benchmarking against international standards (e.g., ABRSM, Trinity, LCM), and collaborative workshops with faculty members. These steps led to a new structure that integrates pedagogical and andragogical principles to support participatory learning and development-oriented assessment. The outcomes are: criteria that define year-specific expectations; a context-appropriate evaluator weighting system; a Centralised Rubric System that uses *qualitative descriptors* to create a shared language among evaluators; and a four-year Learning Development Plan that can be practically applied both in teaching and in systematic quality development at the Princess Galyani Vadhana Institute of Music.

*Keywords: Course Assessment; Centralised Rubric System; Year-Specific Expectations; Learning Development Plan; Participatory Learning; PGVIM*

## Introduction

Within the B.Mus. programme at the Princess Galyani Vadhana Institute of Music (PGVIM), the Major Skill sequence is the curriculum's spine: a four-year, highest-credit component where practical musicianship, artistic capacity, and professional readiness are formed. More than a single course, it is the principal mechanism shaping students' growth—advancing technique, the craft of sound, and the transition to professional practice—and it articulates PGVIM's conception of the “musician.” Instruction therefore concerns identity formation as much as examination (Suttachitt, 2023).

Despite its central role, the existing assessment is overly broad, weakly differentiated across years, and loosely aligned with learning outcomes. Descriptors such as “has technical ability” do not specify how expectations for Year 1 meaningfully differ from Year 4. Ambiguity blurs students' long-term goals, deprives teachers of a robust tool to evidence qualitative growth, and risks both graduate quality and institutional credibility. In Thailand's higher-education context, reform is not a matter of importing ABRSM/Trinity/LCM models—which privilege time-bounded tests of technical competence—but of calibrating assessment to PGVIM's mission values (Passionate, Growth, Visionary, Integration, Mastery). Assessment should operate as a learning process for self-reflection and for charting developmental direction, rather than merely as a pass/fail gatekeeper.

This central question leads to a more specific inquiry: what precisely should be assessed across the learning projection? PGVIM has responded by re-examining assessment's role as integral to learning and artistic growth and by constructing a transparent framework with year-differentiated expectations (Year Mapping) and a cross-instrument rubric, grounded in pedagogical and andragogical principles. In this model, assessment simultaneously serves learning and development, enabling students to build technical facility, deepen interpretation, and use assessment as a tool for growth, identity formation, and a sustainable professional pathway.

## Rationale for Redesigning the Major Skill Assessment Framework

In conservatoire-based higher music education, Major Skill/Principal Study is the curricular spine linking studio teaching, practice, public performance, and assessment that evidences continuous development. Research shows assessment in specialist institutions functions not only as measurement but also as a catalyst orienting learning (Boud & Falchikov, 2007; Gaunt & Westerlund, 2016). Leading models position it at the centre: at The Juilliard

School, instructional vision spans Performance Opportunities, Classroom Studies, Liberal Arts, and Entrepreneurship, with Major Studies carrying up to 40 credits in total (10 credits of individual lessons per year) (The Juilliard School, n.d.); at the Royal Academy of Music (RAM), the “ABC” model—Artistry, Belonging, Challenge—places Principal Study at 45 credits (Royal Academy of Music, 2024–2025).

Within PGVIM’s B.Mus. programme, Major Skill sits at the core of Specialised Courses—48 credits within a ≥86-credit specialisation block toward 130 credits overall. The practical-skills cluster comprises eight courses (Major Skill I–VIII) at 3 credits each (24 credits total), alongside ensemble/performance-hour requirements. Aligned with PGVIM’s mission values (Passionate, Growth, Visionary, Integration, Mastery), the curriculum integrates musical practice, research, and social engagement, conceiving graduates not only as performers but as practitioners who mobilise music for inquiry and tangible social value.

**Table 1** Comparative objectives and curricular organisation of Major Skill/Principal Study across The Juilliard School (USA), the Royal Academy of Music (UK), and the Princess Galyani Vadhana Institute of Music (Thailand).

