

## Music in the Making: experimenting with an open and collaborative learning environment

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### Abstract

*The musical world of young conservatoire graduates is increasingly diverse. Many graduates end up playing in educational performances, musical theatre performances or other innovative crossover musical practices. Such multidisciplinary practices seem to demand different skills than technical virtuosity alone. How can we train tomorrow's musicians? What kinds of non-musical skills and competencies do they need to flourish in contemporary music practices? These questions inspired our experimental learning environment Music in the Making. Acknowledging the changing musical practices of young musicians, we set out to experiment with learning skills that evolve around collaboration, creativity and engagement. In this article we outline some of our findings from Music in the Making and discuss implications for the role students and teachers play in such a learning process.*

*We show that an open collaborative learning environment, without formal assessments, does not have to result in chaos or poor musical performances. Rather, it can encourage students to take ownership of their own learning process and to develop different kinds of skills by which they become more reflective about their own role as musicians. Fostering learning in such an open learning environment does require a different attitude from the teachers: less directive and more facilitating. We argue that working on technical skills in solitude should ideally be balanced with open projects where the students can learn to collaborate and 'tune in' to themselves, other musicians, audiences and others who have become part of their contemporary musical practice.*

## Introduction

Contemporary conservatoire graduates face multiple challenges. Due to the rise of the creative industries, rapid technological developments, budget cuts, increased (global) competition and a shift in the position of art and music in society, students at Dutch conservatoires no longer end up in clear-cut professional practices (Netwerk Muziek, 2017). Fewer and fewer students will work in orchestras on fixed contracts. Only a few make it to successful world class solo careers. At the same time, orchestras and ensembles aim to find new ways to keep classical music relevant in our contemporary media-infused 'experience society' (Hamel, 2016; Schulze, 2005). As a result, young graduates increasingly find themselves performing in a diversity of musical practices such as chamber music concerts, mini-operas, educational performances, musical theatre performances or other innovative crossover musical practices (cf. Idema, 2012). Such multidisciplinary musical practices demand skills of musicians that go beyond technical mastery. How can we train tomorrow's musicians? What other skills and competencies do they need to successfully perform in a variety of contexts?

These are the questions that started our experimental learning environment called *Music in the Making*. It was a six-week project at Conservatorium Maastricht, where we experimented with a collaborative and creative form of musical learning.<sup>1</sup> Acknowledging the changing musical practices of young musicians, we set out to experiment with learning skills that evolve around *collaboration*, *creativity*, and *engagement*. In this article we outline some of our findings of Music in the Making and discuss implications for the role students and teachers play in such an open, collaborative learning process.<sup>2</sup> In the next section we explain the setup of the course and the methods by which we studied and observed the students. In the section that follows we discuss some observations on how the students participated in this experimental learning environment. We then discuss some implications of our findings for the role of both students and teachers before we end with a short conclusion.

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1 The coordinator and teacher of this project is Inge Pasmans, teacher of music theory at Conservatorium Maastricht. As a teacher-researcher she conducted the experiment Music in the Making, a project that was supported by the Research Centre for Arts, Autonomy and the Public Sphere (Zuyd University of Applied Sciences, The Netherlands). Dr Ties van de Werff is a researcher at the same centre and at Maastricht University. Ties served as a critical coach and sounding board and participated in and jointly prepared the evaluation interviews with students and teachers.

2 Some fragments of this article were published in an earlier description of the project on the website of Learning and Teaching in Music Performance Education written by Susanne van Els and Ellen M. Stabell in collaboration with Inge Pasmans (<https://latimpe.eu/the-lied-project/>).

## Music in the Making: an innovative educational project

Music in the Making was designed as an elective, interdisciplinary module, involving students and teachers of composition, music theory, organ, piano, voice and theatre. For the Classical Department at the Maastricht conservatoire this project was rather unique due to its focus on creativity: students are mainly trained to reproduce classical repertoire from the score and work on interpretation in an historical context. In contrast, this project invited the students to create not only a composition, but also the concept, the performance and the score themselves. Music in the Making is part of a recent policy aim of Conservatorium Maastricht to include more project-based practices that combine theory and practice (Van Els, 2018). Our aims for this open, collaborative project were threefold: 1) stimulating creativity, interdisciplinary collaboration and engagement; 2) integrating music theory and practice; and 3) letting students experience a complete process from concept to performance in a project-based setting (similar to their future musical practice). There was no formal assessment at the end of the course, no fixed learning outcomes and no ECTS grades.

