

## **Conference Report: Performance Studies Network Second International Conference 2013**

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**ABSTRACT:** The 2013 meeting of the Performance Studies Network brought together approximately 110 delegates from a range of countries and disciplines to generate broad-ranging discussions on the growing field of musical performance research. The conference was organised by the Centre for Music Performance for Creative Practice (CMPCP), in association with Cambridge University, and was held from 4 to 7 April. A total of 69 papers were given, including four special sessions, one keynote session, and one plenary session. This report summarises the main themes arising over the four-day conference, and groups papers into those with a main focus on (1) creativity, (2) communication and (3) collaboration. Additionally, a number of topics that have recently elicited a spate of new research are identified, including embodiment in performer interaction, the performer's rehearsal process and the distribution of creativity resulting from developments in digital technology and media. This report attempts to provide a comprehensive overview of the research questions currently being addressed in the performance studies field through a discussion of a wide-ranging and diverse selection of papers.

**KEY WORDS:** Music performance, musical creativity, musical communication, CMPCP

### **INTRODUCTION**

The 2013 meeting of the Performance Studies Network brought together approximately 110 delegates from a range of countries and disciplines to generate broad-ranging discussions on the growing field of musical performance research. The conference was organised by the Centre for Music Performance as Creative Practice (CMPCP), in association with Cambridge University, and was held from 4 to 7 April. A total of 69 papers were given, including four

special sessions, one keynote session, and one plenary session. This report attempts to summarise the four-day conference by exploring recurring themes. I group the papers presented into three main themes: (1) creativity, (2) communication and (3) collaboration. Further information about individual presentations can be found in the conference programme at

[http://www.cmppc.ac.uk/Conference\\_programme\\_2013%28extracts%29.pdf](http://www.cmppc.ac.uk/Conference_programme_2013%28extracts%29.pdf).

### CREATIVITY

The first topic to be discussed lies at the very heart of CMPCP: the concept of creativity. A special session taken by Sarah Callis, Neil Heyde and Olivia Sham introduced the idea of creative resistance by exploring the sharing of creativity when composers and performers disagree. A series of case studies provided the basis for an examination of what tensions between colleagues can reveal about the creative process. Cayenna Ponchione also considered the role of creativity, focusing on the distribution of artistic agency in an orchestra.

Amanda Bayley and Beth Elverdam focused on the difference between creative processes in performance and rehearsal through analysis of audio and video recordings of the Kreutzer Quartet. The rehearsal process was further explored first by Jane Ginsborg, Helena Gaunt and Helen Prior, through the examination of musicians' initial encounters with new works and the strategies advocated by teachers, and then by Mirjam James, Karen Wise and John Rink who had undertaken a longitudinal study of students' practice from their initial engagement with a piece to public performance level. These papers and others offered insights into solitary practice.

Finally, Juniper Hill's cross-cultural comparison of conceptions of creativity in South Africa, Finland, and America revealed striking findings. Creativity was commonly reported to comprise individual agency, joint interaction, and a feeling of flow, which served to highlight the importance of facilitating creativity in all cultures. Emily Payne also explored definitions of creativity, questioning the commonly held assumption that innovation, for example in the context of improvisation, is creative whereas craft, represented by playing from the score, is not. On the basis of performers' reports of different understandings of creativity in different contexts she proposed, instead, the concept of a spectrum of creativity.

### COMMUNICATION

The theme of musical communication emerged from a variety of perspectives. Communication through embodiment was explored in several papers, with Nicholas Cook initiating the topic, discussing the role of the signifying body in Hendrix's *Foxy Lady* and its extension to other genres. Murphy McCaleb further examined the idea of gestural communication in ensemble interaction, proposing that such interaction should be considered reactionary rather than communicative. Intentional communication might be represented as a process involving encoding → transmission → decoding. A more useful framework for musicians, McCaleb suggested, would avoid imputing intention to communication and thereby encompass music-making that 'just happens', which is often ignored by researchers, since "observable reactions to events by musicians may reveal a

performer's intentions rather than vice versa". He therefore suggested a reactionary process: transmitting → inferring → attuning. Robert Fulford subsequently reported and discussed his research on communicative gestures made by pairs of performers with hearing impairments. Although the classification of musical 'shaping' gestures remains problematic, analyses of looking behaviours, speech gestures and the time spent talking showed that profoundly deaf musicians were more active both in giving and receiving information via gestures. This finding highlights the importance of gestural communication between performers, with compensation occurring in cases of sensory impairment.

Communication was also the topic of a special session at the conference, in this case communication in the sense of how different lines in early polytextual motets are conveyed to listeners. The session, presented by Edward Wickham, Christopher Fox, Sarah Hawkins and Antje Heinrich, consisted of a performance by The Clerks of a work by Fox, composed for the purposes of research supported by the Wellcome Trust, and punctuated by a lecture on auditory streaming by Hawkins. This session was perhaps the most engaging of the conference, with an element of audience participation: delegates were expected to act as research participants. Analogies between the composition and the tests given to air traffic controllers in which the aim is to follow one of a jumble of overlapping voices aptly demonstrated the difficulty for listeners of tracking an individual musical line in a polyphonic and polytextual work. The highly entertaining and engaging nature of the presentation, however, reminded the audience that sometimes full comprehension of music and lyrics is unnecessary.

