

# The Art of Practice: Learning Through the Looking-Glass

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Understanding the musical learning  
of popular and classical undergraduate musicians  
based upon their reflections about their experiences  
of a UK university performance course

Thesis submitted in accordance with the requirements of the  
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by

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## **The Art of Practice: Learning Through the Looking-Glass**

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Monica Esslin-Peard

### **Abstract**

Much has been written in the last 30 years about musical practice and performance, but there is little consensus over what practice really means, or how musicians progress by practising. Researchers tend to focus on specific elements in practice rather than taking a more holistic perspective. Whilst academics historically focused on (primarily Western) classical musicians, more recent research has focused upon popular, jazz and folk musicians, drawing on formal and informal learning models.

This research project at the University of Liverpool focuses on the practice and performance experiences of both popular and classical undergraduate musicians as described in students' reflective essays, acquired through informed consent. The method of assessment, combining 70% of marks for performance and 30% of marks for the reflective essay is, as far as can be ascertained, unique in comparable higher education institutions.

The research questions address the roles of practice, performance and reflection in musical learning:

- What experiences of practice and performance do the students describe in their reflective essays?
- Do students develop an understanding of their practice and performance behaviours through their reflective essays? If so, how?
- What role does reflection play in musical learning?

Musical learning takes place not only through individual practice, but also in ensembles and bands, supported by feedback from tutors and peers and is firmly situated in the socio-cultural environment of the university and the city of Liverpool.

Longitudinal findings suggest that classical and popular musicians start their performance studies with quite different musical experiences and expectations, dependent upon their prior learning. However, the process of writing an annual reflective essay seems to encourage students to think more critically about their practice and performance behaviours and they ask 'How am I...' or 'How are we practising?' which may lead to the adoption of a range of metacognitive practice strategies. The research findings point towards a validation of written reflection combined with performance as an appropriate method for assessing student musicians. Reflective practice acted as a unifying element between the popular and classical musicians. This study provides a contribution to knowledge for tertiary and secondary music educators, scholars and those involved in higher education course design.

## **Keywords**

Practice

Performance

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Classical Musicians

Popular Musicians

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## Conference Paper Presentations

- Dublin, Ireland      Society for Music Educators Ireland Conference  
11/2013      Paper Presentation: *The Art of Practice*
- London, UK      SEMPRE Conference; Music, Education, Technology:  
3/2014      Critical Insights  
Paper Presentation: *The Art of Practice: the crossroads  
between reflection, creativity and determination*
- Liverpool, UK      Teaching and Learning Conference, University of Liverpool  
6/2014      Presentation/Workshop with student string quartet  
*The Art of Practice: the crossroads between reflection,  
creativity and action*
- Neuwied, Germany      Arbeitskreis Musik-Pädagogische Forschung Annual Conference  
10/2014      Paper Presentation: *Understanding the process of musical  
Maturation through reflection*
- London, UK      SEMPRE/Guildhall Reflective Conservatoire Conference  
4/2015      Paper Presentation: *The Art of Practice: the crossroads  
between reflection, creativity and action*
- Erfurt, Germany      Arbeitskreis Musik-Pädagogische Forschung Annual Conference  
10/2015      Paper Presentation: *Practice is Performance: A study of the  
musical development of popular music undergraduates*
- Oslo, Norway      CEMPE 2015: TEACHING OF PRACTICING —  
12/2015      new knowledge and change  
Paper Presentation 1: *Reflection, Practice and Metacognitive  
Strategies*

Paper Presentation 2: *The teaching of practising in Higher Music Education Institutions*

- London, UK  
3/2016  
SEMPRE MET Conference  
Paper presentation: *Classic goes pop: How classical performance students adopt informal learning behaviours from their popular musician peers*
- Liverpool, UK  
6/2016  
Teaching and Learning Conference, University of Liverpool.  
Workshop/presentation on the role of reflection in expert learning with demonstration from MMus singer and pianist
- York, UK  
6/2016  
Conference for PhD students in Psychology of Music/Music Education. Paper Presentation: *Performance is Practice*  
Chair: Liz Haddon
- Glasgow, UK  
7/2016  
International Society for Music Education, World Conference  
Two paper presentations:  
*Classic goes pop: Key factors in the musical maturation of cross-genre musicians* SIG Popular Music Education  
  
*Through the looking glass: the role of reflection in the musical maturation of classical and popular musicians at university*  
Commission for vocal and instrumental pedagogy
- Hull, UK  
04/2017  
SEMPRE Conference — Musical Cultures. Paper presentation:  
*Using reflection to develop insights into musical practice and performance: A pilot study with Chinese MMus students*
- London, UK  
05/2017  
The Fourth Annual Westminster-Goldsmiths Symposium for Student Research in Popular Music: Paper presentation:

*Practice is Performance: a study of the musical development of popular music undergraduates at the University of Liverpool*

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RMA Conference. Paper presentation/workshop:  
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## **Published Papers**

## **Music Education Book Reviews**

UK

*Psychology of Music* (2014), 42 (4), pp. 637–639.  
Richard Colwell and Peter R. Webster, (Eds). *MENC Handbook of Research on Music Learning Volume 1: Strategies*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2011. 316 pp. ISBN: 978-0-19-538668-4 (Pbk).

UK

*Psychology of Music* (2015), 43 (3), pp. 450-456.  
Mary Stakelum, (Ed.). *Developing the Musician: Contemporary Perspectives on Teaching and Learning*. *SEMPRE Studies in the Psychology of Music*. Farnham, UK: Ashgate, 2013. 329 pp. ISBN 978-1-40-50177 (Hbk).

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- Germany                      Esslin-Peard, M., Shorrocks, T., and Welch, G., F. (2015)  
The Art of Practice – Understanding the process of musical maturation through reflection. In A. Niessen and J. Knigge, (Eds). *Theoretische Rahmung und Theoriebildung in der Musikpädagogischen Forschung*. [Theory Framework and Development in Music Education Research], *Musikpädagogischen Forschung*, 36, pp. 125–145. Münster/New York: Waxmann Verlag. ISBN: 978–3–8309–3313–7
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Practice is Performance: A study of the musical development of popular music undergraduates at the University of Liverpool. In J. Knigge and A. Niessen, (Eds). *Musikpädagogik und Erziehungswissenschaft* [Music Education and Educational Science] *Musikpädagogische Forschung*, 37, pp. 171–190. Münster/New York: Waxmann Verlag. ISBN 978–3–8309–3500–1
- UK                                Esslin-Peard, M., Shorrocks, T., and Welch, G., F. (2016)  
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- Australia                      Esslin-Peard, M., Shorrocks, T., and Welch, G., F. (2016)  
Through the looking glass: The role of reflection in the musical maturation of classical and popular musicians at

university. In D. Forrest and L. Godwin, (Eds). *Proceedings of the International Society for Music Education*, ISME: Malvern, Australia, pp. 95–103.

UK

Esslin-Peard, M. (2017)

Through the looking glass: A study of the role of reflection in the musical development of popular music undergraduates at the University of Liverpool. *Journal of Popular Music Education*, 1 (1), pp. 83–100.

Canada

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Reflecting on my practice: Exploring informal learning and the musical maturation of popular music undergraduates.

In R. Wright, B. A. Younker, and C. Beynon, (Eds.). *21st Century Music Education: Informal Learning and Non-Formal Teaching Approaches in School and Community Contexts*. Waterloo, CA: Canadian Music Educators' Association, pp.167–185.

UK

Esslin-Peard, M., and Shorrocks, T. (2017)

Using reflection to develop insights into musical practice and performance: A pilot study with Chinese MMus students.

In S. Clark, E. King, G. Marshall, H. Prior and E. Himonides, (Eds). *Musical Cultures Conference/SEMPRE Conference Proceedings*, pp. 50–69.

PART ONE:  
Introduction and Literature Review

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## CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

### 1.1. Preamble: What is The Art of Practice?

Google returns approximately 41,600,000 hits for the phrase ‘the art of practice’, ranging from tips on how to play the trumpet, how to write a novel, insights into urban planning, art therapy, practice management of doctors’ surgeries, how to succeed in love ... the list goes on and on! But if you ask a musician, you may receive a furtive look of guilt, as your interviewee colours slightly and starts to mumble about hours of lost practice or what might have been if more attention had been paid to scales and arpeggios or rehearsing with the band rather than going down to the pub. The problem is further compounded if you ask what practice is all about. I would contend that each musician you ask, whatever the musical genre, would give a completely different description of the process of practice. It seems that we find ourselves in a domain in which there are many different approaches, but little consensus about the process of practice itself.

If practice makes perfect, as is commonly (mis)understood, then why are we not surrounded by an infinite number of expert musicians, dancers, artists and sportsmen? The dictum, ‘practice makes perfect’, I would suggest, is one of the most abused terms in the English language. If there is no consensus about what the word ‘practice’ means in common parlance, let alone amongst music educators, then this statement is meaningless. Equally, what does ‘perfect’ or ‘perfection’ mean in this context? Being able to play a major scale without mistakes? Performing Bach’s Goldberg Variations in public? Winning a music competition?

There is a common belief, much beloved of some modern-day parents that their offspring should practise in order to succeed — whether that practice is on a musical instrument, on the tennis court, the football field, in a drama studio or involves any other artistic or sporting endeavour. For many, practice equates to time spent practising, with differing ideas about what that practice should entail, and, I may suggest, in some cases, without much thought about *how* that practice is being done. Whilst as a music teacher

exhort students to practise regularly, ‘Just ten minutes a day,’ I hear myself cry, this feeble entreaty does not necessarily help our young charges. When a pupil fails to make progress and gives up, the reason given is often lack of practice, without any enquiry into other factors, such as the relationship with the music teacher, practice space or family support. Another myth, perhaps? Learning to sing or play an instrument is held to be a ‘good thing’, but whilst musicians plead for more music in primary and secondary schools, we need, I believe, to go back in time to discover why gaining musical skills is thought to be so desirable.

The idea of music as a noble endeavour for a well-educated person can be traced back to the ancient Greek philosophers Plato and Aristotle, who lived in the 4<sup>th</sup> century BC. Despite Aristotle’s concerns about the possibility that certain kinds of music making, such as playing the flute, were improper both for gods and noblemen, he argues that music was a necessary part of education:

As Museus says, ‘Music’s the sweetest joy of man;’ for which reason it is justly admitted into every company and every happy life, as having the power of inspiring joy. So that from this any one may suppose that it is necessary to instruct young persons in it, (Aristotle, 2015, VIII, chapter 5).

Aristotle grasps not only that music involved the technical craft of combining rhythm, melody and harmony related to instrumental playing, but also understands well that music has the power to delight audiences and give pleasure and relaxation to performers — and may even ‘improve our manners and our souls’. Indeed, such is the emotional or aesthetic power of music that he warns that ‘it should be practised by the young, judged of by the old.’ (Aristotle, 2015, VIII, chapter 6).

Aristotle offers two more concepts which give us insights into the historical development of the term ‘practice’. He outlines a philosophical position in which human beings develop through praxis (πρᾶξις), ‘doing’, and poiesis (ποίησις) ‘making’. It is

from ‘poiesis’ that our general modern day term ‘practice’ derives, meaning the act of making or performing something – whether physical or abstract.

The Oxford English Dictionary gives over 30 pages of definitions for the noun ‘practice’ and the verb ‘practise’. Whilst the noun ‘practice’ includes the activities carried out by doctors and lawyers, for example, the second definition comes closer to what musicians might understand by the term:

2 a. The actual application or use of an idea, belief, or method, as opposed to the theory or principles of it; performance, execution, achievement; working, operation; (*Philos.*) activity or action considered as being the realization of or in contrast to theory (cf. *praxis* n. 1a). C.f. *to put into (also in) practice*. (OED, 2016).

The definition of the verb, ‘to practise’ immediately suggests activities linked to the performing arts:

1a. *trans.* To pursue or be engaged in (a particular occupation, profession, skill, or art), (OED, 2016).

The first citation of practice connected with music comes from the 15<sup>th</sup> century AD, by the leading English Benedictine poet John Lydgate. This quotation comes from his minor poems, probably published between 1432 and 1435: (OED, 2016; rephrasing MEP):

Forto practyse with sugred melodye  
He and his scolers theyre wyttes dydde applye.

In order to practise a sugar-sweet melody  
He and his scholars applied their wits.

Here Lydgate implies that there was more to practising or making music than just playing the melody: the musicians needed to apply their wits to the task. Early premonitions of Ericsson et al.'s (1993) notion of deliberate practice perhaps? Or the insight of a Benedictine monk who would have been well-versed in Gregorian chant and one may assume had some personal experience of the time it took to learn chants and antiphons for the many services he would have attended in the monastery.

Whilst it is tempting to enjoy a linguistic odyssey exploring the historical meanings of both the noun and verb forms relating to practising, I will here, for the purposes of consistency, turn to a more mundane linguistic matter and state my own preference for spellings. I shall, throughout this document, use the Oxford English Dictionary spellings; namely 'practice' as a noun and 'practising' as a verb, including correcting inconsistencies in spellings from students' reflective essays.

It is quickly apparent that the noun 'practice' and the verb 'to practise' encompass many different areas of human activity, professions and different aspects of 'doing'. In the face of such complexity, how do we, as musicians, understand what practice is all about? My curiosity about practice and practising stems from my own experiences as a classical musician, performer, conductor and secondary school music teacher and the experiences of musicians all around me.

The desire to shed light upon the process of practice is not new. This study is not intended to provide a check list of self-help strategies. Books like this have been written by Green and Gallwey (1986), Bruser (1997), Snell (2006), Klickstein (2009), Hallam and Gaunt (2012) and Harnun (2014), offering a range of practical strategies to help music students and developing musicians improve their craft, both in terms of technique and wider aspects of being a musician, such as wellness.

My own investigations into student experiences of practice started in 2010, when I conducted a pilot study with popular and classical musicians at a secondary school in south east England for my MA dissertation. The focus of this study was to find out how

much time teenage students spent practising and what they were trying to achieve through their practice. A naïve approach, in hindsight, as it had not occurred to me to ask about *how* they practised. Nevertheless, subsequent informal conversations with a wide range of adult and teenage musicians working in classical, jazz, pop and world music made me realise that perhaps investigating practice in a university setting with young adults might throw more light on how practice relates to musical learning. What has brought me to the University of Liverpool is the combination of a practice diary, written reflection and performance to assess undergraduates taking a Performance Module for three years of study. This combination, as far as I can detect in comparable institutions, offers a unique approach to assessing and understanding practice and performance for both classical and popular musicians and thus makes a very attractive field of study.

## **1.2. Practice makes perfect — or does it?**

In 2013, I went to hear an old school friend, pianist Joanna MacGregor, speak at the University of London. Her topic was practice and she shared many of her concerns derived from over 30 years of teaching the piano, most recently at the Royal Academy of Music, (hereafter RAM), as she explained:

My students at the RAM are practising for stamina, technique, memory and strength – but sometimes they practise in the wrong way, in a repetitive, anxious, neurotic, negative way. They don't use their creative skills at all, they just go over the same thing again and again and again, (MacGregor, 2013).