For a period of six weeks, fourteen students collaborated in groups of three or four with the aim of composing a lied and performing it in the Basilica of St Servaas in Maastricht. The groups usually consisted of a composer, a singer and an organist. There were two coaching sessions per week: one lasting two hours at the conservatoire and one lasting one hour at the church. The coaching sessions were led by five teachers in total: one composition teacher, one organ teacher, one music theory teacher, one organ / choral conducting teacher and one theatre performance teacher. The project started with a series of workshops and lectures by the teachers. This included a performance workshop by a teacher from the local theatre school (Toneelacademie Maastricht) who focused on the perspective of the audience. It also included an organ workshop focusing on the instrument in the church space, a lecture on Romantic lieder, studying songs by Schubert and Schumann and a lecture on contemporary composition techniques. Afterwards the students received a text and musical material as a starting point for their own compositions. The German text selected was *Der Ganzumsonst*, a text from the Dutch theatre group Hauser Orkater (1980). The musical material selected was from György Kurtág's *Jatekok* (1973–2017). The musical material by Kurtág was chosen for its diversity and its opportunities for development in a composition. See below for the text and score fragments. Finally, the students were also given a clear deadline.

### ***Der Ganzumsonst***

Ich bin der Ganzumsonst  
Für mich kommt nichts in Frage  
Ich bin der Mangelmensch  
mich grauen alle Tage

Ich habe keine eigene Weise  
Das Leitmotiv ist mir verstorben  
Mit dem Suchen aller Arten  
Habe ich mir die Lust verdorben

Weshalb? denke ich immerzu ein Ganzumsonst  
Noch so oft ein Fragezeichen?  
Könnte es nicht ein Anderer sein?

Warum ich?  
Die Abwesenheit die meinen Alltag stört  
Sie ist nicht erwünscht

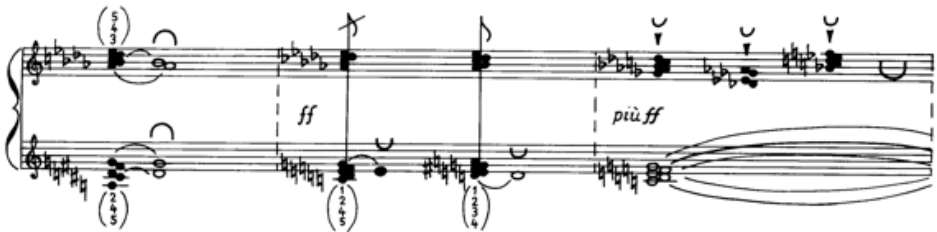
Unerzwinglich,  
Ganz niedrig  
Ohne Gegenstand

Umsonst, umsonst, umsonst und ewig immer

Mein Anteil an dem Dasein  
Unwichtig  
Jede Tat und jede Leistung  
Nichtig

Alle Mühe all das Trachten  
Vergeblich  
Die Unfähigkeit jedoch erheblich

Ich kann nicht durchhalten  
Beschlüsse kommen nimmer  
Und wie einfach auch die Frage ist  
Die Antwort fehlt mir immer



## Omaggio a Endre Bálint

György Kurtág

*p* *f* *m.s.* *m.d.* *pp* *molto*

Lento

*p, dolce* *con Ped.*

## Methods: teachers as researchers

Music in the Making is an example of what we call a 'research studio'. A research studio is both an educational intervention and a platform for practice-based research. Based on the experience and knowledge developed at the research centre in the past ten years, we draw on qualitative, ethnographic methods such as observing, documenting, interviewing and participating (Benschop, 2015; Benschop et al., 2018; Van de Werff & Benschop, 2017). Students in a research studio are encouraged to practise artistic

research: to critically reflect on their own skills, to use documentation and to cultivate a sensitivity to the implicit choices made with the aim of becoming reflective about their own practices in new ways (Benschop et al., 2018; Van de Werff & Benschop, 2017).

In the learning environment of the research studio, teachers have a double role. The coordinator and teacher on this project (Inge) was a teacher-researcher: coach and participant-observer at the same time. As teacher of music theory, she coached the student ensembles. She was also a participant-observer, documenting the students' creative and collaborative processes as well as the kind of opportunities and challenges that emerged in the process. This role takes some training. Due to the unconventional teaching method –to coach, to facilitate and to motivate– Inge could find the space to observe and document the process. Inge observed and documented the different student group sessions on a weekly basis. She had regular evaluative meetings with colleagues over the course of five weeks to discuss the process of the students, the approach of the teachers, the teachers' experiences and interventions in the group sessions and possible points of improvement for the project. After the project she conducted a focus group and semi-structured individual interviews with the students on the following topics: collaboration, learning outcomes, points of improvement for the project, the role of music theory, the value of the project to their regular studies and practice. Furthermore, the Head of Education, Josien Mennen, conducted an interview with the students on artistic research related to the experiences of the students on this particular project. She also conducted interviews with three of the five teachers (with Inge in the role of one of the teachers) on the following topics: teaching activities and interventions, opinions on the project, goals of the project, documentation, points of improvement and value of the project to regular studies and practice.<sup>3</sup> The observations and documentations of the group sessions, the focus groups and the interviews with colleagues and students provide the empirical sources for this article.