### COLLABORATION

The concept of collaboration was approached by considering the performer's relationship with the listener, the performer's role in the composition, and the dialogue between the composer and the performer. These lines of research highlighted the consequences of mutual input into a piece, developing from the increasing realisation that a performer's intended message is not necessarily the composer's intended message, and that the audience may take away a different message again. In keeping with the focus of the conference, these ideas were engaged with in a variety of novel ways.

Kathryn Whitney raised the performer-listener issue early on, through a statement that every performer encounters: 'That may have been what you say you were doing in that piece, but I heard something quite different.' She went on to explore the listener's role in shaping the music that they hear. Myles Eastwood extended this idea by proposing that listening should be elevated to the status of active performance and analysed the work of three record producers. John Sloboda made a notable contribution to the discussion of this issue by reporting on an empirical study of the emotional and aesthetic impact on the audience of a Monteverdi opera. This was measured by collecting the views of the audience which were then fed back to the artistic team thus producing a form of collaboration that could well be of potential value to performers and audiences alike.

A contemporary spin on the performer's role was provided by Bianca Tiplea Temes, who discussed the modern trend of creating virtual musical ensembles. Such ensembles include the YouTube Symphony Orchestra, and Eric Whitacre's Virtual Choir, in which there is no collaboration between performers during performance since they are recorded

individually and only subsequently combined. Sean Williams' account of the Laboratory for Live Electronic Audio Performance Practice, a series of workshops allowing collaborative composition, provided an example of the antithesis of virtual ensembles by involving the composer in the performance process, and Nicole Canham's discussion of distributed creativity in the composition of new music provided a summary of ways in which the role of the performer should be reconceptualised. Resolving such issues will only become more pressing with advances in digital technology and media.

Furthermore the keynote and plenary sessions of the conference both probed composer-performer relationships. The keynote presentation brought the winner of Britten Sinfonia's Opus Competition, Ryan Latimer, together with members of Britten Sinfonia in a discussion of their collaboration in the rehearsal and recording of Latimer's work. John Rink acted as convenor and chair, whilst the audience were invited to witness a rehearsal, performance and post-performance discussion. The interaction between Latimer and the Sinfonia revealed that the performers were keen to fulfil the composer's intentions, whilst the composer himself maintained a hands-off approach, expressing his commitment to the artistic autonomy of the performer.

The plenary session of the conference focused on the development of Jeremy Thurlow's *Ouija*, a solo violin work in five movements of varying notational specificity. This work was composed in conjunction with its dedicatee, Peter Sheppard Skaerved. Rehearsals of *Ouija* were recorded and regular interviews conducted to allow subsequent analysis of the development of the composition and performance. Eric Clarke, Mark Doffman and Renee Timmers outlined the complex system of communication that the composer and performer developed, describing a tripartite structure of 'creative talk': 1) framing – introducing references from the outside world, 2) sustaining – focusing on the composer-performer relationship itself, and 3) directive – relating to the final composition. A form of 'musicians'-speak', or directive talk, had also been discussed by Daniel Leech-Wilkinson and Helen Prior in the context of teaching. Such documentation of the development on *Ouija* provided a valuable insight both into the composer's process and the upper bounds of performer input.

### DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

This report picks out the key themes emerging from recent research. Creativity is at the heart of CMPCP, and the wealth of new research on the topic was striking. The other two themes selected for discussion in this report, collaboration and communication, are also fundamental to the Performance Network: different perspectives on the performer's role and responsibility for these matters were presented. Emerging fields eliciting a notable spate of research included embodiment in performer interaction, the performer's rehearsal process and the distribution of creativity resulting from developments in digital technology and media. Furthermore two special sessions focused on the process of performance itself: from the application of contemporary performance priorities, as described by Andrew Lawrence-King in Monteverdi's *Il Combattimento di Tancredi e Clorinda*, to the unique experience of performing in a studio, explored by Simon Zagorski-Thomas and Amy Blier-Carruthers. Live performances throughout the conference served to foreground successfully the experience on and around which all the research presented was based.

The stimulating discussion that followed the provocative paper 'Is there a future for

musical performance and analysis?' provides an appropriate coda for this report. In this presentation the validity of performance analysis was questioned, with David Kopp arguing that performance possibilities were determined by insights from score-based analyses. Kopp went on to suggest that some performance interpretations were therefore 'incorrect', resulting in the performer's right to exercise artistic discretion being strongly defended by delegates, and the value of performance analysis being restated. Although this is not the first time the question has been posed it is nonetheless a relevant time to consider the answer, and through consideration of both the range of research presented during this conference and the growth evident in the field, it has to be a resounding 'yes'.

**LAUREN VICTORIA HADLEY** graduated in Music from the University of Cambridge in 2011. She then moved to Goldsmiths, University of London, to earn an MSc (with distinction) in Music, Mind and Brain, supervised by Professor Pam Heaton and Dr Jose van Velzen. Lauren is now undertaking her PhD in Psychology at the University of Edinburgh, exploring the cognitive processes involved in music-reading through an eye-tracking paradigm. She is working with Professor Martin Pickering, Dr Patrick Sturt, and Dr Nikki Moran to draw parallels between the reading of language and the reading of music.