It seems surprising that top level students are exhibiting 'play-through' behaviours in a renowned conservatoire. Moreover, with Macgregor as their tutor, they have access to a professional musician who prefers to practise, rather than perform, as she related at the lecture:

On average if I have practised for five hours a day for the last 30 years as a professional pianist, I have practised for 52,000 hours or 2,176 days. That is six

years. I have spent ten years asleep — that is a third of your life. It's amazing that I have done anything else and I am not better than I am, (MacGregor, 2013).

I can attest, having witnessed Macgregor giving musical demonstrations, that she is not only a very well-educated musician, but displays very high levels of acuity in analysing chord voicings, for example, even in something as deceptively simple as Howard Skempton's piano miniatures. It would seem from her workshop presentation that she regards individual practice as a time to think very deeply about what the composer's intentions might be and then explores a myriad of different approaches until she finds an interpretation which she believes will suit her and her audience. How does it come about, then, that she suggests that her students do not exhibit similar self-critical, reflective attitudes towards practice?

Whilst Macgregor grew up in the 1970s and was studying in the early 1980s, music students in the 21<sup>st</sup> century find themselves in a very different learning environment, which brings its own challenges. Many rely on watching YouTube videos to gain knowledge of the repertoire they are studying, which, I would suggest, is stimulating a kind of visual learning that could be helpful in developing stage presence, whereas in the past, musicians worked from a score or gramophone recordings, relying on their knowledge of music history, musical analysis and a keen sense of hearing. It is not necessarily the case that all musical learning is to be found in the digital world in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, so I would like to compare my experiences of the daily practice of two musical lodgers over a three year period. Listening to them gave me an informal window into the practice habits of two advanced music students studying at conservatoires in London.

The first musician, a violinist doing a Postgraduate Performance Diploma at the Royal College of Music (hereafter RCM), practised for two to three hours each morning. He always started with half an hour to an hour of scales and technical exercises and then tackled audition, orchestral or chamber music repertoire, breaking down difficult passages into small sections and then working slowly on technique and intonation. He had not gone through conservatoire training, but had taken a first in the Oxford BMus

and MMus courses in the preceding four years and perhaps, by dint of having to fit his practice around academic work, had developed an effective and time-saving practice routine.

The second, an undergraduate at the RAM, was also a violinist and had been set the Paganini Caprice Op. 1 no. 24 as his main performance piece in his first year. He practised for ten hours a day, skipping classes at college. He played through the individual variations again and again, tapping — or should I say, stamping — his foot as he went along. He rarely broke down the difficult passages into sections, but just played on and on, repeating the music for hours on end. This reminds me of music educator Janet Mills (2005, p.71) who robustly stated:

Thousands of hours — even tens of thousands of hours — of the ‘wrong’ practice will clearly not turn a novice performer into an expert performer. ‘Lots of practice’ is a symptom, rather than a cause of learning to be a performer.

Paradoxically, both these students were awarded marks of over 90% for their final assessed recitals. How can it be that one violinist was doing four times as much practice in terms of time than the other but both, in the view of the assessment panel of music professionals, got excellent marks?

In the 1930s, it was enough for behavioural researcher Watson (1970) [1930] to assert that ‘practising more intensively than others ... is probably the most reasonable explanation we have today, not only for success in any line, but even for genius’. It is important to note that this was a general statement which could be applied to any area of the performing arts, sport and probably in its day, military training. However, that view was also embraced by educationalists, resulting in generations of schoolchildren practising for hours under the watchful eye of parents or teachers.

A focus on quantity (length of time of practice), rather than questioning the quality of the practice was implicit in the definition of expert mastery posed by Ericsson et al.,

(1993), based upon their notion of deliberate practice. Compelling as Ericsson and his colleagues' arguments seemed at the time, their views have been challenged in the last twenty years from a variety of different angles, including counter-arguments based on innate versus acquired talent. A 2014 paper by Hambrick et al., suggests that deliberate practice accounted for about a third of the reliable variance in the performance of musicians and chess players. They also noted that some chess players did virtually no practice at all at a young age, but nevertheless became Grand Masters – perhaps because of their innate talent.

When I looked at practice times with teenage musicians in secondary school for my MA thesis, I found that both classical and popular musicians spent roughly the same amount of time on practice each week, but with varying results in terms of performance, (Esslin-Peard, 2012, p. 63). However, reporting time spent on practice did not necessarily offer insights into the process of practice. In order to understand what is going on for any individual or group engaged in practice it is vital, I will argue, to be self-critical of the process.

### **1.3. The classical/popular divide**

When presenting at the Arbeitskreis Musikpädagogischer Forschung conference (hereafter AMPF) in Germany in October 2015, I discussed the experiences of popular musician students at the University of Liverpool with regard to practice as described in their end-of-year reflective essays. As is the custom in this German academic forum, spoken papers last for twenty minutes, with a further 40 minutes given over to debate and discussion. After a few questions regarding the student cohort, an Austrian musician made a statement, bitterly bemoaning the lack of technique required by popular musicians, compared, say with a classically-trained clarinettist. As I was taking a deep breath to prepare my response, another audience member and Tutor for Popular Music in a German university in the Ruhrgebiet turned upon the Austrian and spoke passionately about the technical complexities of popular music, resulting in a ding-dong battle between the two scholars which lasted for twenty minutes. An easy question and answer



session for me, perhaps, but this altercation reflects the commonly held view that the worlds of classical and popular music are far distant from each other and, in the opinion of some classical musicians, popular musicians do not require any technical skills. This somewhat blinkered view requires examination.

Having grown up with distant memories of the swinging Sixties and the emergence of The Beatles, followed by the musical diversity of the 1970s and 1980s, I was only dimly aware as a teenager of the musical competencies which may or may not have been necessary to be a successful rock musician. Is the underlying process of practice for popular musicians the same, or different? However, in going back into the history of popular music, two types of musician commonly emerge: those who are entirely self-taught, and those who have had formal training in the Western art music tradition. An admission to having classical training goes against the anti-establishment ethos of popular musicians, who may pride themselves on being self-taught. Nevertheless, notable instances of classically-trained musicians might include Miles Davies, the jazz trumpeter who went to the Julliard conservatoire, Freddy Mercury, lead singer with Queen, who was a choral scholar, Johnny Greenwood, the lead guitarist with Radiohead and resident guitarist with the BBC Concert Orchestra and the singer-songwriter Adele, to name but a few of many.

Popular music is omnipresent in contemporary society. According to the University and Colleges Admissions Services (UCAS) website, there are currently over 300 undergraduate courses in music in the United Kingdom, two thirds of which are oriented towards popular music. This would suggest that any investigation of practice relating to performance courses at university should include popular as well as classical musicians.

#### **1.4. Isn't it about making good music?**

Mills (1991, p. 175), amongst other music educators, wrote of her intuitive understanding of what made a good performance. She recounts that she first makes a holistic judgement, without referring to assessment criteria. She, like many other

professional musicians with whom I have worked, simply ‘knew’ whether a performance was good or not. Similarly, expert adult musicians appear to know how to practise, but are they able to deconstruct the process to help their students and tutees? Paradoxically, despite the large numbers of students studying music, particularly popular music, it is not necessarily the case that they continue to work full-time as musicians after graduation. The majority of adult classical and popular musicians find themselves in portfolio careers, managing performing with other jobs which may or may not be related to music. If they are being paid to perform — to make good music in whatever genre — one would expect that they have the skills and knowledge in order to prepare for those performances. That might be one purpose of practice. Perhaps there is something about the act of practising which is valued either for an aesthetic, intellectual or musical outcome, such as becoming a professional musician. Or, to put it simply, is practice about the journey towards making good music, in whatever musical genre? To embark on that journey, one would assume, requires an understanding of what practice is, and what the process of practice entails. There seems, however, to be a glaring lack of consistency in musicians’ understanding of the metacognitive aspects of practice, both for themselves as individuals and when working in ensembles.

What is needed, I would suggest, is a pedagogical tool that can be used by musicians of all ages to unpick the process of musical learning and develop higher-level metacognitive thinking strategies. Reflection, as I will argue, can help to expose the thought processes that underpin practising and throw light upon how student musicians develop the skills to understand their own practice routines and behaviours, become consciously aware and self-critical of their playing and develop into independent learners.

Thus this doctoral research project poses three main research questions:

- What experiences of practice and performance do the students describe in their reflective essays?

- Do students develop an understanding of their practice and performance behaviours through their reflective essays? If so, how?
- What role does reflection play in musical learning?

## **1.5. Overview of chapters**

This thesis is divided into four parts.

Part One comprises Chapter 1, the Introduction and Chapter 2, in which I review the literature relating to theories of knowledge, musical learning, both formal and informal, the role of practice in musical learning and the development of reflective practice in Higher Education institutions.

Part Two comprises Chapter 3, which introduces the methodology which I adopt for this study, including an examination of the methods used to gather data. In Chapter 4, an overview is given of the two groups of students in this study, namely undergraduate popular and classical musicians taking the Performance Module. In Chapters 5 and 6, I present descriptions and insights into the experiences of practice and performance from the students' reflective essays, with Chapter 5 devoted to the classically-trained musicians and Chapter 6 focusing on popular musicians.

Part Three presents the findings. In Chapter 7, I discuss the findings of my research, highlighting the similarities and differences between the popular and classical musicians and examining key areas of musical learning in detail. This leads to a 'Spirals of Reflection' model which I have developed, based on the students' reflections, to represent the holistic musical learning environment of the participants in this study. Finally, in Chapter 8, I give a summary of the contribution to knowledge offered by this study, consider the limitations of this study, discuss the implications of using reflection in performance courses for undergraduate musicians in higher education and outline areas for further research.

Part Four offers three case studies in appendices to illustrate the application of reflective practice for a function band, *Funk Soul Continuum*, a rock band, *The Sneaky Nixons*, and classical musicians who were involved in cross-genre musicking. The subsequent appendices provide information relating to Ethics approval for this study from the University of Liverpool, the Background Questionnaire, a Glossary and the Assessment criteria for reflective essays.

## CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

### 2.1. Theories of Knowledge

To understand what it is to be a musician, or to understand how to improve as an instrumentalist or vocalist in a higher education institution such as a university or conservatoire, there is a tacit assumption that such institutions offer students an opportunity to learn. But two questions arise, what are they learning and to what purpose? A recent blog by Furnham (2014) on the *Psychology Today* website gives a succinct overview of the many reasons that students choose to go to university. Interestingly, this mentions the power of learning, but does not give any hint that learning might lead to an increase in knowledge:

To guide and foster an interest/passion for its own sake. It's a time to develop a sense of the power of learning and thought, and respect what it can do.

As Cope (1998, p. 264) explains:

In higher order learning, the outcome is understanding, rather than competence, and acquisition requires reflection through the medium of discourse, rather than repeated practice.

How do human beings acquire knowledge? Is this an intuitive, instinctive process which each can manage individually, or is the influence of others necessary to make sense of the world? An exploration of general theories of knowledge and how human beings understand the world around them is therefore the starting point for this literature review.

### 2.1.1. Epistemology

Epistemology is the branch of philosophy which deals with what an individual knows. There are different elements to this: for a full discussion, see Lemos, (2007). What is relevant to the current study is the idea of propositional knowledge, which means the knowledge that an individual has of facts.

For example, 'Vicky knows that the sky is blue'. As Lemos states, 'propositional knowledge is a relation between a subject and a true proposition,' (2007, p.2). He continues by defining acquaintance knowledge, which implies that an individual knows another person, rather than knowing facts about that person. More importantly, for learning, Lemos also considers how a person knows *how* to do something. If we say 'Sophie knows how to play the viola part of the Mozart Double Concerto' we are, in normal parlance, implying that Sophie has the ability to play this concerto, which Lemos describes as a person having propositional knowledge about how to do something. Such knowledge for a musician is based on facts about the musical work, for example, the notation, the musical period and stylistic conventions and how to play it, that is to say, facts about the technical skills needed to play the notes accurately. It is interesting to note, if we continue with the musical example, that a musician may have some propositional knowledge about a particular piece of music without being able to play it, such as knowledge drawn from musical analysis or musicology. Conversely, and perhaps more relevant for self-taught musicians, one may have the ability to play a famous riff aurally, for example, the guitar intro to 'Stairway to Heaven' without having any propositional knowledge about the tonality or harmony of the piece of music.

From epistemology, I move to consider some theories concerned with understanding how learning occurs, namely behaviourism, cognitivism, constructivism, and social learning, all of which are considered to be branches of psychology.

### **2.1.2. Behaviourism**

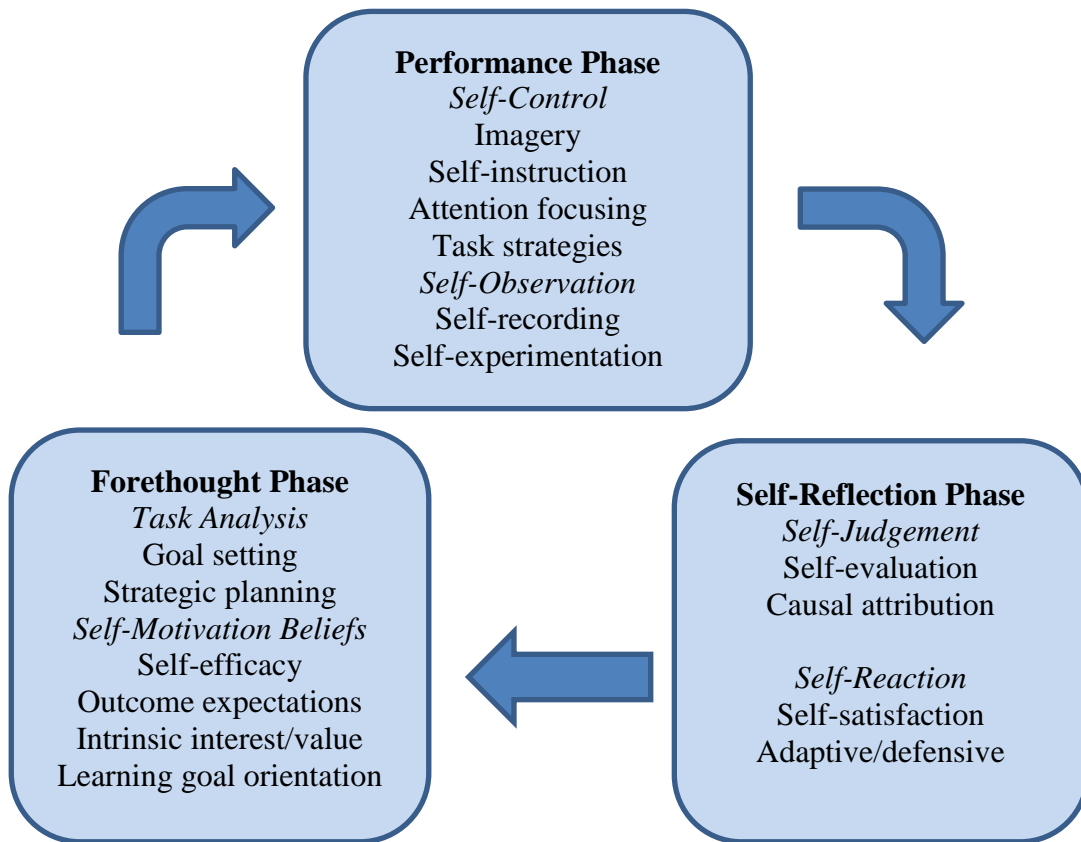
Behaviourism was developed by Watson (1970) [1930] in the early decades of the twentieth century. The fundamental idea of behaviourism is that all behaviours are caused by external stimuli, without any reference to internal states or consciousness. This suggests that a learner is in a passive role and that learning may be governed by external stimuli or other persons. For a musician, this points towards the historical model of one-to-one peripatetic teaching which is strongly teacher-led. Or to use another metaphor, the learner is like an empty glass which is filled with water by the teacher. A behaviourist model of learning, I would argue, seems somewhat outdated in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Academic discourse in the last twenty years has put students firmly at the centre of the pedagogical process. In this student-centric approach, students are deemed to have choice about what they learn and how they learn, rather than being fed information in lectures by their tutors.