### Listening and reflecting: emergent student soft skills

In this section the learning outcomes will be discussed from the perspective of the students. Learning mainly happened in the group sessions during the creative process. Many activities can be witnessed, such as exploring the given material, brainstorming, discussing concepts, improvising, experimenting, rehearsing, composing and designing a score. To order these activities we subdivided them into four categories:

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<sup>3</sup> Parallel to Music in the Making, Josien Mennen, former Head of Education, conducted a research project into tacit knowledge with performing musicians. Her material is used with her permission.

instrument and expertise; context and concept; sound and design; and audience and communication. These activities were mainly content-oriented; on a (micro) level one could witness a number of research activities in the actions of the students.

### **Instrument & expertise**

Each student entered this project from the perspective of his or her domain: as a singer, composer, organist or pianist. During the creative process the students explored both their own and each other's expertise. Surprisingly, they did not start off by introducing themselves, their expert domains, instruments or repertoire to each other, let alone their cultural background. We witnessed a shyness in that area and noticed an impatience (urge) to start the creative process. During the project we observed mainly two typical situations where students learned about each other's expertise.

In the first situation problems occurred in the performance of composed material, and the students felt the need to explain their expectations and traditions as a singer/composer/organist to each other. For example, in the fourth group session we observed one singer who stated that the composed melodic line was unfeasible for her; there was no metre, so she could not find the timing of the melodic fragments together with the organ. On top of that she claimed that she could not find her tone from a cluster in the organ. In general, she felt uncomfortable with this type of open composition, which included improvised elements. She mentioned that she had never improvised before. As a coach, Inge advised them to experiment with material from Kurtág to find melodic fragments that were fitting for the range and agility of the voice but also contributed to their concept of the given text. This was a chance for the composer to learn about the vocalism of the singer and for both of them a chance to learn how to proportion open elements and improvisation in a compositional structure. The students documented their experiments in a recording or score, which finally led to the full structure. This was a challenging process: one of the students confirmed later in the evaluation interview that the group struggled to find a common method of working and composing. Once they did, they dismissed their first composition and wrote a new piece one week before the concert.

In the second situation of learning about expertise, the students 'simply' got involved with other disciplines than their own. Many singers, organists and pianists made musical suggestions, improvised, provided material and literally composed. In the interviews the students mentioned how remarkable it was that singers and organists had such a large stake in the composition and not simply reproduced what was written, as is often their traditional approach to classical repertoire. Furthermore, all

the students, including the composers, participated in the performance, some even in another discipline than their own: organists and pianists sang, singers and composers played the organ, and one composer played the electric guitar. One of the composers reflects on these shifting roles in the student evaluation interview:

It was very different than I expected. I expected to be writing for a singer and organist, getting to know the organ in the process. Instead [...] we learnt about teamwork and which role everyone had. There was a lot of input from the singer and organist, and I was not the only creator but 'merely' the guy who put our decisions in notation. It was a true collaborative composition.

### **Context & concept**

To stimulate the students to explore the context of the performance, the teachers asked them questions such as: what is a Romantic lied? What is the history of the organ? What is the role of an organ in this performance? What does the church mean as location for a concert?

In the workshops and lectures the teachers provided context information for the Romantic lied and the organ but left the translation to the performance open. Every group developed its vision on these topics. One group associated the church with a living and breathing organism, symbolised by the air in the organ; they also associated the church with eternal humanism. Another group wanted to express feelings of depression by contrasting huge clusters in fortissimo with long, dense silences. And another group pictured the organ as destiny or fate.

Both the given text and the musical material from Kurtág were non-Romantic in atmosphere and therefore inconsistent with a Romantic lied, which invoked questions about the context of Romantic lied repertoire, as illustrated in the documentation from a piano student below:

#### **QUESTIONS SO FAR?**

Is this still lieder? We are using the text and adding our own colour and interpretation. But is this musical theatre? Should we write a Romantic lied, and then take it apart? [...]What do we want the audience to feel?