	<b>The Juilliard School</b>	<b>Royal Academy of Music (RAM)</b>	<b>Princess Galyani Vadhana Institute of Music (PGVIM)</b>
<b>Curricular objectives / vision</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1) Performance Opportunities</li> <li>2) Classroom Studies</li> <li>3) Liberal Arts</li> <li>4) Entrepreneurship</li> </ol>	‘ABC’ <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1) Artistry: Creative Listening</li> <li>2) Belonging: Professional Development</li> <li>3) Challenge: Music Leadership</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1) Produce graduates with deep knowledge and skill in classical music</li> <li>2) Develop research and creative capacities in classical music</li> <li>3) Enable graduates to apply knowledge beneficially and appropriately to societal contexts</li> </ol>
<b>Course classification / strands</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1) Major Studies</li> <li>2) Performance Ensemble</li> <li>3) Music Department</li> <li>4) Liberal Arts</li> </ol>	Not explicitly divided into fixed “blocks”; commonly understood as: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Principal Study</li> <li>• Academic Study</li> <li>• Artist Development (activities)</li> </ul>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1) General Education</li> <li>2) Specialised Courses</li> <li>3) Free Electives</li> </ol>
<b>Placement of major skill / principal study</b>	Housed in Major Studies as Major Instrumental Lesson for all four years (10 credits per year; 40 credits total).	Housed in Principal Study with Individual Study components integrating related practical skills (45 credits total).	Housed in Specialised Studies → Practical Skills: Major Skill I–VIII, 3 credits each (24 credits). (Practical Skills totals 48 credits within ≥86 credits of Specialised Studies.)

Table 1 reveals a shared centrality of Major/Principal Study and distinct emphases: Juilliard foregrounds performative impact and societal inspiration; RAM prioritises leadership and professional formation; PGVIM stresses integration of practice with research and social responsibility. Hence PGVIM cannot import a single external model; assessment must be purpose-built to reflect institutional values and context. The legacy criteria were broad and ambiguous, lacked year-by-year differentiation, and used indicators that failed to evidence progress, creating misalignment between desired identity and assessment signals. Consequently, students then struggle to see a growth trajectory, and teachers lack a robust instrument for targeted qualitative feedback (Biggs, 1996). A transparent, year-mapped, cross-instrument rubric is therefore essential to establish a shared language, reduce bias, and enhance the reliability and credibility of standards.

From a teaching-and-learning standpoint, integrating pedagogy and andragogy is central. In Years 1–2, teacher-centred structures consolidate technique through scales, études, and foundational repertoire, with learning outcomes emphasising accuracy and consistency; assessment relies on concrete, verifiable technical indicators (Vygotsky, 1978). In Years 3–4, andragogical principles become salient: students exercise autonomy in repertoire aligned to artistic or professional goals while teachers shift to mentor/facilitator roles, using reflective questioning. Assessment correspondingly extends from correctness to analytical reasoning, independence, and artistic identity—for instance, justifying interpretive choices or relating repertoire to social questions or research to generate new value (Knowles, 1980). Systematic integration of these modes charts technical progress and makes visible the transition from scaffolded guidance to independent, creative artistry (Biggs, 1996; Boud & Falchikov, 2007). In the redesigned model, assessment functions as a growth map, aligning each year’s pathway with intended learning outcomes, positioning assessment as part of learning and identity-formation rather than mere summative judgement, and reflecting contemporary musical value that spans performance, research, creation, and social engagement (Suttachitt, 2023).

## Assessment Design Process

Designing assessment for the Major Skill sequence is a multi-level, interconnected task—not a tweak to a single rubric. The framework must balance external reference standards with PGVIM’s values and identity, while taking seriously the lived feedback of students and faculty who work with the course week by week. If Major Skill is where musical identity is forged, assessment is the instrument that catalyses that growth. Hence, the design draws on the Thai Qualifications Framework (TQF) issued by the Ministry of

Higher Education, Science, Research and Innovation (2022), PGVIM’s mission values (Passionate, Growth, Visionary, Integration, Mastery), programme-level learning outcomes, regional/international benchmarks (e.g., AEC, CALOHex), and—crucially—evidence from real assessment practice. Robust criteria must work in studios, rehearsals, and juries, not only read well on paper.