### **2.1.3. Cognitivism**

Cognitive theories of learning describe internal cognitive structures. Learning takes place as changes occur in these internal cognitive structures. This can be helpful if one is trying to understand the development, for example, of a set of skills. This is a process-based approach which relies on the medium of communication and experimentation. As a subject learns, there is a continual comparison between the current moment and what has gone before involving mental processes such as contrast, inference and problem-solving. Cognitive theories help researchers to build concepts which explain how we do something.

Zimmerman (2002) describes how teachers help students in secondary education in the United States to develop metacognitive strategies. The key elements which promote more effective learning include setting proximal goals, self-awareness, monitoring progress, self-motivation, effective time management, attributing causation to outcomes and the ability to apply and adapt newly gained knowledge to future behaviour and skill

development. By combining these elements in a three-part cycle, Zimmermann (2002, p. 67) describes what he terms the phases and sub-processes of self-regulation, see Figure 2.1., below.



**Figure 2.1. Zimmerman: Phases and Sub-processes of Self-Regulation (2002, p. 67)**

What makes this model relevant for musical practice and learning is the iterative cycle of planning, doing and reflecting combined with higher-order thinking skills. Zimmerman also reports how experts and novices used elements of the model. Experts were able to use a mix of strategies to promote autonomous learning which was varied and enjoyable. Novices, on the other hand, did not set proximal goals and did not reflect at the time of the event but afterwards, often failing to reflect on their own behaviour, but simply comparing themselves to peers.



#### **2.1.4. Constructivism**

Experiential learning was first posited by Dewey in the 1930s. It is one of the key notions in constructivism, a school of thought which suggests that learning is an active process, in which the learner has a role rather like a builder or constructor of knowledge. The philosophical idea underpinning constructivism is that learners construct their own individual representations of the world around them. Each piece of new information is linked to or related to prior knowledge. All knowledge is subjective; what the individual knows is known to him or her and is, by definition, a true ‘picture of the world’.

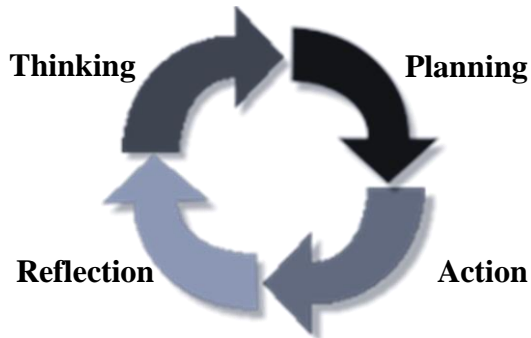
This philosophical approach has more recently been linked to problem-solving. Savery and Duffy (2001) discuss the links between instruction, teaching and constructivism. They conclude (2001, p. 14) that:

The focus is on learners as constructors of their own knowledge in a context which is similar to the context in which they would apply that knowledge. Students are encouraged and expected to think both critically and creatively and to monitor their own understanding i.e. function at a metacognitive level. Social negotiation of meaning is an important part of the problem-solving team structure and the facts of the case are only facts when the group decides they are.

These statements illustrate a constructivist approach to learning and decision-making in a group, which may be relevant for the learning processes of the students involved in bands and ensembles in this study.

Another model of constructivist thinking is the experiential learning cycle proposed by Kolb (1984), who posits a four-stage iterative process for the acquisition of knowledge, see Figure 2.2., below. This model was developed to describe how adults learn. Kolb maintained that knowledge is acquired by passing through all four phases in sequence: thinking or ‘abstract conceptualisation’; planning or ‘active experimentation’; doing/action or ‘concrete experience’ and reflection or ‘reflective observation’. It does

not matter for the purposes of this model at which point in the cycle an individual starts to gather knowledge. What is important, however, is that all four stages of the cycle are completed in order. The benefits of this model are that it encompasses four different learning styles related to each phase which are said to mirror individual approaches favoured by adult learners.

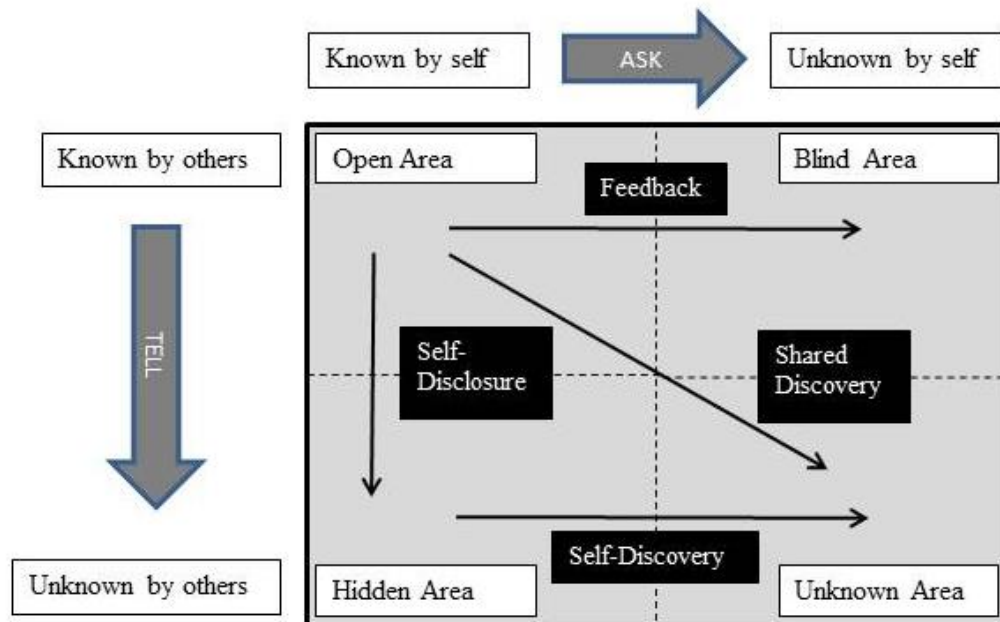


**Figure 2.2. Kolb: Learning Cycle (1984)**

One of the limitations of this model is that Kolb distinguishes between learning through feeling and learning through thinking, which he claims cannot happen at the same time. I would contend that musicians can learn by thinking and feeling at the same time, but they may not be conscious of which process is dominant, or they may not be conscious of the process at all. So how do we understand the differences between conscious and unconscious learning?

We need to turn to a different theoretical model, namely the Johari Window, developed by Luft and Ingham (1955) to understand how people perceive their own learning. This model is derived from the branch of psychology known as personality psychology. The vertical axis in Figure 2.3., below represents how others perceive an individual whilst

the horizontal axis shows how an individual perceives him or herself.



**Figure 2.3. Luft and Ingham: Johari Window (1955)**

The two quadrants on the top of the square represent self-knowledge; the quadrant on the left represents what a person knows about himself; that on the right what is not known about the self. I may be able to discover more about my unknown self if others ask me questions, or I choose to reflect on my personal experience. Others, however, can perceive what I know about myself, my ‘public persona’. What is unknown to others, the bottom left hand quadrant, I have control over. I may choose to disclose more about myself, depending on the circumstances and my relationship with the people around me. The bottom right hand area which is unknown both to me and to those around me can only become known if both parties collaborate on discovering what is unknown.

What makes this model interesting is that it gives us an understanding of how one can move from a state of ignorance to a state of knowledge. For example, before I have learnt to ride a bicycle, I am in a state of unconscious incompetence. I do not know that I

do not know how to ride a bicycle. The next stage is conscious incompetence: I know that I do not know how to ride a bicycle, e.g. the tricky stage when it's all wobbly and I worry about falling off. The third stage is conscious competence; I can now do this pretty well, but I have to think about what I am doing while I am doing it. It takes a lot of concentration! The final stage, unconscious competence, heralds the moment when I am just riding a bicycle; I don't need to think about the process, or how to do it anymore. I feel safe and secure and can let my mind wander elsewhere. The Johari Window is helpful in trying to understand musical learning as it captures not only the struggle in the early stages of skill development, but also embraces the effortless mastery which may be exhibited by great performers in the stage of unconscious competence.

### **2.1.5. Social Learning Theories**

As the majority of the students in this research study not only practised on their own, but also played in bands or classical ensembles, it is important to consider relevant theories relating to learning in groups. Theories of social learning were developed by Bandura (1977) and then explored further by Lave and Wenger (1991) and Wenger (1998). The key idea behind social learning is a focus on cognitive processes by individuals within social groups. Wenger develops the notion of situating learning in what she terms 'communities of practice'. These communities are not defined by an individual or an educational institution, but may change as the participants form groups to pursue particular goals, for example, musicians playing in a rock band or a string quartet.

The overwhelming challenge in considering these different models for learning in the context of music education is, I would contend, that the process of musical learning is inherently messy, unpredictable and student behaviours may be aligned to one philosophical or psychological model or another according to context. It is therefore helpful at this point to consider how researchers in music education have adopted a variety of approaches to try to understand musical learning.

## 2.2. General factors in musical development

There is a large quantity of research which investigates the musical learning of classically-trained musicians and researchers consider this topic from a wide variety of perspectives, some of which I present below. But how does one define the concept of ‘musical excellence’? Is the chart-topping musician or world-class soloist born or made? Williamon (2004) offers a wide range of case studies which illustrate different aspects of excellence. Musical excellence seems to include a wide variety of elements including musical ability, (Hallam and Prince, 2003); the notion of talent and giftedness, (Sloboda and Howe, 1991); specific personal characteristics such as aptitude, (Gagne, 1995); emotional aspects like passion, (Bonneville-Roussy et al., 2011) and the environmental backgrounds of subjects, (Jenkins, 2011).

There is a lively discussion about the entity and incremental theories of intelligence which are based on theories about self-belief introduced by Dweck and Bempechat (1983). According to the entity theory, a ‘gifted’ musical child might be seen as having an innate skill, a ‘God-given’ talent, whereas an incremental theory of intelligence tells us that musical expertise can be acquired through hard work and the continual and recurring process of practice, whatever the musical ability of the subject. The incremental theory helps to explain how some younger musicians develop their skills by just playing together regularly or practising for long periods of time.

Another approach to musical excellence is proposed by Gagne (1995), who develops a ‘Differentiated Model of Giftedness and Talent’. In reconsidering Sloboda and Howe’s 1991 research, he offers the following definitions, differentiating between ‘talent’ and ‘giftedness’ (Gagne 1999, p. 39):

*Musical talent* is the demonstration of systematically developed abilities in the playing of a musical instrument at a level which places the individual among the top 10% of peers having had similar training. For its part, the term *musical giftedness* designates the possession and use of natural abilities (or aptitudes) in

domains that influence the development of musical talent, again to such a degree that the level of performance places the person among the top 10% of same age peers.

Unlike Sloboda and Howe (1991), Gagne (1999, p. 50) argues that development of musical ability is not just about environmental factors such as parental involvement, the quality of music teachers and the amount of practice, but claims that account must be taken of individual differences in ‘musical aptitude’. No research that I can find considers the question of whether popular musicians are more or less talented – or more or less gifted – or have a greater or lesser musical aptitude than classical musicians.

Such models do not account for all the factors which may affect musical learning; an enquiry into the self-beliefs of individuals can also be helpful, as Nielsen (2012) demonstrates, who researches epistemic beliefs and self-regulated learning with first-year students at a conservatoire in Norway. Her focus was to discover what kind of epistemic beliefs students held regarding their instrumental playing and how these beliefs were related to their practising strategies, using a questionnaire administered to 130 participants. The musical experience of the sample population comprised classical musicians (80%) and rock, pop and jazz musicians (20%). Her conclusions (2012, p. 355) reveal that:

Music students who believed ability is fixed were less likely than students who believed that the ability to learn is malleable and related to hard work to use both metacognitive and effort regulation strategies.

In addition to investigating concepts like musical talent and individual beliefs about ability, music education researchers have explored how musicians become experts or reach professional levels of competence, taking a variety of approaches. Papageorgi et al., (2010, pp. 32-34) review various models of the development of musical expertise, citing Ericsson et al.’s (1993) four-stage model which spans a ten year period of development; a three-phase model posited by Bloom and Sosniak (1981) and a six-stage

model suggested by Manturzewska (1990). All these models encompass musical activity from early childhood — the first playful experiments with musical instruments — to a period of activity as an expert musician. Following on from these models, Papageorgi et al., (2010) additionally identify seven characteristics which contribute to excellence in musical performance, namely dedication, planning, commitment, interpersonal skills, realistic performance evaluation, goal setting and confidence.

Reid (2001) uses a phenomenological approach to examine the learning experiences of fourteen undergraduate musicians on a performance course at an Australian university. He posits a model of learning in five levels, progressing from the physical skills of mastering instrumental playing to personal expression in performance. This model mixes cognitive and behaviourist principles, based on the assumption that the mode of learning develops from playing directed by a tutor, towards self-determined deeper understanding of the act of performance which involves not only motor skills, but deliberate cognitive decisions about how to interpret a particular piece of music at an individual level, including a process of testing and rejecting existing interpretations before arriving at a unique performance. Whilst it cannot be assumed that every student will reach an expert level of performance at the end of a three-year course, Reid found that students can work at several levels at the same time, offering one pedagogical model which helped students to become more self-critical about their playing and performance, echoing Zimmerman's (2002) cognitive model of self-directed learning.

Another factor which has been explored in relation to musical excellence is passion.

Bonneville-Roussy et al., (2011, p. 124) define passion thus:

a strong inclination towards a self-determining activity that people love, that they consider important and in which they devote significant amounts of time and energy.