Developing a concept from a text may not be one of the daily activities of a classical musician, but in this case it strongly inspired the students in their compositional process. Most students translated and analysed the German text, chose important words, improvised suitable musical fragments and designed performative elements, which all led to a complete structure. One group took it one step further: they did not only want to word paint the text, but to provide a musical answer to the text. This was the students' modern view on the lieder genre. The following notes were made by one of the students during several group sessions:

Develop an answer to the text. What does the church (not the institution but the space) have to do with it? [...]

Our vision: so it's a depressing poem, and we feel that there's no place in society for people who are depressed, have burn-out etc. They are being ignored, laughed at, 'thrown out of the nest'. [...]

We want to use the second, big eruption as a 'mirror' in the composition. So first, before the big eruption we portrayed the content of the poem. Then, after the big eruption, we wanted to counterbalance the despair: the inability of people/society to understand (in the end people want happy people around them...)

The quality of the discussions in this group was very high and consistent; they regularly reflected on their concept in order to adjust and deepen it. Similar to Schubert and Schumann, who expressed the text by musical means but also occasionally gave the piano the role of antagonist, this group wanted to add a layer by expressing the text in the first part of the music and giving a musical answer in the second part.

### **Sound & design**

The teachers urged the groups to use the selection from *Jatekok* by György Kurtág as musical building blocks for the compositions; Kurtág's pieces could be selected, reduced, combined in any way the students found suitable for their concept. However, some students were reluctant to use the material from Kurtág. The contemporary idiom discouraged them somewhat, as also became clear in the student evaluation interview:

I learned to appreciate the music of Kurtág, normally I would quickly skip this kind of music. (Student 1)

We did not use the Kurtág compositions. We listened to them, but we did not want to be influenced by them, instead we wanted to find our own sounds to the text. (Student 2)

The groups that did research deep into the compositions by Kurtág concurrently also found more layers and depth in their own material. They analysed Kurtág's pieces, but as a result of that they also analysed their own melodies, harmonies, rhythms, dialogues, climaxes etc. They had a better grip on their material and could mould it into the form they envisioned.

At this stage the students experimented and improvised a lot to develop their musical material in relation to the text, using Kurtág as a starting point. As stated previously, the students sometimes felt uncomfortable improvising, but the organ teachers designed simple improvisation exercises, interacted with the students and, most of all, created a safe environment in which to experiment without judging them. Consequently, the students quickly picked up this tool and had fun doing so.

Not knowing what you are doing makes you more free. (...) This project should definitely be repeated; everyone should do such a project. It makes you much more open-minded. You work outside your comfort zone; we are not used to creating. Now everyone was creating and improvising. (Student 3)

In the notes and sketches by the students we found many examples of word painting and form design. The composition (*Vergeblich*) below is inspired by one of the pieces by Kurtág. Using the cluster technique, abandoning it note per note, the students linked this to the text 'Das Leitmotiv ist mir verstorben.' (The leitmotif died within me). And they added colours in the organ.

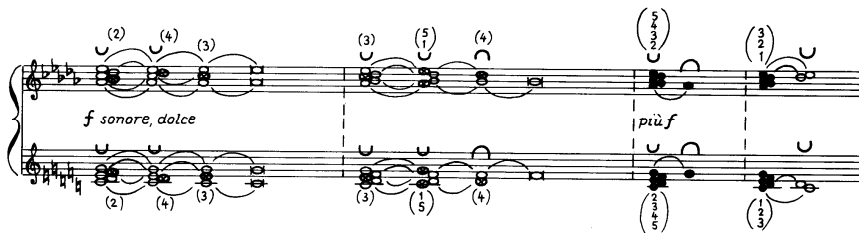


Figure 2: from Kurtág *Jatekok*

The image shows two systems of a musical score. The first system features a vocal line (T.) with the lyrics "Ich habe keine eigene weise," and a piano (*p*) dynamic. Below it is an organ part (Org.) with a *pp* dynamic. The organ part includes performance instructions: "Flute 4", "Flageolet 1", and "Third manual". A bracket indicates "Add notes one by one and keep them" over a series of chords. The final chord is marked "abandon notes one by one". The second system shows the vocal line with the lyrics "Das leitmotiv ist mir verstorben, Das leitmotiv" and the organ part continuing with chords.