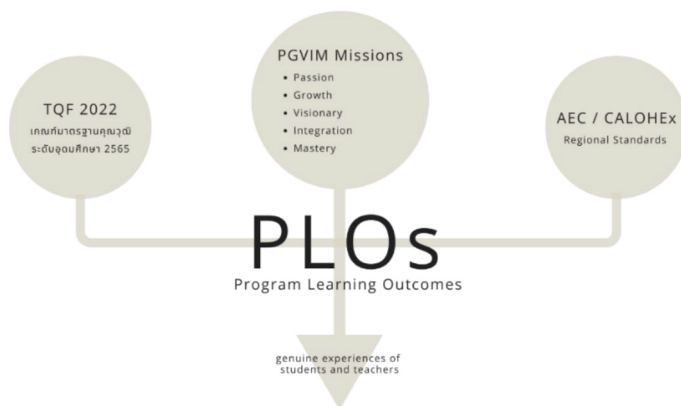


Figure 1 Framework of Assessment Design

Several layers inform the redesign; each brings its own expectations and pressures, and together they give the framework traction for learning:

#### *Thai Qualifications Framework (TQF)*

Establishes national minima; course assessment must map explicitly to TQF domains (knowledge, skills, attributes) to ensure quality and degree credibility.

#### *PGVIM Missions*

Criteria should evidence capacities aligned with Passionate/Growth/Visionary/Integration/Mastery—not only technical proficiency (e.g., respect, intellectual development, connection of practice to society/knowledge).

#### *Regional and International Standards*

References such as AEC and CALOHex help anchor verifiable, internationally comparable competences through field-specific descriptors and quality-assurance expectations—strengthening rigour and contemporaneity.

### *Programme Learning Outcomes (PLOs)*

Clear mapping from course criteria to PLOs evidences Major Skill’s advancement of artistic identity, critical/reflective thinking, and collaboration; alignment must be explicit and auditable.

### *Genuine Experiences of Students and Teachers*

Systematic attention to lived experience ensures criteria remain tools in practice rather than policy on paper, revealing value, fairness, and priorities for improvement across studio, rehearsal, and jury contexts.

## Key Components of the Framework

This redesign delivers criteria engineered for real use—across studio teaching and juried performance at every year level, including guest lecturers—prioritising immediate legibility, shared understanding, and ease of use. Five components underpin the framework:

### *Clarity of Descriptors*

Ambiguous wording is replaced by plain, targeted language. Each score band is defined by observable, verifiable qualitative descriptors, enabling faster, more consistent judgements pre-jury and in-jury.

### *Consistency Across Faculty*

A common assessment language applies across instruments and panels, reducing score variance and supporting systematic post-jury moderation.

### *Alignment with Practice*

Criteria mirror real workflows—repertoire selection, practice, rehearsal, performance—so the rubric functions as a facilitator of teaching and assessment, not an administrative layer.

### *Institutional Fit*

The scheme is purpose-built to PGVIM’s values and pedagogy (wording, weightings, focal emphases), yet broad enough to work across instrument areas.

## *Faculty usability (User Experience / User Interface)*

Clear scoring visuals and compact checklists lower cognitive load, making the tool immediately legible for full-time and guest lecturers and improving efficiency and feedback quality.

Beyond these components, the framework is made actionable through practice-based artefacts: a four-year Roadmap Table (Foundations → Growth → Expansion → Artistic Mastery) that sets year-specific targets and supports continuous tracking; and a common rubric system with concise, observable descriptors at each score band (e.g., *Resonant*, *Rich*, *Unstable* for tone/intonation). Together, these artefacts bind teaching and assessment into a single coherent process; assessment then operates as both a measurement mechanism and a compass for growth.

## Results of the Redesign

### *Weighting the Major Skill assessment across four years*

PGVIM's redesign is grounded in both educational principles and the lived realities of musical practice. It proceeds from the view that higher music study is not merely the accumulation of technique but the gradual formation of identity—from learner to professional artist; accordingly, assessment must mirror instructional outcomes and a continuous developmental pathway.

To serve this purpose, assessor weightings are tiered by year of study: Year 1: 60:40 (Major Skill teacher: panel) to foreground within-semester process indicators (technical development, practice consistency, professional discipline); Year 2: 50:50 balancing lesson-based growth with performance outputs; Year 3: 40:60; and Year 4: 30:70, giving primacy to public-performance quality under real-world conditions (time management, pressure, audience communication, responsibility for the artistic work). Table 2 summarises assessor groups, weights, and criteria used in juries.