Ryan and Deci (2000) consider elite sportsmen and women. They differentiate between harmonious passion which generates positive outcomes, with virtually no negative

outcomes, and obsessive passion, which is led by external factors. In obsessive passion, the passionate activity is so overwhelming that it dominates the subject's life and conflicts with other domains of activity. In this paper, the authors test a process linking passion and performance. In their discussion, they suggest that harmonious passion leads to the mastery of goals, and therefore progresses the level of performance, whereas obsessive passion leads to performance avoidance goals, and therefore passion is negatively associated with performance. I find it remarkable that these authors come to this conclusion as others, including Ericsson et al., (1993) report long hours of practice to achieve professional levels of performance which, to some non-musicians, would appear obsessive. In a similar vein, Macnamara et al., (2008, p. 342), quote a professional musician describing his time at music college thus: 'It was bliss being able to practise all day and not think of anything else', suggesting that some musicians equate long hours of practice with progress in learning.

Another factor to be considered in the acquisition of musical expertise is whether a student takes lessons. Holding (2010, p. 326) makes an interesting point about gifted musicians and their possible resistance to formal musical training:

Because innate musical abilities are situated in the right hemisphere of the brain, while logical/mathematical reasoning is situated in the left, the ability to cross back and forth over the *corpus callosum* (the major neural connection area between the left and right hemispheres of the brain) is essential to mastering Western classical music. This may help explain why some musically-gifted people may resist formal musical training: if they are naturally inclined to right brain activity, this crossing over entails dedicated learning, which by its very nature, unmask and destabilizes intuitive talents.

Whilst Holding's research focused on classically-trained musicians, I would suggest that this comment could have some relevance for popular musicians who are self-taught and may rely upon an intuitive approach to rehearsal and performance.



Another factor which may have a bearing on musical learning is the motivation of an individual to practise. Theories of motivation in general have been well documented by psychologists such as Ryan and Deci (2000, p. 69). They describe the nature of motivation using the theory of self-determination, which identifies different types of motivation that have specifiable consequences for learning, performance, personal experience and well-being. Within this model, they identify the phenomenon of intrinsic motivation, that is to say, the natural tendency of individuals to seek what is new and challenging. They claim that this starts with an infant's desire to discover the world around her. But it would not be true to say that everyone is equally driven by intrinsic motivation. External or environmental factors can severely limit intrinsic motivation. They point out that threats and deadlines, the removal of rewards and controlling teachers can severely limit intrinsic motivation, (2000, p. 70).

Theories of extrinsic motivation provide an alternative perspective. Extrinsic motivation explains how students can be motivated to perform and complete tasks not for the sake of the task itself, but to realise an external outcome. This model is, for example, appropriate for classically-trained students studying for music exams. Many young musicians find some aspects of practice less than enjoyable, as recognised by Ericsson et al., (1993), but if they know, for example, that they need to get ABRSM Grade VIII in a practical subject to meet the entry requirements of a university music course, they may be extrinsically motivated to practise and gain the necessary qualification.

There is considerable research on motivation applied to musical learning, presented among others, by O'Neill and McPherson (2002), Hallam (2010) and Austin and Haefner-Berg (2006). Hallam (2010) examines the factors which contribute to musical motivation. She presents a much more complex picture, partly because she is taking account of many different musicians, musics and the social, cultural and environmental contexts of musical development. Young people who learn musical instruments at school are not only influenced by their parents and peripatetic music teachers, but also by their school environment. A supportive head teacher and music teacher promote a culture where musical attainment is valued. However, as Hallam states (2010, p. 235):

Musicians can achieve professional status with little practical support from the family, e.g. Louis Armstrong, or the orphans at La Pieta in the time of Vivaldi, but such cases are rare.

The family, social groups and the learning institution may have an influence on the motivation of an individual to engage in musical activities, but there are some musicians who can do it on their own. Hallam (2010, p. 270) describes the various elements of musical development in a cultural context, making it clear that in a research environment, there are many influences to consider:

Individual learning biographies [...] reflect the available opportunities and influences within the prevailing culture. As we engage with different musical activities over long periods of time, permanent changes occur in the brain.

I think this is important, because it highlights the fact that each and every undergraduate music or conservatoire course is unique because of the cultural context of individual and group learning within a particular institution.

### **2.3. Formal approaches to musical learning**

Individual practice is generally acknowledged as the core activity in the musical learning of classical musicians. Extensive research has been conducted over the last thirty years by academics into practice habits and behaviours. Miksza (2011) presents a meta-analysis of papers on practice. It is clear from Miksza's review that no single research project has been able to encompass the whole process of practising. According to Miksza, (2011, pp. 52-53), research on practice can be divided into three areas, namely:

1. What do individuals do when they practise music?
2. Comparisons of student/teacher opinions/perspectives
3. Changes in approach to practising across long periods of time.

However, this tripartite division does not lead to a holistic understanding of practice. In an attempt to explain the phenomenon of practice, researchers draw on a wide variety of models. Examples include approaches to learning StGeorge et al., (2012, p. 245); beliefs about learning Cantwell, (2004) and Vygotsky, (1978); motivation to practise O’Neill and McPherson, ( 2002); self-regulation strategies for practice Gaunt, (2008, 2010) and Leon-Guerrero (2008); the self-identity of musicians O’Neill, (2002) and the role of the institution in learning Burwell and Shipton, (2011) and Jørgensen, 2000). In addition, research has been conducted into the development of practice strategies, self-reported time spent in individual practice sessions; Austin and Haefner-Berg, (2006) and Hallam et al., (2012) and analyses of how musicians break down challenging passages in order to improve their performance; StGeorge et al., (2012) and Dos Santos and Hentschke, (2011).

Surprisingly, researchers do not agree on a single model which encompasses practice behaviours. Hallam (2001, p. 28) investigates expert practice and concedes that even the definition of experts is open-ended:

They know how to do the right thing at the right time. There is no single expert way to perform all tasks.

Moreover, she concludes from interviews with 22 professional musicians that they do indeed ‘learn to learn’. In a subsequent paper, Hallam (2006, pp. 122–123) identifies nine expert practice strategies exhibited by conservatoire students which she links to the concept of metacognitive practice:

1. Acquire an overview of the material to be practised, including study of the score.
2. Identify sections for practice according to the structure of the piece.
3. Attend to technical problems in sub-sections.
4. The more complex the music, the smaller the chunks will be for technical practice.
5. As practice progresses, sections rehearsed become longer.

6. As practice nears completion, the sections being practised are of similar length
7. A performance plan is integrated into practice, with musical rather than technical considerations being most important.
8. Musicians practise in different ways and adopt different approaches to tackling technical work, such as working on small sections, slowing material down, focusing on rhythm, bowing, tonguing and intonation.
9. The outcome of practice is performance, whatever practice methods are chosen by the individual.

Whilst these strategies may be helpful in understanding the nature of practice for classically-trained musicians for whom, one might argue, practice is a must, this framework neither makes reference to mental rehearsal or memorisation nor, for example, the ability of a musician to listen critically to his or her own playing. As Jørgensen and Hallam (2009, p. 270) explain, metacognitive strategies involve planning, monitoring and evaluating learning. This means that an expert musician should not only listen critically to his own playing, but also apply appropriate strategies to solve technical difficulties or matters of artistic interpretation and performance craft. Bathgate et al., (2012) explore whether it is possible to teach metacognitive practice strategies to guitar, bass guitar and piano students between the ages of thirteen and nineteen during their individual music lessons. They gave teachers and students a handbook of metacognitive strategies and asked them to make notes after each lesson. It was interesting that those students' and teachers' descriptions of the use of metacognitive practice strategies did not correlate overall. On the other hand, the authors conclude that regular written descriptions of practice behaviours including metacognitive practice strategies led to more efficient practice.

A common phenomenon reported by Barry and McArthur (1994), Thomas (1993), McPherson and Renwick (2001) and Green (2008) is an unstructured approach to practice among non-adult musicians. Juvenile musicians play through pieces without identifying which elements require specific attention, either with regard to technique or interpretation. In contrast to juvenile players, classically-trained adult musicians may

have spent 10,000 hours or ten years of deliberate practice to reach professional standards according to Ericsson et al., (1993). Macnamara et al., (2014, p. 1615) conduct a meta-analysis of 88 academic papers describing practice and performance in games, music, sports, education and professional practice. She and her colleagues conclude that:

[The] amount of deliberate practice – although unquestionably important as a predictor of individual differences in performance from both a statistical and practical perspective – is not as important as Ericsson and his colleagues have argued.

Gaunt (2010) highlights a focus on *time* spent practising rather than a focus on what, or how to practise effectively in her exploration of practice by music students at the Guildhall School of Music and Drama. Similarly Hallam et al., (2012, p. 670) suggest that:

As expertise develops, learners practise on more days and increase the amount of practice undertaken on those days. [...] Learners at higher levels of expertise reported adopting more effective practice strategies and perceived that they were more able to recognise errors.

However, as will emerge in this study, time spent practising is not necessarily the key to progress in musical learning.

### **2.3.1. Musical identity**

In considering the process of musical learning through practice, it is helpful to ask what role a musician's notion of their own identity has to play. I would argue that this is relevant to the musical development of both classical and popular musicians.

Concepts of self-identity have developed over the last 30 years based on Tajfel's research into Social Identity Theory, (hereafter SIT), as described, for example, by

Tarrant et al., (2002, p.137). The principal idea here is that a person's identity is not only formed from their own self-knowledge and understanding and their own individual, personal experiences, but also from their membership of social groups. Central to the notion of belonging is the position of an individual within a group, or outside a group, and the resulting beliefs about group membership. Researchers who have applied the SIT model for music education generally agree that musical identity emerges between the ages of five and fourteen, as Lamont (2002) explains. These identities are often built around instrumental skills, as Lamont et al., (2003, p. 45) remind us that:

The conventional defining features of a 'musician' centre on instrumental performance skills – whether one can play a musical instrument.

The association of instrumental skills and personal identity may also be important for adult popular musicians, as Smith (2013) argues in his study of the identity of drummers.

One factor affecting the emergence of musical identity in children and adolescents is comparisons with peers, which is highlighted by Hargreaves and Miell (2002, p. 15), echoing Cook (1998, p. 5):

Children's identities, including musical identities, are constructed and reconstructed by making comparisons with other people, and this continues into adult life.

Peers also play a significant role in the choice of preferred musics, according to McPherson (2008), and, I would argue, in choices about how adolescents develop as musicians, which concurs with the views of Tarrant et al., (2002, p. 125) below:

The social context in which affiliation with music takes place for adolescents is of central importance: musical preference is an important factor in in-group and

out-group membership, for self-esteem and for the maintenance of positive social identity.

Musical identity is formed at an early age and a positive sense of ‘being a musician’ seems to play a role in musical development. But as students enter tertiary education, one might argue that students’ existing musical identities could be challenged by a change of location, new peers and new teachers. Kruse (2010, p.137) in her work with adult popular musicians in the United States, notes that musicians in indie pop and rock were part of:

Overlapping networks in which genre, geography, position in the independent or alternative music industry and other factors located subjects within one or more social networks and were central in participants’ processes of identity and identification.

Furthermore, for students who had not had extensive experience of playing in bands at school, they would also have to establish their identities within a new popular music scene. Pitts (2002, p. 87) gives an overview of the challenges facing musicians starting undergraduate music courses:

Music students in particular have to come to terms with being one of a far larger group of skilled and experienced performers. Whilst some may relish the opportunities that this brings, others are made acutely aware that their sense of musical identity previously rested on being part of a high profile minority group, capable of responding to the schools need for musical expertise. Suddenly the balance shifts, as greater numbers of students occupy formerly privileged positions, and for some this presents a challenge to their sense of why or whether they can be considered to be musicians.

These comments, based on research with Year 13 students in a secondary school and first-year undergraduates studying music, illustrate that students may need to adapt their musical identities to suit a new learning environment.

#### **2.4. Informal approaches to musical learning**

Most of the academic discourse about musical learning has focused on classical musicians, both in schools and in higher education. It is only in the last twenty years that popular music education research has contributed to the debate and highlighted that popular musicians learn differently from their peers. Green (2002, p.16) gives a definition of informal learning based on the behaviours of adult popular musicians. She reveals that popular musicians are largely self-taught, learn collaboratively with their peers and work aurally with reference to audio or video material, rather than using printed notation. If there is a notional 'divide' between classical and popular musicians, perhaps it is rash to classify all popular musicians as informal learners. The reality of musical development is more complex and less easy to define. Folkestad (2006) importantly presents the notion that musical learning can take place across a formal-informal learning spectrum and stresses that learning may move along the continuum according to context.

Jenkins (2011) argues that whilst informal learning may occur naturally before formal learning, such as a child learning language from its parents, formal learning may stifle students' abilities to make decisions independently, as it is structured and teacher-led. He compares the learning of two hypothetical teenagers, a female drummer in a rock band and a male student of classical music. He describes seven aspects of musical learning, highlighting, for example, the holistic nature of the experiences of the drummer, who not only composes, rehearses and performs in a band, but is also involved in managing the band. In an informal learning situation surrounded by her peers, Jenkins (2011, p. 186) identifies a possible limitation of informal learning, namely that this drummer may find herself 'settling into a pattern of familiar actions, rather than stretching her abilities by working on her weaknesses.'



Furthermore, in examining the experiential learning which takes place within a band, Jenkins points out that whilst musical exploration may support intuitive musical choices, there is also a chance that patterns of learning may be haphazard. He also notes that the popular musicians may see performance as a kind of learning, i.e. the learning is not the prime goal of the activity, in this case, performance in public. Jenkins concludes (2011, p. 193) that individual learning is effective precisely because the learning experiences are student-centred, personal and more closely aligned to real life decision-making situations. The significance of learning environments which simulate real-life learning is discussed further in Section 2.5.

Smith (2013a) suggests that for popular musicians learning can be formal, informal and what he terms 'non-formal' where the learner intentionally structures his learning using objectives, but the learning does not take place in an educational setting. As a professional drummer, Smith offers many insights into musical learning. Perhaps most importantly, he suggests a new hybridized model for musical learning which he calls the 'Snowball Self' (2013, p. 22). This model incorporates elements of learning, identity and the principal meta-identity of 'being a drummer'. This model is helpful as it embraces the complexities of learning in popular music, as the name suggests, a snowball can be rolled along, collecting more material — snowflakes, dirt, ice — as it travels. In the same way, a drummer, like the snowball, picks up knowledge here and there over time. The question which arises is whether the notion of a person having a principal identity as a drummer could also be used to describe another musician in a band, such as a lead singer or a lead guitarist.

A different view is espoused by Slater (2016), who researches the experiences of three musicians working in what he describes as a 'project studio'. He discusses four different approaches to informal learning (2016, p. 15, Table 1.1) and concludes that a well-rounded musician will experience both formal and informal learning. Indeed, his concept of musical learning encompasses a very wide range of experiences, including collaboration, mastering music technology to record and edit in the studio, project management, sharing responsibilities, dealing with record labels, performing live and

maintaining an appropriate work-life balance. Such a broad view echoes the wider professional skills which form a part of informal learning identified by Mak (2009, p. 34) and Creech et al., (2008) which include networking, listening to music and making music for fun.