Figure 3: *Vergeblich*, composition by students

Teachers and students alike gave feedback on performed passages and constantly reflected on their concept and musical interpretation. The teachers encouraged the students to focus their listening during the experiments. This is not a given quality for musicians, but a skill that needs to be sharpened and developed in each new situation. Teachers and students all listened critically to the dialogues between voice and organ, for example. Does the reaction from the organ express the text well enough? How does the timing of the dialogue contribute to the expression? How does this timing develop? Are the voice and the organ well enough articulated in the acoustic of the church? One group documents the following on this last aspect:

## CHURCH SESSION #2

Shorter attacks and slower heartbeat in these acoustics

Intensifying the heartbeat is not accelerating but using more stops on organ, clusters (clusters changing from white to black keys, not only e.g. black). So the beat stays the same rate because of the big acoustics

A certain knowledge of music theory was generally useful in this phase of improvising, composing, adapting and reflecting: analytical skills, knowledge of harmony, melody, rhythm and form were tools to shape the composition. The teachers stimulated the analytical and aural skills of the students as mentioned above. In the evaluation interview the students were also asked about the role of music theory in this project. They answered as follows:

Student 4: 'I am not such a theory person. I don't think I did a lot of theoretical things in this project, not like my group mates'

Student 5: 'I totally disagree. I think this whole project was the most practical theory ever, dealing with sound, melody, material and form'

Student 6: 'It was project-wise: a lot of theory in a short time, quick, a lot of different teachers saying different things'

The first comment seems to be the most striking one. As a teacher-researcher, Inge witnessed this student working on the composition together with the pianist. They made a reduction (see figure 4) of one of the Kurtág pieces (see figure 5), derived a leitmotif (see figure 6) from bar 11, designed variations and developed a ternary form with a rhythmically varied middle section. She just did not experience these activities as music theory!

The image displays two systems of musical notation, each with a treble and bass clef. The first system contains seven measures of chords. The second system, starting at measure 8, also contains seven measures of chords. The chords are represented by circles with stems and flags, indicating the notes of the chords.

Figure 4: chord reduction

The image displays five systems of musical notation for a piano piece. The notation is written on grand staff systems (treble and bass clefs). The first system begins with a dynamic marking of *p* and the instruction *con Ped.*. The second system features a *poco a poco cresc.* instruction. The third system includes a *f* dynamic marking and two *Ped.* markings. The fourth system contains *rinf.* and *sonore, dolce* markings, along with a *Ped.* marking. The fifth system starts with *pp* and includes an *(eco)* marking. The score uses various musical symbols such as notes, rests, slurs, and dynamic markings to convey the piece's structure and performance requirements.

Figure 5 Kurtág *Consolazione*

Slow (around 60beats per minute)  
Tempo Rubato Spoken : "Mich Grauen alle Tage"

Soprano

Organ

Ich ha-be kei-ne ei-ge-ne wei-se

Figure 6 Leitmotive from *Die Antwort*, composition by the students

Similarly, the students perceived their actions quite differently from the research activities envisioned by the teacher-researcher. In a group interview conducted by Josien Mennen the students were first asked to react to a set of typical research activities; the question was to which extent they recognised these research activities in their own actions on this project. In Figure 7 you can find the result of their first reaction.

First associations  
Verbs related to what you have done in the Lied project  
Ranking: 1 = most important, 5 = least important

Verbs	+	+-	-	Ranking
Ask				2 3 2 1 4 6
Gather knowledge				4 6 2 5 5 7
Experiment				1 1 3 1 1
Work methodically				7 7 2 7 6 4
Reflect				3 2 2 2 3 3
Document				5 5 3 4 7 5
Share knowledge	(   )			6 4 1 6 2 2

Figure 7 Associations to artistic research terminology

From this picture one can conclude, that the students thought they reflected, experimented and asked questions but also that they did not work particularly methodically or documented a great deal. Concentrating on this last statement, the students were

asked what they considered to be ‘documenting’ and what kind of documenting they applied in this project. Surprisingly the students said:

Student 4: ‘[...] every meeting we had, there was always someone writing down what we did, and I think that really helped me.’

Student 6: ‘Yeah, just to keep track of ideas because there were so many, especially at the beginning, ... So, [...] I just had a book where I wrote everything down to help you go back, ...for me that worked. (...) I wrote down all the ideas we had, I drew graphs of the church, just like what the spatial thing would be like. Signs like the stops I wrote down what they sounded like, so we could remember...’

Student 7: ‘Yes, we also did that, after every session, we ... did the documentation. Just trying to accurately write down all the ideas; we had so many, and we talked so much [...], we’d meet each other before the session AND after the session, just talking. If we didn’t do that [documenting], that’s a suggestion for next time, if people don’t think about documenting the ideas, yes, that is really helpful. It’s necessary actually.’