This tiering mitigates individual-assessor bias by increasing the contribution of the rotating panel as students' progress, and is paired with post-jury moderation to calibrate standards. Publishing year-specific weights in advance and tying scoring to the Centralised Rubric System and Year Mapping makes annual targets visible: Years 1–2 prioritise accuracy and consistency of execution; Years 3–4 extend expectations to depth of communication, interpretive quality, and the calibre of creative work presented in performance. The result integrates longitudinal development with public-performance quality. The Major Skill teacher tracks growth across the semester, while panel voices—internal faculty and external examiners—carry increasing weight year by year. This arrangement increases continuity,

broadens perspectives, and strengthens credibility; it also reduces bias and enhances transparency, enabling students to chart growth aligned with their goals.

**Table 2** Weighting structure and criteria across the four years

Assessor Group	Weight (Years 1 → 4)	Criteria
<b>Major Skill Teacher</b>	60/50/40/30 (%)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Progress during the semester</li> <li>- Technical Skills – Interpretative Skills</li> <li>- Professional Discipline</li> <li>- Commitment &amp; Attendance</li> <li>- Live Performance Assessment</li> </ul>
<b>Instrumental Teacher (PGVIM or External)</b>	40/50/60/70 (%)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Live Performance Assessment (Performance Quality / Stage Presence / Communication / +2 additional criteria) (defined by teacher)</li> </ul>
<b>PGVIM Faculty</b>	40/50/60/70 (%)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Live Performance Assessment (Performance Quality / Stage Presence / Communication / +2 additional criteria) (defined by teacher)</li> <li>- Alignment with PGVIM Values</li> </ul>

### *Centralised Rubric System*

Beyond year-tiered assessor weightings, PGVIM establishes a Centralised Rubric System—a single, shared assessment language across faculty, instruments, and year levels. This institute-wide tool integrates technical dimensions, artistic/interpretive capacity, and developmental progress within one coherent scheme. Standardised levels and qualitative descriptors signal consistent assessment programme-wide, support transparent, defensible judgements, and convert feedback into actionable guidance for studios and juries.

The previous rubric showed structural limitations: ambiguous wording (e.g., “appropriate technical ability”) that enabled divergent interpretations; absence of year-specific objectives; lack of verifiable qualitative descriptors at each score band (inviting reliance on personal standards); and weak alignment with programme PLOs. Consequently, it functioned as a scoring form rather than a framework that organises and supports learning.

### *Design of the New Rubric*

The rubric was redesigned around 3 objectives: *Transparency* (clear, observable descriptors that enable teachers and students to identify the current level and next steps for improvement); *Consistency* (a common assessment language across instrument families to reduce interpretive drift and idiosyncratic bias); and *Authenticity* (descriptors anchored in what students actually do in rehearsal and on stage, rather than box-ticking aimed merely at passing). Structurally, Key Indicators define musical dimensions, paired with criteria and guiding questions; each criterion is described across five levels (*Outstanding* → *Needs Improvement*) using plain, observable statements. Figure 2 illustrates the scheme and sample descriptors (e.g., *Resonant, Rich, Clear, Unstable, Poor*).