Robinson (2012) and McPhail (2013) both discover that popular musicians may adopt both formal and informal learning methods when working as peripatetic music teachers. Mornell (2009, p. 95) looks at how popular musicians learn and describes a mix of strategies which she describes as converging informal and deliberate musical learning. Feichas (2010, p. 52) presents findings from an exploratory study at a Brazilian higher education institution with classical and popular musicians who worked together in groups. She found that such groups could collaborate successfully, as she reports:

Formal and informal seem to be opposed forms of learning, but both can live together in harmony. The mixed-popular group in particular seemed to keep a balance between the practices of both sides. Six students from this group had formal and informal learning at the same time, in that they used to have formal lessons and simultaneously developed popular skills through playing in groups by ear, by picking songs and making arrangements. It seemed that they had learnt both modes with apparent success.

These two studies suggest that musical learning for popular musicians involves a mix of formal and informal strategies. Mak (2009) goes further and posits a three-part concept of learning including formal, non-formal and informal learning. He describes formal learning as taking individual instrumental or vocal lessons. Students typically follow a formal curriculum and track their process through formal assessment such as external examinations. Mak uses informal learning to describe self-taught musicians and the activities of popular musicians playing and learning in bands. Such learning may be open-ended, without a particular goal for a practice session and is dependent on the communication and collaboration between band members. There is no formal entry requirement for such learning and it is not formally assessed. Non-formal learning

describes voluntary musical learning in a group, which may be typical of community music groups involving both professionals in leadership roles and amateur singers and musicians. Importantly, such non-formal learning takes place outside an educational institution. Participants choose to participate, but they may come for non-musical reasons, such as meeting their friends.

Mak acknowledges that there may be a mix of approaches in many learning situations. But he concludes that informal and non-formal learning can lead to more formal learning. This sentiment is echoed by Mahler (2009), who explores informal learning practices with classical musicians, both in ensembles and in one-to-one tuition, where students reported that they rejected the advice of their tutors and ‘went their own way’. Mahler quotes a student thus:

Die Erkenntnis, daß es nicht nur einen Weg zum Ziel gibt, daß jeder seinen eigenen Weg finden muß, und vor allem die der relativen Unabhängigkeit vom Lehrer. Natürlich ist seine Begleitung auf dem Weg essenziell, aber es war wichtig für mich zu erfahren, daß ich nicht nur hilflos bin, wenn ich selbst Schritte in die Materie hinein wage, (Mahler, 2009, p. 53).

*The realisation is that there is not only one way to achieve a goal and that I can find my own way independently from the teacher. Of course, the teacher's support is essential, but it was vital for me to realise that I am not helpless if I try my own approach to a piece. (Trans. MEP)*

Researchers have sought to find representative models for the many experiences and behaviours which form a part of learning for popular musicians. Siedenburg and Nolte (2015) posit a model for popular music learning in German secondary school students which focuses on the importance of community involvement and peer learning in locations which are suited to band practice. Jørgensen (2011) highlights that learning may take place outside lessons and lectures, suggesting a more informal approach. Furthermore, popular musicians may regard learning as ‘anti-establishment’, as

Parkinson (2013, p.155) notes. He emphasizes that as popular music has developed outside academia, the very act of teaching popular music in an institution may clash with the predominant culture of self-taught musicians experimenting and ‘jamming out’ in their bands, rather than being coached or taught by experts, as classical musicians would expect. This view is reflected by Davis and Pulman (2001, p. 255), who explore the challenge of teaching critical listening skills to popular musicians. They report that lecturers were sensitive to the prevailing ‘rock’ culture, and so were cautious about trying to teach critical listening skills in a formal manner. Furthermore, Pulman (2011, 2014) discusses in depth the experiences of popular music undergraduates learning collaboratively in bands and notes that tutors recognised that they needed to give their students space to work out their musical problems, so that the tutor acted more as a partner, rather than a teacher in the learning process.

In their review of the development of popular music tertiary education at an Australian conservatoire, Lebler and Weston (2015, p. 125) point out that early popular music courses were based on pedagogical approaches which were more suited to classical musicians, such as a teacher-led programme of study and a focus on individual technical development. Przybylski and Niknafs (2015, p. 104) note that although some institutions adopted informal learning strategies, ‘there is still a discrepancy between the ways in which musicians learn and practise music making inside and outside the academy.’

As there are so few studies of how popular musicians learn, it is helpful to look at musical learning in other-than-classical traditions, such as folk. Kamin et al., (2007) investigated whether the lack of a structured environment influenced the musical development of twelve professional folk musicians. All the participants had undergone some kind of classical musical training. Perhaps more importantly, these folk musicians learnt by doing and simply playing. Kamin and her colleagues analyse the data drawn from questionnaires using Grounded Theory to create a model which identifies six key elements in musical learning for this group of musicians, namely motivation, commitment, confidence, goal setting, practice and imagery. The cultural expectations

of these musicians were quite different from classical or popular musicians. This is made clear by one player, who stated (2007, p. 457):

Mainly I don't practise. I never ever sit down and try to copy a record or look at tablature, or do anything like that. I'm not trying to be a lead guitar player – or a knockout performer.

That is not to say that these musicians don't practise. Their comments make it quite clear that they work hard at their craft, but practice might be better described as collective, spontaneous playing, jamming, busking and performing. The participants also described using metacognitive strategies, such as deliberately using mental imagery of a past successful performance to prepare for a new performance and using specific practice strategies to improve technique.

Another comparison can be made here with a research project conducted by Johansen (2016) in Norway, which focused on how undergraduates studying jazz at four music higher education institutions learnt to improvise. Her findings, based on interviews with thirteen students, demonstrated that:

When jazz students practise, they seem to be searching for ways to expand and develop the music at the same time as they are trying to learn it, (2016, p.15).

The interesting point here is that students not only worked on technique, but also had to be given freedom to improvise, which meant that their peripatetic music tutors were obliged at a certain point to adopt a more informal approach to teaching.

In conclusion, the key to the learning of popular musicians is perhaps that they adopt a wider range of learning strategies or hybridised models of learning, reflecting the myriad different approaches which individuals take to developing their craft through rehearsal and performance.

## 2.5. Playing in ensembles and bands

There is little research on the experiences of students in tertiary education who work in chamber music groups or bands; nevertheless, the existing literature throws some light upon the psychological and social process of working in a small group for both classical and popular musicians.

Young and Colman (1979) discuss the psychological processes which are exhibited by members of a string quartet. A string quartet has four members: two violinists, a viola player and a cellist. It is recognised that musicians in a string quartet require a high degree of cooperation in order to be able to interpret the score based on the historical context of the work they are rehearsing. They need an understanding of both individual and group rehearsal techniques, verbal and non-verbal communication and an ability to negotiate the social aspects of working together. One important factor which the authors point out is that string quartets are not necessarily formed from friendship groups, but may be result from the location or availability of players. In addition, one of the key factors in the long-term success of a string quartet is the musical abilities of the members. Traditionally, the first violinist in the quartet may take a leadership role, a view echoed by Davidson and Good (2002), but the authors point out that quartet members who share decision making gain a higher level of satisfaction from their playing activities. Young and Colman (1979, p. 17) report that:

If members are ill-prepared, their playing is liable to suffer during rehearsals.

The amount of learning that takes place in this context ought therefore to be kept to a minimum.

Davidson and Good (2002) observed the rehearsal and performance of an undergraduate string quartet at a UK university. They report that all four members of the quartet were twenty years old and had similar musical ability, although:

The second violinist was regarded to be the weakest player by the two specialist string teachers who ran the chamber music module within the music department. In part, the second violinist was weakest because he was the only member of the ensemble not to be studying music as his main subject, and therefore tended not to practise his instrument or work at repertoire as much as the other three players, (2002, pp. 190–191).

In this study, students were invited to reveal their experiences of rehearsal and performance and were videotaped both when playing and in interview. The most commonly cited theme which emerged from the analysis of the data was described as the extra-musical interpersonal dynamics of the players. The authors found that the male second violinist was dominant in expressing his opinions in rehearsals, whilst the three female members of the quartet seemed to adopt more passive, supportive roles. Another aspect of performance which emerged in this study was the ability of the students to accommodate technical shortcomings, for example, by slowing the tempo slightly to help the second violinist to perform a technically challenging passage accurately in thirds with the first violinist in the first movement of a Mozart quartet.

King (2004) posits a conceptual model for chamber music rehearsal under the themes of structure, collaboration and techniques which provides a useful framework for understanding the behaviours of chamber musicians. However, one shortcoming of this model is that it lacks any elements of self-evaluation. In a later study, King (2006) compares the interaction of student musicians in two wind ensembles and a string quartet. She finds that there were different degrees of collaboration within each group, depending on the influence of the leader and the emotional state of players. She compares student behaviours against the framework of team roles posited by Belbin (2004) and reports that some students could shift from one role to another during a rehearsal without affecting the overall dynamic and work ethos of the quartet.

These studies highlight the complexities of rehearsing and performing in small groups and make it clear that success in a small ensemble is not only dependant on musical

ability, but also upon social collaboration, including verbal and non-verbal communication, negotiation of process and outcomes, and the presence or absence of a leader of the group.

There is even less extant literature which examines the rehearsal and performance behaviours of students in other-than-classical musical genres. Below, I discuss two reports concerning jazz musicians and one focusing on popular musicians' band rehearsals.

Jazz musicians, as Seddon (2005) reports, exhibit six modes of communication which he describes as verbal and non-verbal instruction, verbal and non-verbal cooperation and verbal and non-verbal collaboration. I reproduce his table below as Table 2.1.

**Table 2.1. Seddon: Modes of Communication, (2005, p. 53, Table 1)**

<b>Mode of communication</b>	<b>Verbal</b>	<b>Non-verbal</b>
Instruction	Musicians are told what and when to play in pre-composed sections (the head).	Musicians learn pre-composed parts by ear or read from music notation.
Cooperation	Musicians discuss and plan the organisation of the piece prior to performance in order to achieve a cohesive performance.	Musicians achieve sympathetic attunement and exchange stocks of musical knowledge, producing a cohesive performance employing body language, facial expression, eye contact, musical cues and gesticulation.
Collaboration	Musicians discuss and evaluate their performance of the music in order to develop the content and/or style of the piece.	Musicians achieve empathetic attunement, take creative risks which can result in spontaneous musical utterances. When they do, this signals empathetic creativity.



It is interesting to note that jazz musicians exhibit some of the behaviours adopted by classical chamber musicians. The difference here is that improvisation involves the creation of new musical material ‘in the moment’, requiring considerable trust between players and a willingness to take risks, which Johansen (2016) also highlights in her study of the development of improvisational skills by individual jazz musicians.

Sawyer (2006, p. 159) presents the notion of ‘group flow’ to describe the collaborative creativity of jazz musicians, which, I would suggest, is also true for popular and classical musicians:

In musical ensembles, group flow requires a type of parallel processing: the musicians are playing non-stop, yet while they are playing they must simultaneously listen to their band members, hearing and immediately responding to what they are playing.

He also notes that whilst musicians may discuss tempo and changes in pulse in rehearsal verbally, in a performance, the negotiation of temporal changes is negotiated by gesture and eye contact, echoing the findings of Davidson and Good (2002) above.

Pulman (2011, 2014) suggests three areas of focus in his studies of popular musicians rehearsing in bands, namely operational mechanics, rehearsing activities and rehearsal dynamics. I reproduce his table of themes below:

**Table 2.2. Pulman: Master list of themes (2014, p. 300, Table 3)**

<b>Operational mechanics</b>	<b>Rehearsing activities</b>	<b>Rehearsal dynamics</b>
Course philosophy	Arranging song material	Group dynamics, personal qualities and attributes
Contribution to rehearsing	Feedback	
Selection of band members	Specific rehearsal skills	
Tutor practice – covers and originals	Leading the band as a musical director	
Rehearsing environment		
Rehearsing content		

Pulman's study draws on questionnaires submitted by popular music tutors and students at seven universities and highlights the differences in both pedagogy and musical learning. One interesting idea described by tutors is that popular musicians might benefit from some support to develop their rehearsal skills. Suggestions included short structured tasks which can be completed in one or two workshops, or requiring just one hour of rehearsal before students performed to their peers. This is interesting, as it points towards the role of tutor as a facilitator of informal learning. Tutors also comment on the importance of group dynamics and the emergence of leaders in student bands who build band cohesion. Pulman (2014) concludes that there is still much work to be done in understanding the role of the popular music tutor in the context of band rehearsals and informal learning practices, which I discuss in Chapters 7 and 8 below.

## **2.6. Assessment in Musical Learning**

Classical musicians are well acquainted with regular examinations as a mark of their progress from novice to experienced players. In the last twenty years, similar examinations have also been introduced to serve the needs of popular musicians, for example, by Trinity/Guildhall and RockSchool. In a university or conservatoire setting it is also expected that students who are studying practical aspects of performance will perform for assessment. There are various approaches to assessment. It may involve faculty staff, or tutors and students. Musicians may perform as soloists, or in bands and ensembles. In each case, assessment criteria vary from institution to institution and by musical genre.

Bergee (1993) sets out to compare the reliability of faculty, peer and self-assessment of brass performances by music undergraduates in the USA. Assessments were made using 27 criteria organised into four themes: interpretation/musical effect; tone quality/intonation; technique and rhythm/tempo on a five-point Likert scale. Bergee's analysis of the results show that faculty/peer evaluations are similar, with correlation factors between 0.86 and 0.91. The highest degree of agreement between students and faculty staff is seen in the interpretation/musical effect category, suggesting that despite

the provision of prescriptive rubrics, adjudicators and students may make similar holistic judgements about performances. Research undertaken by Ginsborg and Wistreich (2010) explores undergraduate approaches to ensemble practice and student views of assessment at the end of modules. The authors acknowledge that it is difficult to find one model which fits all musics and also report that it is hard to decide how to take account of the process of rehearsal as well as the final performance. In ensemble assessment, is the same mark to be given to all the members, or should each player receive an individual grade? Wistreich, who taught the Folk and Popular Performance Module at Newcastle University, admits that there is a mix of approaches in marking. Marks are combined for ensemble and individual performance and that the grade may be 'nuanced' to reflect the quality of the accompanying practice diary and attendance at lectures and workshops.

Daniel, (2001, pp. 215–218), presents an overview of issues in methods of self-assessment and the challenges posed by self-assessment in tertiary education. It is important to note here that whilst various institutions have experimented with practice diaries, learning journals and the use of video-taped performances, there is a general concern that, despite these resources, students do not engage critically in self-assessment. As Daniel comments, (p. 218):

Many students, in fact, assume a passive role in assessing their performances critically, relying primarily on others for feedback. Regardless of the reasons for this, be it apathy or trepidation at analysing their performances, the lack of engagement can retard the development of performance skills.