In addition to the abovementioned work notes, the students’ documentation consisted mainly of notating music. According to some teachers, this is the most adequate method of documenting. In the fragment below, from the teacher’s evaluation, it is once again apparent how different the interpretation of documenting can be:

Teacher 1: ‘Speaking just for myself now [...] documenting would take all my energy out of the creative things. So, if I am creative, then I must not document, it would drive me nuts.’

Interviewer: ‘But, what do you do when you are creative?’

Teacher 1: ‘Then I am all “into the piece”’

Interviewer: ‘Do you write anything down?’

Teacher 1: ‘Yes! Notes.’

Interviewer: ‘Yes! That is also documenting, right?’

Teacher 1: ‘No, that would also mean to describe the process.’

Interviewer: ‘No, that’s not my question. Documenting is not limited to writing words.’

Teacher 1: ‘O, well, then I agree...’

Assuming that documenting can be realised in many forms, musical notation required special attention in this project. Many compositions contained improvised elements, and their notation formed a challenge; traditional music notation was inadequate for this purpose. The students handled this challenge in different ways: the scores ranged from a memo with one musical motif and some expressive indications to a full traditional notation and a large timeline with detailed indications (but no notes). The most exciting score was a half open notation of the music. One of the composition students put in a considerable effort to overcome the limitations found in digital music notation programmes in order to design an adequate notation for their music. In the group interview he explained his reasons for his extensive work on the notation. Firstly, he wanted to literally preserve the composition, otherwise it would be lost after it had sounded in the performance. Secondly, as a memory support for the group's work process, as one can only adapt and develop music that can be remembered. And thirdly, as a practical performance support to synchronise the elements of the performance. He described his own emerging notating method as follows:

I think what we did was break the methods, because all the materials we had were, musically speaking, classical material, but yet we created something that is considered contemporary, which was very irregular. All the material we had, (classical singers, organ, church, lied) is in a certain structure, and we were experimenting with things which would never be on paper if we wanted to write it down with a classical (notating) system. [...] So what really helped us was breaking the classical rules, and that's how we ended up with a graphical notation. And that freedom would allow us to bring what we were doing onto paper.

As researcher, Inge observed that there was a clear relation between the quality of the documentation of the groups and the development and consistency of the compositions.

Generally speaking she witnessed more research activities than the students would admit to in their own actions or reflections. Many of the research terms are surrounded by assumptions and academic interpretations; in creative processes artistic research terminology may need a different interpretation. For example: the students did not conduct a source study but gathered knowledge by playing, listening and touching. They did not ask a research question, but they did *ask* relevant questions about the audience, lied and church for example. They did not work according to well-known research methods but designed their own *methodical cycles* for composing and creating (idea – experiment – listen – analyse – reflect – notate – idea). They did not document



their work with a full report but found ways of *documenting* supporting their collaborative process: many ideas needed to be ordered, and the sound possibilities and sketches needed to be collected and scored. Their acquired knowledge was mainly shared with their colleagues in the project and finally with the audience in the concert.

### **Audience & communication**

The first workshop of the project, by the performance teacher from the Academy of Theatre, was important for the mindset of the students. He created the following assignment for all the students and teachers:

Please give an answer to one of the following questions: what is your experience of church? Which scene of a movie, theatrical piece, opera or musical is very dear to you? Which song do you feel it is written just for you? Please answer not only in words but also in movements, position, sound and expression.

A grand piano was available in the hall. One by one, students and teachers gave a brief performance, and afterwards everyone discussed the expression, associations and observations. This was a very interesting assignment, because everyone's relation to the project became apparent in a very authentic way. In addition, the observations by all participants, but especially by the performance teacher, served as a kind of mirror for the performer, reflecting what the audience might experience. Consequently, the students were motivated from the outset to communicate their own concepts to the audience. One of the students documented:

Play with position of audience for the good of the composition and the experience (from close to far from organ)  
Task for audience: breathing? Walking with a map with 3 indications?  
We can use the crypt? The sound is so nice there that it's an idea to put the audience there  
Before the performance, we want to give the audience something to trigger them (together with the map). You don't want to have to explain everything, but it's harder than we think for an audience to follow our ideas as logical as they are in our minds.