Main Key Indicator	Criteria	Guide Question	Satisfactory (S)	Unsatisfactory (U)			
Student presents at least one work from an instrumental style not previously studied in the course.	Repertoire Collected	"Has the student selected and prepared at least one piece in a new instrumental style not previously explored?"	Student has selected and prepared a piece that represents a new and distinct style compared to prior coursework.	No new stylistic direction is evident; repertoire remains within previously covered style.			
Main Key Indicator	Criteria	Guide Question	5 Outstanding	4	3	2	1 Needs Improvement
Tone	Tone Quality & Intonation	"Is the tone consistent, resonant, and well-supported across the full range, with accurate intonation?"	<b>Resonant</b> Resonant tone across full range; precise intonation.	<b>Rich</b> Rich tone with minor pitch lapses.	<b>Clear</b> Clear tone; occasional pitch inaccuracies.	<b>Unstable</b> Tone inconsistent; intonation affects phrasing.	<b>Poor</b> Poor tone; unstable intonation hinders musical line.
Execution in time	Technical Accuracy & Precision	"Are the notes and rhythms executed accurately and clearly with control and precision throughout?"	<b>Flawless</b> Flawless note & rhythm execution; effortless technique.	<b>Accurate</b> Predominantly accurate; minor slips.	<b>Noticeable</b> Noticeable errors but not disruptive.	<b>Irregular</b> Frequent inaccuracies; lapses affect flow.	<b>Pervasive</b> Pervasive technical failures hinder performance.
Emotion, dynamics, intonation	Musical Interpretation & Expression	"Does the performer demonstrate clear musical intent through expressive choices in dynamics, articulation, and tempo?"	<b>Expressive</b> Deeply expressive phrasing with clear intent and refined nuance.	<b>Convincing</b> Phrasing shows strong sense of intention and direction.	<b>Clear</b> Some expressive elements; intent present but not fully convincing.	<b>Flat</b> Limited expressive direction; unclear intent.	<b>Mechanical</b> Lacks interpretation or clear intent.
Stylistic phrasing, structural logic	Phrasing, Communication & Stylistic Interpretations	"Does the phrasing reflect stylistic understanding and effectively guide the listener through tension, release, and musical direction?"	<b>Stylistically Refined</b> Reflects deep stylistic understanding; skillfully creates/fulfills expectations.	<b>Stylistically Aware</b> Mostly authentic phrasing; some lapses in direction and resolution.	<b>Understandable</b> Ideas generally grouped; less control over shaping/tension/release.	<b>Fragmented</b> Incoherent phrasing; listener loses sense of direction.	<b>Disconnected</b> Disjointed, inappropriate phrasing; fails to communicate ideas or structure.
Presence	Stage Presence & Professionalism	"Does the performer present themselves with confidence, poise, and engaging stage presence that supports the musical performance?"	<b>Commanding</b> Powerful, confident body language; fully engaging.	<b>Assured</b> Steady, controlled presence; minor lapses.	<b>Competent</b> Generally solid; occasional stiffness.	<b>Unsteady</b> Hesitant movements; lacks confidence.	<b>Unconvincing</b> Distracting gestures; fails to engage.

Figure 2 Redesigned rubric and qualitative descriptors

Six Key Indicators span technique, artistry, and professional communication:

1. Tone Quality and Intonation: control of tone colour and pitch (from *Resonant/precise* to *Poor/unstable*), giving concrete targets by register/phrase;
2. Technical Accuracy and Precision: accuracy/clarity of notes and rhythms (from *Flawless* to whole-affecting inaccuracies);
3. Musical Interpretation and Expression: shaping of dynamics/colour/affect (from *Deeply expressive with clear intent* to *Flat/unclear intent*);
4. Phrasing, Communication and Stylistic Interpretation: narrative flow and stylistic understanding (from *Stylistically refined* to *Fragmented*);
5. Stage Presence and Professionalism: confidence, physical control, audience engagement (from *Commanding* to *Unconvincing*);
6. Repertoire Collected: breadth/depth via at least one new stylistic/idiomatic area each cycle to widen range and understanding.

A shared language between teachers and students reduces inter-rater variability and supports post-jury moderation (e.g., why level 3 vs level 4 anchored to published descriptors). Across the semester the rubric also functions as a communication tool: targets can be set (e.g., move phrasing from *Fragmented* → *Clear*), and feedback becomes *feed-forward* (e.g., specify where pitch control undermines phrase shape). Indicators are mapped to Programme Learning Outcomes—for example, *Stage Presence & Professionalism* aligns with effective communication with audiences, and *Repertoire Collected* aligns with extending knowledge and repertoire-based inquiry. This alignment makes progress in Major Skill contribute visibly to programme-level graduate attributes rather than merely to a jury mark.

## Three Core Innovations

The redesign reframes assessment from a skills checklist into a strategic mechanism aligned with PGVIM's values and contemporary musical practice. Through this redesign, the structure of assessment itself is transformed from a single-evaluator model into a multi-evaluator system, from isolated rubrics into an institute-wide standardised process, and from short-term grading into a longitudinal roadmap for artistic and professional development. Each of the three core innovations elaborates this transition in practice.

### *Multi-Evaluator System*

Three assessor groups share responsibility: (i) Major Skill Teacher (tracks within-semester progress and formative development), (ii) Instrumental

Teacher / External Panel (specialist/professional perspective), and (iii) PGVIM Faculty (institutional standards and values). Together they balance perspectives, reduce bias, and broaden feedback across development, technique, and identity. Their influence is aligned by year through tiered weightings, making roles progressively appropriate to students' stage of study.