Daniel (2001) considers a new self-assessment process which ran with 35 music undergraduates by means of a questionnaire. Not surprisingly, the majority of students indicated that they principally relied upon feedback from their teachers. When students were offered videos of their performances, nearly half reported that they could identify their mistakes more clearly from seeing the video than at the time of performance which suggested that self-assessment helped students to develop independent learning

strategies and self-reflective skills which may be relevant in their later professional careers.

Lebler (2007, 2008), working with undergraduates on a BMus course in Popular Music, has pioneered some innovative methods of peer and self-assessment by evaluating learning for rock groups in the studio. Looking at self-assessment by popular musician undergraduates, Lebler's survey (2007, p. 215) of student reactions to being given a considerable degree of autonomy over their learning in the recording studio reveals a positive attitude towards self-assessment, as these students reported:

When I am playing, I'm not really listening to what I'm doing, but when I play it back I hear everything I do right and everything that I do wrong, everything I need to improve, (Student interview).

I've started to find a certain headspace when I am singing in the studios. I relax into this same groove, where I'm not thinking, I'm just listening, and singing, (Reflective journal extract).

It is apparent from Lebler's analysis that some guidelines for reflective writing were given at the outset of the process. Thus even for a popular musician who might be reluctant to express thoughts in a reflective diary, the author (2007, p. 217) notes that students are required to consider both the product and the process of their creative work and reflect about this in writing, as one related:

Forcing me to talk about it [making music] when I would normally just think about it, keep it to myself and then just get in and do it ... it's not in language at all when I think about it, (Student interview).

I find Lebler's research thought-provoking, as it points to the possibility of creating an environment for popular music practice and performance which encourages higher-level thinking and learning for a group of musicians who culturally, may not be thought of as

the most willing to engage in formal reflection. Perhaps it is the relevance of the real-life learning environment which just tips the balance and motivates these students to develop their critical self-awareness, as they were editing, mixing and producing their tracks in professionally-equipped studios in addition to performing.

## **2.7. Reflection in Musical Learning**

Reflective practice has emerged over the last twenty years not only as an area of study for management development, but also as a key component in higher education, particularly in practical or caring professions. Higgins, (2011, p. 583) gives a broad definition of reflective practice thus:

The term reflective practice conveys meanings that range from the questioning of presuppositions and assumptions, through to more explicit engagement in the process of critical and creative thinking in order to make connections between experience and learning in practice and practical action. [...] The process of reflecting for, in and on action makes it possible to change our current understanding of action by framing the issue or encounter in a different or novel way, or by improvising on new ways to solve the issue at hand.

The core principles of reflective practice emerged in the 1980s from the work of Schön (1983, pp. 49-69). Schön posits the idea that an expert can know what he or she is doing whilst actually doing it, giving the example that a baseball player can adjust his pitching 'in the moment' in the same way that a jazz musician knows how to improvise in a musical context full of subtle and continuous changes. He claims that by 'knowing-in-action', individuals are able to think on their feet and learn by doing. Knowledge, therefore, is not just something that is taught, but is something which a person can develop individually based on experience.

This idea is further refined with the introduction of 'reflection-in-action', meaning that you can be aware of what is going on as you learn, perhaps because a surprising event

causes you to reflect as you act. He is critical of what he terms ‘over-learning’ (1983, p. 61), stating that if one ignores the possible signs of change in practice, it is impossible to change. The third idea in Schön’s work is ‘reflection-on-action’: a deliberate decision to reflect upon an action after the event, with a view to improving action in the future.

In his second book, Schön (1987, p. 175) gives his own interpretation of musical performance:

Musical performance is a kind of designing. It is true that the performer has access to a score that gives him the pitches and durations to be played, along with indications of fingerings, legato and staccato playing, dynamics, tempo and such expressive descriptions as ‘furioso’ or ‘andante cantabile’. But the performer also has a great deal of discretion... he must discover the meaning of the piece given to him as a score, frame it by the decisions he makes and realise it by physical manipulation of his instrument. So the performer makes his ephemeral, temporally unfolding artefact.

‘Reflection-in-action’ and ‘reflection-on-action’ as models do not, in my view, encompass all that a musician does when performing. However, it is plausible to suggest that musicians are either consciously or subconsciously accessing the present moment — and their past experiences and knowledge — to create the highest levels of performance. That means that more is needed in a model for reflective practice for musicians.

Ghaye (2011) posits four different types of reflection, shown in Table 2.3., below:

**Table 2.3. Ghaye: Models of Reflective Practice (2011, p. 6)**

Reflection-in-action	Thinking on your feet – either in a particular context or place, or thinking about what you are doing as you do it
Reflection-on-practice	Thinking after the event – may involve the selection of something significant to ponder upon
Reflection-for-action	Planning what you are going to do, considering possible options for change or improvement
Reflection-with-action	Conscious future action to develop your skills, alone or with others

These different aspects of reflection offer a framework which might be useful in helping students to understand the process of self-assessment in an educational context, whether they be trainee teachers reflecting on their first lessons delivered, trainee nurses thinking about patient care or undergraduate musicians trying to understand the processes of rehearsal and performance in more depth and acquire greater levels of self-knowledge.

One of the most common instruments used in reflective practice is the learning journal. For a full discussion of the application of learning journals for students, professionals and personal development planning, see Moon (2006). The learning or reflective journal is not without its challenges. Cowan (2013), writing as a tutor with over 30 years' experience of facilitating reflective practice with engineering students, makes it clear that students need clear and focused questions to help them to frame their reflections. Academic tutors may, I suggest, be hopeful that their students will engage in reflective practices honestly and openly, as Cowan outlines (2013, p. 2):

I expect learners' reflective journaling to centre on metacognitive thinking, by learners ruminating constructively on their thinking and feeling and doing.

Ryan (2013) asserts that reflection has to be deep to be meaningful, but needs to be carefully supported by university tutors. One approach, as Cowan (2013) describes, is to ask students to keep an electronic diary which is sent to him regularly for comment. This makes the reflective process interactive and immediate. Nevertheless, despite Cowan's

gentle online prompts, he feels it necessary to outline five common weaknesses in the process, (2013, p. 7):

- Disregard of underlying assumptions
- Neglect of the implications, conclusions
- Going straight for the ‘obvious’ choice and failing to consider other (and difficult options)
- Confident assertions with no justification or reason considered
- Disregard of facts or aspects of the experience that are inconsistent with the on-going reflection

These shortcomings highlight a potential question which must be answered by university departments seeking to introduce reflective journals. How much training and explanation of the underlying theory and best practice is needed to enable students to write meaningful journals which preserve the personal and immediate nature of reflections, as well as offering individual analysis of actions after the event? Cowan speaks with the voice of authority, based on 30 years of experience, (2013, p. 4):

I want to empower each learner supportively and without exercising authority, within a ring-fenced area where their self-directed learning and development will be self-assessed. I try to help them to be the best that they can be — but always leave them to decide what to do and how to do it. I nudge the learners forward into Vygotsky’s Zone of Proximal Development where they can make more progress through prompting than they could manage on their own. I do no more than that. I certainly do not instruct, or tutor.

I am not entirely convinced by Cowan’s high ideals. Even if the content of a reflective journal can be explicitly linked to professional development and an outcome which one assumes students aspire to, how can there be certainty that what students write is a true account of their reflection? Bleakley (2000, p. 14) proffers some swingeing criticisms of narrative journals, stating that they may decline into a kind of ‘narrative confessional’,



which would seem to be far removed from the process of learning in an academic environment. On the other hand, this is not just about reflection on action, but also the reflexive act of introspection, which may lead to personal revelations.

Another potential challenge for the use of reflective journals is confidentiality. If students knowingly engage in reflective practice, understanding that what they write may be read by tutors and other university staff, then it seems reasonable to offer students a choice about whether to engage in reflective practice — unless the process of reflection is already a prescribed part of their course. Another potential drawback for students completing reflective journals, or essays based upon diary entries, is that they may skew their reflections to try to please their tutor or course leader. Cowan (2013) has no sympathy for such ‘cue-conscious’ authors. He points out that students who are writing to please their teachers are not writing about themselves, and have thus failed to understand the purpose of reflective journals.

There is also debate about how to teach reflective practice in a way which helps students to become self-critical without being prescriptive. Power (2016, Figure 1, p. 241) has suggested a model in which students are asked to describe their behaviours, experiences and actions and then answer three questions:

1. What I did.
2. What have I learnt from what I did.
3. Has this changed the way I think? What does this mean for me?

Power reports that 75% of the students in his study adopted this model to help them reflect. The benefit of this approach is its simplicity — it can be applied to any discipline. The possible shortcomings are that the first two stages might only generate narrative descriptions, whereas the two questions in the third stage do seem to encourage reflective thinking.

There are few instances of studies which examine the role of reflection in musical learning. Mills (2002, p. 81) suggests tentatively that conservatoire peripatetic music tutors should also be reflective practitioners and help their students to achieve what she terms 'deep learning'. Fleeting mentions are made of the use of practice diaries. Monks (2009, p. 6) reports that only five out of fifteen first-year undergraduate singers produced written accounts of their practice during the year. Hunter (2006) looks at the experiences of first-year music students who were asked to present in pairs about their preparation for their end-of-year performance using a reflective account. This was, he reports, successful, as the students recognised that the reflective writing had a direct link to their end-of-year assessment. However, it would also seem that musical maturity and experience may also play a part in the willingness of students to keep a practice diary as Townsend (2012) reports regarding the practice habits of three cellists. His analysis of Student B reveals that a player with nine years of experience was able to recognise technical and musical challenges in his chosen repertoire and approached these methodically, recording his interventions in a practice diary. Using a practice diary made this student's practice more effective because he was consciously regulating his practice routine.

Research has also been conducted which touches on reflection for learning at the Guildhall School of Music and Drama. Gaunt (2008) first explores the views of peripatetic teachers. The instrumental and vocal teachers instructed their students how to use reflection in one-to-one lessons, but the author concludes that this teacher-led approach may have prevented students from developing independent reflective skills. The students themselves, as Gaunt (2010) subsequently relates, thought that the development of reflective practice was not given sufficient priority in their individual lessons. However, both these studies seem to imply that students should be taught reflective practice, rather than actively developing skills in reflection for themselves.

Lebler (2004) describes the use of reflection in the Bachelor of Popular Music course at Griffith University in Australia. He recognises that students need to reflect after performance as he states:

It is important in the performance of music that this reflection occurs at times other than when the performance is in progress, to avoid interfering with the intuitive performance flow. The problem with consciously thinking about the performance while performing is that deliberative thinking limits our cognitive engagement with the performance to those aspects that can be deliberately thought about, and does not allow access to the complex nonverbal intuitive know-how necessary for fluent musical performance.

Students engage in different levels of reflection according to the module they are studying. For example, they write short reflections on tracks they have produced in the studio and they keep a reflective journal. More recently, Donna Weston (private communication) has recounted to me that undergraduate students also write an end-of-year reflection, based upon their learning journals and short reflective tasks completed as part of course work. Weston and Lebler are, as far as I can ascertain, unique in their approach to reflection with undergraduate popular musicians.

Musical learning encompasses a wide range of experiences and behaviours which raises the possibility that reflection may generate insights which students find uncomfortable. Boud (2010, p. 33) explains:

Reflection is an open, unpredictable process. It is dynamic and changes over time. It necessarily has unintended consequences ... it deals with matters that do not have a ready solution and are not clearly formulated and, as such, it cannot be controlled and managed as a routine process.

This view, I would argue, is particularly helpful in the context of musical learning, as students have explained to me that they do not necessarily regard their musical development as linear, which I discuss below in Chapter 5. Despite the potential challenge of keeping a learning journal or practice diary, the long-term development of reflective skills may point to longer-term learning about the craft of being a musician. It is therefore helpful to consider Mak (2004, p. 6) who suggests that the act of reflection

could be a unifying factor which brings together formal and informal learning, creating lifelong learning.

## **2.8. Defining the process of learning for popular and classical musicians**

In order to find some common guidelines to be able to understand the musical learning of classical and popular musicians in parallel, I start from the concept of practice outlined by Ericsson et al., (1993), which describes deliberate practice as a learning process which involves planning, reflection and problem-solving, combined with learning in a wide range of other situations which may be more informal, as discussed by Jørgensen, (2011, p. 4). Such models are based upon constructivist and cognitive theories of learning.

Problem-solving in a musical context may include individual thinking, planning and acting to solve, for example, a problem in technique as well as discussions within a band to try new approaches until a solution is found, for example, tightening a rhythm or getting backing vocals in tune. Problem-solving may also involve conversations with course tutors or specific interventions with peripatetic music tutors. In light of the current research project which investigates musical learning and reflective practice, I initially posit a definition of musical learning below:

Musical learning involves problem-solving either individually, or in groups, leading to an outcome which demonstrates change and/or progress. Reflection underpins the process of practice and rehearsal for the individual or the group by stimulating conscious thought about *how* practice is conducted, prompting choices about *how* the process can be improved and what strategies can be adopted to reach desired goals.

This definition of musical learning has already been published, see Esslin-Peard et al., (2016, p. 5); it is not a part of the Performance Module materials, nor the published

curriculum or reading lists. Nevertheless this definition offers a framework for the qualitative data presented in this research.

## **2.9. Summary and Research Questions**

In the literature review, I have considered theories of knowledge such as epistemology, behaviourism, cognitivism and constructivism. I have discussed a wide range of approaches to musical learning for classical and popular musicians and highlighted the lack of consensus in many areas, particularly with regard to definitions of practice. There are indications that musical excellence may take many forms. The process of learning may occur formally, informally or with a mix of formal and informal approaches. The literature review above indicates that there is currently no published research which explores the relationship between musical learning and reflection in depth, based upon a practice diary and an assessed annual reflective essay. Thus, in posing the research questions below, the task is to understand the process of learning as described by the students and then explore the role of reflective practice in musical learning.

- What experiences of practice and performance do the students describe in their reflective essays?
- Do students develop an understanding of their practice and performance behaviours through their reflective essays? If so, how?
- What role does reflection play in musical learning?



# PART TWO: Methodology and Description of Findings

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## **CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY**

### **3.1. Research Methodology**

This research project considers the learning journeys of both classical and popular musicians drawn from written descriptions of their experiences rehearsing and performing as individual and in groups.

#### **3.1.1. General considerations for research in higher education**

As a music teacher and practising musician, I am conscious of the need to ensure that the research will have relevance to music educators and tutors in tertiary education.

According to Brown, (2006, p. 384):

Since the mid-1990s [...] much more emphasis has been placed on what is seen by some as the need for a direct and instrumental relationship between educational research and practice, but more generally as the importance of promoting greater understanding of practical matters through applied and practice based research.

This echoes Hargreaves' (1996) comments suggesting that teaching should be seen as a research-based profession. It is therefore important to ensure that any research conducted can be shown to have a beneficial effect on students, their teachers and the teaching environment:

Effective teaching is likely to be achieved by helping teachers to understand how to interpret research findings within their own context and circumstances, and so help to identify the strongest influences on their students.