Oddly, the above-mentioned ideas never became reality; the audience was seated during the whole performance, turning around in the pews to be able to see the

performers at the back of the church. Maybe the students did not know how to organise these kinds of requests for the audience and needed more coaching in this area. During the last rehearsals the students were coached in their performance positions and movements. Transitions between the compositions were created, which was an unfamiliar phenomenon for the organists, pianists and composers (the singers seemed more used to this). The so-called 'dead' time between the compositions was now to be reduced to a minimum. Musicians generally do not seem to care much about the audience having to wait several minutes while the musicians take their positions or disappear from the stage; the students needed several attempts to simply move in time to their positions in the space or behind the organ. The aspect of audience and communication was somewhat underexposed in the project; the students needed more coaching in the whole process. This is an aspect that needs further development and more thorough coaching.

## **Discussion: changing roles for student and teacher**

So, what have we, as teachers and researchers, learned from this project? What were the main challenges and outcomes? Based on the previous empirical observations, we now discuss some implications of our findings for the roles of the students and teachers in the following.

### **Collaboration, autonomy and responsibility**

Teachers and students participating in the project came from different disciplines. The students were expected to collaborate as experts in their field with other expert students belonging to other disciplines. The intensity of the collaboration depended on the social and communicative skills of the participants, such as aligning different expectations, work tempo and making sure progress was made as a group. Some students were too polite and friendly and were afraid to voice their opinions. Other students had to be encouraged by the teachers to start experimenting and creating instead of merely discussing ideas over and over. Being able to collaborate appears as an important factor for the success of a performance. Groups where there was open communication, a safe atmosphere and an overall feeling of mutual respect and equality performed better in every creative aspect throughout the project. Assumptions about each other's roles, misunderstandings or even quarrels blocked creativity and progress in general. The importance of group dynamics also means that the teachers

should from time to time coach the students in how to collaborate. As it turned out, the teachers were rather hesitant to intervene in these aspects and preferred to focus on the musical material.

In all the groups, expectations and assumptions about each other's roles became explicit when working together. As this student reflects:

We needed to (learn to) trust each other with certain responsibilities. As a pianist I am not used to that; I like to do everything myself. (student 6)

When social group dynamics and collaboration flourished, the students became more open to trying out things outside their own main subject of study. It was remarkable to find that students in such groups did not feel limited by their usual role, level or preferences.

The students were in control of their process and found that to be a rather positive experience. They took charge of their own coaching and asked for more availability of the coaches to 'shop around' and get the expertise they needed at that moment. The students both displayed and reported strong motivation for producing a high-quality performance, even without the usual drivers of assessment, ECT grades and fixed learning outcomes. As there was no formal assessment at the end, the students felt free to experiment and take risks in the creative process. The combination of a feeling of freedom and responsibility, the collaborative aspect and the aim of performing in the grand Basilica might have contributed to the high motivation the students both reported and displayed during the process. Teachers involved in the project were convinced that having no formal assessment even worked as a trigger for the students to push themselves more than expected. And indeed, the quality of the result, the *lieder*, was consequently higher than the teachers had expected.

An important learning objective for the assignment of creating their own *lieder* was to enable the students to develop ownership and more ease when performing the original *lieder* of Schubert and Schumann, which students often perceive as 'God-given notes'. Reflections on how the students' experiences from the creative *lieder* project could transfer back to performing Schumann and Schubert could have been part of the project, but then preferably retrospectively as such reflection during the process could make the students over-conscious. What seems to be of utmost importance is to hand over the project to the students and leave as much as possible for them to decide, including goals and methods. The students' ownership of the project was crucial.

## Changing teachers' roles: from master to facilitator

The open character of *Music in the Making* probably proved the most challenging for the teachers involved, as their role and relationship with the students differed substantially from the traditional master-apprentice relationship. In a way, the teachers in this project were trying not to teach in the form of instruction. Instead, they asked questions, helped organise the process, developed the students' ideas further and stimulated consistency. The biggest challenge for the teachers involved was to determine when to intervene and when not to. To intervene in a group process and take charge often evokes a passive response in the students. This was to be avoided. At the same time, at certain moments in the process the students did benefit from the teachers' expertise or support, for example in the strengthening of their ideas. As this teacher reflects:

You have to pay attention to the moments when they are creative, and when ideas freely flow, and when they need additional direction. (...) For me, that is a delicate and beautiful challenge. To find the right moment to say: let's do this or that.

In the evaluation interviews, the teachers also became aware of the musical criteria they implicitly seemed to apply and silently all agreed on. Consistency in a composition, listening to each other in improvisation and dialogue, balancing between repetition and variation, and an overall sense of form and tension seemed to be recurring criteria. In improvisation in particular, the musical qualities of the students such as imagination, inner ear, aural skills, sense of harmony and form become apparent – far more so than in any traditional exam. When the students struggled with these aspects, some of the teachers tended to become more directive; they deployed their expertise. This inspired the students and helped them to find possibilities and direction in their composition. In some cases, when the students could not pick up on the given directions and with the concert deadline approaching, the teachers became more and more instructive. Some teachers even felt the performance needed to be 'rescued' by giving detailed instructions, which perhaps came at the expense of the students' learning process. In a multi-disciplinary, collaborative learning project, where the students are given the responsibility not only to come up with a performance but also develop ways to do this fruitfully together, teachers have to strike a fine balance between being directive and facilitating.