### *Centralised Rubric System and Process*

A faculty-endorsed, institute-wide rubric operates end-to-end—from drafting descriptors and academic approval to classroom use, jury implementation, and post-jury moderation—establishing a common language and standard across studios and years. Beyond scoring, it functions as a learning compass: students set concrete goals against descriptors; teachers give feedback that tracks those goals while staying aligned with programme aims and PGVIM's mission.

### *Learning and Assessment Roadmap*

A four-year roadmap makes the developmental trajectory explicit. It crosstalks PLOs with rubric criteria and qualitative descriptors at each stage, showing how first-year practices lead coherently to final-year artistic and professional capabilities. It strengthens student ownership (self-audit) and supports strategic advising (e.g., repertoire choices aligned to intended pathways). Integrated with the two mechanisms above, it enhances fairness, clarity, direction of travel, and fidelity to PGVIM's artistic values.

## Conclusion

The redesign of PGVIM's Major Skill assessment marks a substantive structural shift. While the previous system relied on broad and uneven criteria, the new framework ensures clarity, fairness, and longitudinal coherence. Its strength lies in the integration of three components—a multi-evaluator system, a centralised rubric and process, and a four-year learning and assessment roadmap. This integration aligns teaching, assessment, and programme-level outcomes, enabling students and faculty to share targets and monitor progress continuously.

The significance of these changes is in their enactment. The system has been implemented across all instruments from the first semester, establishing immediate consistency and equity. The four-year roadmap operates as a compass: students see a guided progression toward professional artistry, while teachers evidence qualitative learning and adjust strategies with precision and pedagogical salience calibrated to each stage of

study. These directions can be projected forward into semester-by-semester plans—repertoire pathways, technique targets, juried benchmarks, and outreach/research tasks. In turn, advising, rehearsal scheduling, and resource allocation become anticipatory rather than reactive.

Strategically, assessment is reframed from a terminal end-of-semester event into a continuous learning process. It moves beyond pass/fail to a development-oriented approach that measures outcomes, sets learning direction, and supports the sustained creation of art.

## Future Directions and Development

The new system is a foundation, not an end-state. As musical values evolve, the rubric must remain flexible rather than prescriptive, ensuring that clarity does not become a constraint on creativity. Given students' diverse backgrounds and interests, over-specification can feel limiting; standards should be clear while preserving sufficient latitude for students to project artistic identity.

Sustaining inter-rater coherence is critical. PGVIM should prioritise regular calibration (norming), post-jury moderation, periodic descriptor reviews informed by student/faculty feedback, and exemplar/anchor materials (e.g., annotated recordings) to stabilise interpretations. These practices maintain responsiveness and credibility—supporting consistency where it matters while leaving room for individual artistry and growth.

With growing attention to community-based practice, assessment should also value students' capacity to connect artistic work to social issues, design and deliver projects, collaborate through outreach, and generate tangible impact. Criteria may therefore include indicators for project design, stakeholder engagement, ethical practice, and evidence of impact, alongside technical excellence.

Digital technologies—including AI—are increasingly woven into learning (tone/intonation monitoring, rhythm checking, co-creation). Policy should clarify AI's role as assistant, not proxy, and set guardrails that preserve human judgement and artistic value: human-led, AI-assisted evaluation; brief reflective notes when AI informs a judgement; auditable traces of AI suggestions; and periodic checks for bias/drift. Implemented well, AI can enhance objectivity and transparency without flattening nuance. Looking ahead, Major Skill assessment should braid academic rigour with artistic and social practice, evaluating technical command, creative thinking, community connection, and adaptability to a changing landscape.

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## Biography

Trained as a flutist, Sethapong Janyarayachon earned his Doctor of Fine and Applied Arts in Music Performance from Chulalongkorn University. His performing career spans chamber music, orchestral and band experiences, as well as recording projects and collaborations with distinguished artists across Thailand and abroad. These engagements reflect his versatility as a musician and his commitment to connecting performance with broader artistic communities. As a researcher, his work centers on music education in higher education, with particular attention to the ways performance and pedagogy intersect. His studies have been presented at both national and international conferences, contributing to ongoing dialogues about music education.

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