As music research in an educational setting such as tertiary education is, by necessity, also affected by the physical and socio-cultural environment, the musical backgrounds

of the participants, their concepts of self-identity and the influence of peer groups, it is therefore important to adopt research methods and tools which will generate the richest possible data set covering psychological, social, cultural and institutional factors in musical learning whilst not disrupting the normal flow of undergraduate studies.

### **3.1.2. Phenomenology**

A phenomenological approach is best suited to examining the students' reflective essays as these provide, as Denscombe (2014) explains, a description of the human experiences. The key here is to refrain initially from interpretation, but to view musical learning through the eyes of the students. Such an approach allows for multiple different interpretations of student experiences.

Phenomenological studies are commonly small-scale and rely on data generated from interviews or personal accounts, such as reflective journals, questionnaires with open questions and case studies. It is important, as Finlay (2009, p. 8) explains, to avoid imposing external theories onto the interpretation of data:

Phenomenological research is phenomenological when it involves both a rich description of the lifeworld or lived experience, and where the researcher has adopted a special, open phenomenological attitude which, at least initially, refrains from importing external frameworks and sets aside judgements about the realness of the phenomenon.

It could be argued that taking adopting a phenomenological model might lead to too much philosophising, but Finlay accepts that phenomenological research methods can be combined with empirical methods.

Another approach in this field is offered by Smith (2004), who developed Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis, (hereafter IPA), which also includes elements of induction, as Finlay explains:

Smith argues that his idiographic and inductive method, which seeks to explore participants' personal lived experiences, is phenomenological in its concern for individuals' perceptions. (Finlay, 2009, p. 8)

The IPA methodology emerged from health studies and psychological enquiry and is gradually being adopted by researchers in the social sciences. As Joseph (2014, p. 147) points out, IPA lends itself to research projects which are based upon data gathered from participants' reflective journals and interviews, an approach which I also adopt for data gathering as discussed below. What is important is that student voices should be allowed to speak in their descriptions of their musical learning, rather than the researcher trying to propose a theoretical model and see whether the students' descriptions of their behaviours can be made to fit the model. As Smith (2010) explains, IPA

attempts to show how experiential themes are made manifest in the sample through a nuanced analysis of convergence and divergence — showing how participants may share overriding concerns but highlighting the particular ways in which those concerns reveal themselves for particular individuals.

As IPA may be inductive, it is only *after* data have been reviewed and discussed that it is possible to posit any new model for learning. However, some academics have criticised IPA as being unscientific and not rigorous enough. Smith (2010) points out in his defence of IPA as a research methodology that

Doing good IPA requires the development of some complex skills — interviewing, analysis, interpretation, writing, and researchers at different stages will have different degrees of fluency and adeptness at these skills. It is the degree of proficiency in these skills which will influence the quality of the research carried out more than the conscientious following of procedures.

IPA does, however, offer an attractive research model for music education. Recent examples include the study by Reid (2001) discussed above, Bangert et al., (2009) who

examine decision making during performance by string players; Robinson (2012) with an investigation of how popular musicians teach in the studio; Bainger (2010) in a study of perceptions of pre-school teachers of their ability to teach music; Pulman, (2014) who discusses tutor and student perceptions of rock band rehearsals in UK universities and Taylor (2015) who examines the experiences of mature adults learning the keyboard.

### **3.1.3. Ethnography**

Ethnographic research methods seek to describe people and their cultures. Musical learning, I have already suggested, is socially-situated, which lends itself to ethnographic enquiry, as Barton (2014) confirms. The difference between taking a phenomenological approach and an ethnographical approach is that the latter allows for an investigation of how participants in a study understand the world around them and gain knowledge. Ethnographical research, as Krueger (1987) reports, has commonly been used for investigations based in schools or educational institutions. By using this approach combined with research tools such as questionnaires, interviews and observation, researchers can discover more about the working practices of an institution and the experiences of its students. This approach would therefore seem to be relevant when the field of study is to understand how university undergraduates develop their understanding of musical learning through reflection. Furthermore, as Denscombe (2010, p. 87) outlines, ethnography can not only generate detailed descriptions of human behaviours, but some researchers report that conclusions can be drawn from research data if they accord with or contradict existing theories of social behaviour. Bresler, (1995, p. 22), discusses both ethnography and phenomenology in music education, drawing the distinction that in an ethnographical approach, the researcher is outside the culture studied whereas with a phenomenological approach, the researcher may directly experience the phenomenon being studied. She notes that these two approaches may exist side by side, which this study adopts.

Nevertheless, it is important to recognise that in adopting either an ethnographic or an ethnographic and phenomenological approach, the possible influence of the lead

researcher must be addressed. It is thus important for the researcher to make her own qualifications, knowledge and prior beliefs known, both to the participants in the study and for the purposes of declaring any influence or bias in her interpretation of data. I discuss this in more detail below in Section 3.7.2.

## **3.2. Research Methods**

There has been considerable discussion over recent years about appropriate methods of research as presented by Yarbrough (2003), Hostetler (2005), Roulston (2006), Freeman et al., (2007) and Cohen et al., (2011). These studies can be divided into those which assess research techniques, such as quantitative or qualitative tools, and those which, like Hostetler (2005, p.17), seek to put academic research into a wider context of social benefits and the moral good. This study uses both qualitative and quantitative techniques, an approach which is often adopted in research studies in the social sciences, as Bryman, (2001, p.100) concludes from his meta-analysis of over 250 descriptions of research projects. Quantitative data play a lesser role in this research project, serving to show trends, such as the frequency of students taking music lessons.

### **3.2.1. Qualitative analysis using textual analysis**

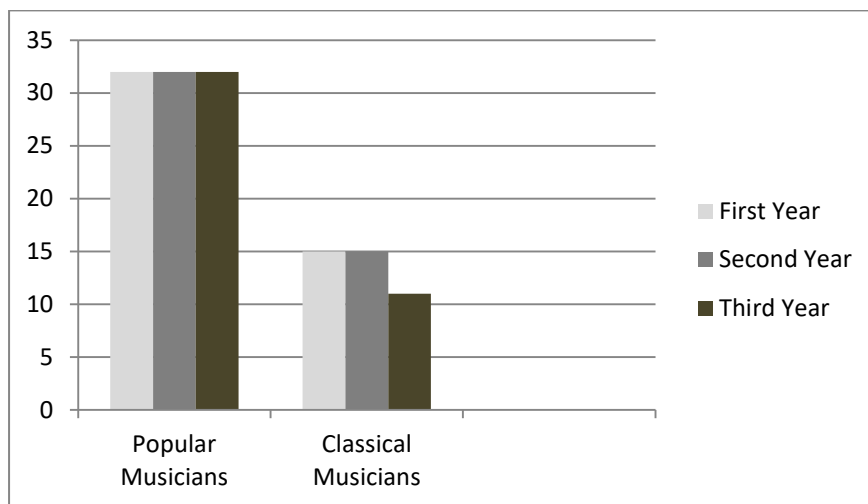
Qualitative data drawn from the reflective essays and interview transcripts were examined based on the principles of textual analysis. Following McKee (2003), repeated close reading of all the available narratives was considered to be the most appropriate method to ascertain how students' behaviour and attitudes towards practice were changing, which follows the 'zooming in' approach of Johansson (2013) and the methods adopted by Green (2002) and Smith (2013) in exploring interview data from interviews with popular musicians.

### 3.3. Research tools

The principal research tools in this study are the students' reflective essays based upon their practice diaries, (see Tables R1 and R2, pp. 279–280), the Background Questionnaire, (see Appendix 5) and semi-structured interviews (see List of interview dates and transcripts, pp. 281–282).

#### 3.3.1. Reflective essays

47 students gave their consent to take part in this research. This generated the following data for reflective essays over three years, shown in Figure 3.1.

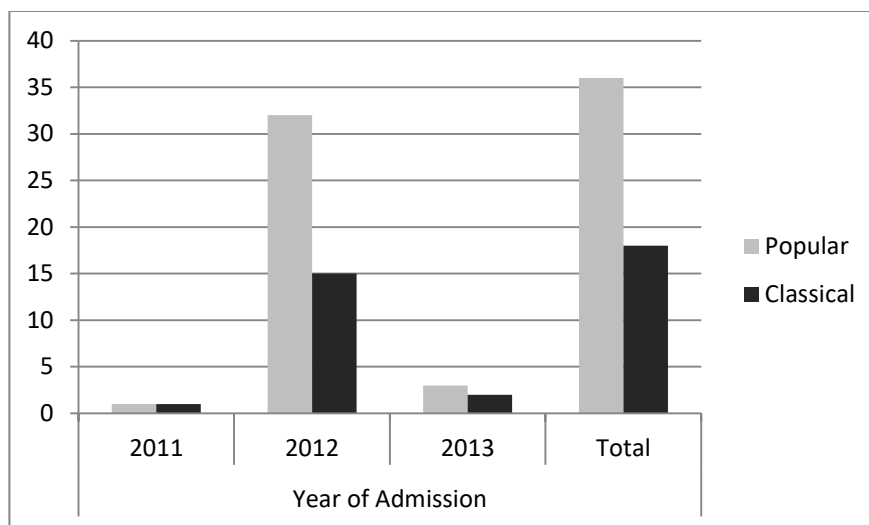


**Figure 3.1. Submission of reflective essays 2012–2015**

The student numbers for the Popular Music Performance course, (n=32), stayed constant over the three years of study, whilst for classical musicians, (n=15) for the first two years of study, as four students gave up the Performance Module at the end of their second year and one joined just for the third year, resulting in (n=11) for the third year of study. Student essays were submitted through a Turnitin gateway on the university intranet. The Turnitin gateway screens submissions for plagiarism; none of the submissions were excluded from the assessment process for plagiarism, which indicates

that students were not copying from each other; nor were they copying text from published sources.

In addition, for purposes of qualitative analysis and gaining insights into students outside the 2012–2015 cohort who were involved in student bands/ensembles which figured prominently in the core cohort, consent was gained from an additional two students from the 2011–2014 cohort and five students from the 2013–2016 cohort. This enabled the researcher to gain access to another seven reflective essays, which were not used for any quantitative analysis.



**Figure 3.2. Total reflective essays by year of admission**

### 3.3.2. Background Questionnaire

Questionnaires are a common tool in research in the social sciences. The researcher had already had experience of questionnaire design for her MA dissertation (Esslin-Peard, 2012). In this research project, it was important to generate both quantitative and qualitative data. As Cohen et al., (2011, p. 322) explain, closed questions or tick boxes can quickly be analysed to gain an overview of a sample population. To generate

qualitative data, open questions may be used, with or without any limits on the amount of text that respondents can enter.

As the research project progressed, it was deemed beneficial to find out more about the students' musical backgrounds before coming to university. This offered an opportunity to compare attitudes to practice with reflective essays and also gain an overview of the learning journey which each student had taken. A Background Questionnaire, see Appendix 5, was administered in February and May 2015 to the third year performance students. The first part of the questionnaire gathered information through tick boxes about musical learning in primary and secondary education, the type of course studied at KS5 and influences on individual musical learning. The remaining ten questions were open, in order to prompt students to reflect on their experiences before and during university study. The final question invited students to identify highlights on their musical pathways, represented by a graphic of a road curving away into the distance.

This questionnaire was made available to students via GoogleDocs and was also given out in classical and popular performance lectures by the two tutors. The return rate was 100% for the classical musicians, with all 11 students submitting questionnaires. The return rate for the popular musicians was 20 out of 32 students, or a percentage of 63%. Whilst it would have been advantageous to collect more responses from the popular musicians, their tutor reported that not all students attended performance workshops in the second semester. Furthermore, as the researcher was absent from these lectures, she was dependent upon the good will of faculty staff to administer questionnaire forms.

### **3.3.3. Interviews**

Interviews provide an opportunity for a researcher to gain more details about a particular subject or subjects who are part of the sample population. There are different types of interview — structured, semi-structured and unstructured — which can be linked to different approaches to research. In the context of a study which focuses on personal reflection, it was decided that the best approach for interviews would be to take an



unstructured approach, in which the interviewer could pose questions related to the submitted reflective essay, or more general questions about making music which invited comments about musical learning. Interviews were deliberately conducted in the students' second and third years. The researcher wanted to start by forming an impression of the main themes in the essays without seeking additional input from participants. This reflects the approach taken by Pitts (2000, p. 77), who considers that administering a questionnaire before interview '...was helpful, as the danger that answers would be considered, rather than spontaneous was outweighed by the advantages of greater depth of discussion and the opportunity to return to and clarify ideas.' Whilst many of the interviews started with general questions about what students understood by the term 'practice' and their experiences of the performance course, the researcher allowed the discussion to be led as far as possible by the interviewee and there were no pre-set time limits for the duration of interviews.

Transcripts were prepared by the researcher from mp3 audio recordings. The transcripts were checked by an independent arts graduate who had no knowledge of the participants, but had some musical experience (Grade VIII violin) and was therefore familiar with musical terminology. Table 3.1., below shows the interviews which were conducted and transcribed with members of the core cohort of 2012–2015 students.

**Table 3.1. Interviews with performance students 2012–2015**

Musician (anonymous)	Year of Study/	Instrument(s)/Voice	Date of interview
<b>Core Cohort</b>			
P30S (m)	3	Saxophone	20.2.2015
P4V (m)	3	Voice/keyboard	17.2.2015
P17G (m)	3	Voice/Guitar	28.7.2014
P15V (f)	3	Voice	20.2.2015
CL1 (m)	3	Saxophone	17.2.2015
CL11 (f)	3	Violin	28.10.2014
CL13 (f)	3	Violin	1.3.2014
CL7 (f)	3	Violin	21.6.2014
CL8/CL4 (f)	3	Cello and Violin	20.2.2015
CL15, exit interview (m)	3	Saxophone	28.10.2014
CL11, exit interview (f)	3	Violin	28.10.2014
<b>Ensembles</b>			
<i>Funk Soul Continuum</i> P30S, P16G, CL1, (3 m)	3	Saxophone, Saxophone, Guitar	29.10.2014
<i>Sneaky Nixons</i> P3D, P5B, P17G (1 f, 2 m)	3	Voice/Guitar, Bass, Drums	30.10.2014/ 18.2.2015

Interviews were also conducted with students outside the core cohort who were involved in the three case studies presented in Appendices 1–3, which are discussed separately.

### 3.3.4. Research tools which were excluded from this study

Two further methods of data collection were also considered after the pilot study, namely focus groups and the use of video recording of practice sessions. Starting from the premise that reflection as embodied in the reflective essay is essentially personal and written by an individual, it seemed that conducting focus groups might lead students to ‘follow the leader’ in describing their experiences. This tendency to agree with others became apparent in a group interview with four students from the 2014 cohort who

discussed their experiences of the practice diary and so their testimonials have been excluded from this project.