The teachers also had to collaborate. Just as the students, they came from different disciplines. Collaborating with each other and supervising an interdisciplinary group

of students forced the teachers to step out of their traditional roles as music theorists, organists or composers. One teacher of music theory confessed to being an amateur organist for the last twenty years. Another teacher enjoyed bringing his 'entire background' as an organist, choral conductor, theorist and composer into the project. The alignment between the teachers in the preparation and especially in the coaching process was at times an issue; students pointed out that the coaching styles were very diverse between the teachers, ranging from very open to more restricted. While these 'multiple voices' appear to hamper teaching consistency across the board, they do in practice spur on the students to take ownership of their own learning process.

As a teacher-researcher, Inge experienced some resistance from her colleagues at the conservatoire when introducing research assignments or a possible method / work model for the students. It was thought by some teachers that the students should not be bothered with these assignments in the middle of a creative process, as it would distract them from their musical material. Documenting the process (making notes in text or graphs) was considered necessary by some teachers to generate awareness in the students, but again it was considered too distracting from their creative process by others. This hesitance to incorporate process-gear research assignments seems linked to assumptions surrounding artistic research (i.e. 'documenting is writing'). The students themselves showed multiple aspects of research in their creative activities (i.e. documenting, reflecting, finding a method together).

For the teachers one learning outcome was that grades and tests are not needed to motivate students; they worked very autonomously and were very motivated for their performance. The teachers learnt to trust the students with this responsibility – however difficult this sometimes proved to be. Instead of a traditional assessment, a final evaluation followed the concert, arranged as a group interview with all students, teachers and head of education. In this dialogue, awareness of the implicit learning was addressed as a central topic. These evaluations were of key importance to the learning process in the project: during these talks the students became more aware of their role, their pre-conceptions, habits, strengths and weaknesses. In these evaluative moments, the students became aware and found words to explicate their actions both in the creative process and during their performance as well as their own methods and criteria for success. However, while no formal evaluation increased the openness of the project, the lack of ECTS given is also a danger: a proper weighting in terms of ECTS awarded to the students would help to institutionalise such innovative teaching electives.

## Conclusion

As in many conservatoires, the curriculum of the Conservatorium Maastricht traditionally consists of practical courses (instrument, chamber music, projects) on the one hand and theoretical courses (music theory, entrepreneurship, conducting & arranging, teaching skills, research skills) on the other hand. This separation of components contrasts with the musical profession, where all components are practised more or less simultaneously with a specific focus on an upcoming performance and the repertoire at hand (cf. Peters, 2012). Moreover, such a strict separation does not align well with the skills demanded by the current and future musical practices of our graduates of today. Collaboration, flexibility, innovative and creative thinking, and self-reflection are becoming increasingly important qualities for the contemporary professional, including the musician (cf. Eraut, 2009; Janssen-Noordman & Van Merienboer, 2002; Kuh, 2008; Kindelan, 2012; Muziek Netwerk, 2017).

With this article we aimed to show that contemporary conservatoire students can benefit from courses on which they learn to collaborate and on which they together have to creatively come up with an engaging music performance. Such an open collaborative learning environment, without formal assessments, does not have to result in chaos or poor musical performances. Rather, it can encourage students to take ownership of their own learning process, and to develop *different* kinds of skills. Working within a heterogeneous group of musicians encourages students to experiment and to develop their own ways of working (together), making them more reflexive about their own role as musicians. As we showed, to foster learning in such an open learning environment also requires a different attitude from the teachers: less directive and more facilitating (including paying attention to social dynamics).

Motivation is key to becoming a professional musician. It helps the musician's passion for music survive the huge technical and mental demands of the profession. Individually learning the craft of an instrument – the dominant focus in the curriculum of the majority of contemporary conservatoires – is an important part of becoming a skilful musician. But, as we argue, that is not enough to prepare students for the changing musical landscape in which they will work. Nor is training in entrepreneurship. Working on technical skills in solitude should ideally be balanced with open projects where the students can learn to collaborate and to 'tune in' to themselves, other musicians, audiences and others who have become part of their contemporary musical practice.

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