Video recording as a means to gaining a better understanding of what goes on in the practice studio has been used in music education, for example, by Daniel (2001). Video recording of lessons on mobile phones was mentioned by ten students in this study as an aide-memoire for what was covered. However, given the considerable amount of data generated by the reflective essays (n=137), it was felt that a formal analysis of videos of all or some of the students would result in unwieldy amounts of data which could not be analysed within the time allocated to this project. Video recording would seem to point towards a different kind of research on a micro level, seeking perhaps to analyse changes in playing techniques, or communication between band members. It is also debatable whether students would have been as willing to participate in the project had they been asked to consent to video recording in their rehearsals, as this might have been seen as an unwelcome invasion of their private rehearsal space.

#### **3.4. Overview of the research process**

Table 3.2., below shows the overall timeline of this research project. The main period of data collection started in autumn 2013 after the University Ethics Committee had given approval. The researcher had access to the first set of reflective essays in October 2013 after results had been published and this cycle was repeated in 2014 and 2015, supplemented by interviews and the administration of the Background Questionnaire.

**Table 3.2. Research timeline**

	Autumn 2012	Spring 2013	Summer 2013	Autumn 2013	Spring 2014	Summer 2014	Autumn 2014	Spring 2015	Summer 2015	Autumn 2015
Pilot Study										
Ethics application										
Ethics Approval										
Reflective essays										
Background questionnaire										
Student interviews										

### 3.5. Ethics

Research projects in secondary and tertiary education require ethical approval in order to protect the identity of participants and comply with university regulations. General guidelines are offered by various institutions: for this study, I have used the document produced by the British Education Research Association (BERA, 2011). The primary consideration was to ensure that students understood why the research was being conducted and how the data were to be handled. I met the classical and popular student groups in October 2013 in order to explain my research and handed out the participant information sheet, (see Appendix 4), which explained the purpose of the research, guaranteed participants anonymity and indicated that they could take part in the research voluntarily and pull out at any time without giving a reason.

Firstly, in accordance with the recommendation of the University of Liverpool Ethics Committee, students were given information about whom to contact if they had any concerns about the research project. Furthermore, it is the custom within the department of music that all first-year undergraduates are assigned a Pastoral Tutor, to whom they can turn if they have any issues or concerns. The Director of Undergraduate Studies was

also available to deal with any concerns regarding modules which students were studying. Finally, both Performance Tutors maintained an ‘open door’ policy for their students, encouraging them to visit at any time to discuss matters pertaining to the Performance Modules. In this way, every effort was made to ensure that students were informed about possible channels of communication, should they have decided to withdraw from the research project.

Secondly, in handling the contents of reflective essays which were personal, it was of paramount importance to maintain the anonymity of all participants and ensure that all information was treated in the strictest confidence. These guarantees were made explicit in the participant consent form, in accordance with BERA guidelines (BERA, 2011). In addition, the students were also made aware through the research project information sheet that they were giving permission for the researcher to access their end-of-year reflective essays and their grades for their assessed recitals and band gigs. The guarantee of anonymity extended to any participants who agreed to take part in semi-structured interviews at any time during the research period. However, three students in the band *The Sneaky Nixons* decided to be named, as they felt a strong sense of identity with their development as performers, which is central to the case study in Appendix 2.

Thirdly, an important caveat for any research conducted with students in tertiary education is the degree to which the researcher might influence the participants’ responses, as discussed by Cohen et al., (2011, p. 224) and Gaunt (2010). The Performance Modules were taught through weekly lectures by the respective Tutors for Classical and Popular Performance. I gave feedback to students through their regular lectures. As was made clear to undergraduates, my involvement in the research project did not in any way influence the marks that were awarded by their tutors. The researcher held a workshop for classical undergraduates in all three years to support their reflective learning in March 2014 which is discussed below in Section 3.7.2. No specific mention of this seminar was made in reflective essays, which suggests that in my role as researcher, I had not unduly influenced the students.

### **3.6. Data gathering: pilot study**

Denscombe (2010, p. 165) points out that a pilot study can be a valuable tool to define the scope of a proposed research project and identifies the most appropriate research methods within the stipulated time frame and the available resources. In 2005, the Head of Performance had conducted a survey amongst peripatetic music teachers to try to identify why performance students did not seem to be making much progress with their individual practice. The result of this survey was that practice diaries and a reflective essay were introduced for undergraduate musicians taking the Performance Module.

Discussions were held informally with the Head of Performance for three years before the research started, focusing on the role of reflection in undergraduate practice and performance. I made two one-week visits to the university campus in 2012 in order to read practice diaries under supervision, as these documents could not be removed from the department. After reading twenty examples of reflective writing by classical and popular musicians across all three years of study, further conversations with the Head of Performance and peripatetic music staff pointed towards a possible improvement in student practice behaviours after the introduction of practice diaries and the reflective essays.

As it would have been impossible at this stage to gain access to reflective essays without approval from the University Ethics Committee, a proposal was made to conduct research for a PhD, based upon the student reflective essays, starting in 2013.

#### **3.6.1. Data sources for the main research project**

Undergraduate reflective essays form the principal data set for this research. Initially, it was thought that the reflective essays would generate sufficient data for analysis. However, as Denscombe points out (2010, p. 109), qualitative research design often requires a flexible and adaptable approach. Thus unstructured interviews with a selection of students were conducted to gain further insights into what had been written in

reflective essays. Unstructured interviews were chosen to align with the phenomenological approach to this study. It was important to let the students tell their own personal stories without imposing a structure of pre-defined questions and I was led by what the students reported. Furthermore, as more general questions about the experiences of students prior to coming to university arose, it was decided to use a Background Questionnaire to gather both quantitative and qualitative data about previous musical experiences, their academic background and attitudes towards practice and performance, following the approach of Pitts (2002). This triangulation of three different methods of data gathering is typical of the approach adopted for an exploratory case study, in order to facilitate cross-checking between different sources, as Denscombe advises (2014, pp. 32–33).

The choice of the undergraduate musicians taking the Performance Module was deliberate: they were the students who had to write reflective essays describing their experiences of individual and group practice and performance.

### **3.6.2. Sample size**

The university offers three-year undergraduate courses in Music and Popular Music, or Joint Honours in both Classical and Popular Music. The intake each year is approximately 65 students who can choose the Performance Module from a choice of over 30 different modules. 36 students initially registered for the Popular Performance Module. However, four dropped out or changed course during the academic year, resulting in a core cohort of 32 students. For classical musicians, fifteen took the Classical Performance Module for two years: ten continued in the third year and one student joined for the third year only. Given the relatively small potential pool of students taking the Performance Module, it was unfeasible to take a random sample of students as this would have generated an even smaller data set. The best approach was therefore to approach all students with the Ethics consent form, administered by their workshop tutors, which generated an exploratory sample.

This resulted in a sample size for the core cohort of 47 students in the first and second years of study, and 42 students for the third year of study. Given the size of the data set, I believe that it is sensible to take a cautious approach to analysing data, as Yarbrough (2003, p.13) recommends:

...other means of controlling reliability and validity in qualitative research include peer review, checking the data and interpretations with the people being studied, detail accounts of how the study was carried out, and critical self-reflection by the researcher.

On the other hand, as Denscombe (2014, p. 49) points out, social science research is often based on a survey size of between 30 and 250 participants. This project uses three different data collection methods to try and increase the validity and reliability of the data. This reflects the experiences of Burt and Mills (2006) and Pitts (2002) who conducted research with students at conservatoires and music undergraduates using questionnaires and interviews. The difference here is that this research project relies principally upon the reflective essays, supplemented by a Background Questionnaire and interviews.

### **3.6.3. Considerations relating to the principal data source**

It might be argued that there is an advantage to basing qualitative research upon written materials which are a compulsory part of a university course. Surely this would guarantee that all the data were submitted in a timely manner and there would be a 100% return rate? However, there is a caveat here. No essays could be seen by the researcher until the students had given their consent and grades had been published.

I have already discussed issues of cue-conscious writing in Chapter 2. There are, from a total of 137 essays, three references to the Head of Performance, five references to the Tutor for the Popular Music and one reference to the lead researcher. Do these references compromise the veracity of the reflective essays? I would argue that quoting,



for example, the Head of Performance's mantra of breaking the habit of 'Do, do, do' in the context of thinking about how to improve practice is not a deliberate attempt to curry favour with the marking panel. Popular musicians who named their tutor referred to his previous professional career (P17G, Interview, 2015) or praised him (P5B) for his support with contacts or suggestions in informal evening coaching sessions. As long as such comments are used as a starting point for further self-analysis and reflection, I cannot see any reason to exclude an essay, or a part of any essay from this study. This concurs with the overall phenomenological approach. It is the students who are speaking through their reflective essays.

### **3.7. Accuracy**

The principal question is whether the reflective essays accurately reflect the experiences of the student musicians on the Performance Module. Guidelines for writing the reflective essay were made available to the students at the beginning of each academic year; see Chapter 4, Table 4.6. Essays were written in accordance with the recommended guidelines and, as is discussed below in Chapters 5 and 6, students described not only individual rehearsal and performance behaviours, but also covered themes which were addressed in the weekly tutor-led workshops for classical and popular musicians.

#### **3.7.1. Validity**

Validity is generally accepted to mean the degree to which true results are obtained. Whilst some researchers might expect validity to concern the accuracy of the questions asked, it is important to remember that students in this study were not given a checklist of questions to work through to guide their reflective essays. However, as each student was required to keep a practice diary throughout the year, recording their experiences of individual and group practices, their own performances, feedback gained from tutor-led performance workshops and their impressions of concerts and gigs on and off-campus, it was possible for the researcher to check the validity of statements made in the reflective

essay against the practice diaries, which were available for consultation in the department.

Another challenge in working with young people would, I suggest, be peer pressure. There may have been instances of respondents sitting next to each other while completing the Background Questionnaire and copying or imitating the responses of their neighbour. One way to control this would have been to video the process, or to administer questionnaires on a one-to-one basis in a separate location. It has to be said however, that in a busy university department, there were simply not the resources available to make this happen. I am broadly confident that students did their best to complete the questionnaire honestly. They all had time to read the introductory statement of intent, (see Appendix 4), and were told by staff in attendance that their contributions were anonymous and that they could withdraw at any time.

### **3.7.2. Objectivity**

There is a considerable challenge facing a researcher who is self-funded in demonstrating that the research project is objective. As I have outlined in the introduction, Chapter 1, I am a classically-trained musician who has a full-time job as a Head of Instrumental Studies in secondary education in London. I have had limited access to the university students. I visited the department in my half term breaks in order to conduct teaching workshops on behalf of the Head of Performance. I conducted workshops based on the Footsteps Model (Moon, 2006, p. 142), led performance tasks on Minimalism and reported back to students on the outcomes of my research. These workshops were designed to inspire students to think about their practice diaries and reflective essays, not to instruct them what to do. I made every effort to avoid leading students to reflect in a particular way, or to echo the guidance given by the Head of Performance and the Tutor for Popular Music.

I acknowledge that nearly 40 years' experience as a classical musician and musical coach in different genres does not entitle me to rely solely on my own musical experience and knowledge to analyse the reflective essays, the principal data source. Therefore a decision was made after eighteen months of research to invite two professional musicians to review the reflective essays, a measure which may be adopted in studies based on interpretative phenomenological analysis. A popular musician/ music educator reviewed all the popular and classical musicians' reflective essays, and a classical musician/ music educator reviewed the classical reflective essays. This, I felt, was a vital step to ensure that my own musical background did not influence my interpretation of the reflective essays.

No guidance was given to the two external reviewers. I sent them the reflective essays and asked for their analysis. The popular musician identified the key themes that I had noted and importantly highlighted something which I had overlooked, namely that set lists were an important area of focus for popular musicians. The classical musician, who also had experience as a Head of Music in secondary education, evaluated the essays using a red-amber-green scale. His tabulated findings were interesting as, without any knowledge of the background of the musicians, he came to some different conclusions about student achievement compared with the university staff who conducted the end-of-year performance assessments. Given that both reviewers were given complete freedom to analyse the essays, it might have been more effective to give them a sample of student essays and ask them to state whether they agreed or disagreed with my classifications of principal themes, in order to avoid generating more variables in interpretation.

This shows that in order to conduct qualitative analysis of narrative accounts, the researcher needs to be open to other interpretations and not mould the findings to fit a possible inductive theoretical model.

### **3.8. Summary**

Conducting a mixed methods research project with university students needs to balance academic rigour with a personal touch. If students do not trust the lead researcher, there will be nothing to be gained from individual or group interviews, supplementing the reflective essays. The possible areas for improvement in the methodology of this research project are discussed in Chapter 8.

## **CHAPTER FOUR: THE BIG PICTURE**

### **4.1. Background to the student cohort**

It is important to note that students applying to the University of Liverpool are admitted on the basis of academic achievement. This is typical of a university which belongs to the Russell Group, which represents 24 leading UK universities which are committed to maintaining the very best research, outstanding teaching and learning experiences and unrivalled links with business and the public sector, as described on the Russell Group website, (Russell Group, 2017). The university Admissions Office typically makes applicants offers of ABB for A Levels or distinction in the BTEC Level 3 diploma or equivalent qualifications, such as the International Baccalaureate or pre-university foundation courses. According to the university website, students with Grade VIII distinction may also be offered BBB. For those wishing to take the Performance Module, the website indicates a minimum level of ABRSM or RockSchool Grade VII.

The university offers three-year undergraduate courses in Music and Popular Music. The intake each year is approximately 60–70 students. Music students have access to a wide range of topics in each year of study, spanning musicology, composition, sociology of music, production, gender, aesthetics and audio-visual media and can choose the Performance Module in all three years of study, subject to a successful audition at the start of their first semester.

For the 2012–2015 cohort, background information about the students who took the Performance Module over three years is presented below.

### **4.2. Classical musicians 2012–2015**

Table 4.1., below shows the instrumentals skills and academic qualifications of the classical musicians who completed all three years of the Performance Module, drawn from their responses to the Background Questionnaire.

**Table 4.1. Background musical experience classical core cohort 2012–2015 (n=10)**

<b>Student</b>	<b>Instrument 1</b>	<b>Instrument 2</b>	<b>Instrument 3</b>	<b>Secondary Education</b>	<b>One-to-one lessons at school</b>
CL1 (m)	Sax	Piano		A Level Music	Yes
CL2 (f)	Viola	Piano		A Level Music*	Yes
CL3 (f)	Sax	Piano	Clarinet	A Level Music	Yes
CL4 (f)	Viola	Violin		Grade VIII violin**	Yes
CL5 (m)	Voice	Viola	Piano	A Level Music	Yes
CL6 (m)	Voice	Double Bass/Guitar	Harmonica	A Level Music	Yes
CL7 (f)	Violin			A Level Music	Yes
CL8 (f)	Cello			AS Level Music/ Music Foundation Course (City Lit)	Yes
CL9 (f)	Piano			BTEC Level 3	Yes
CL10 (f)	Cello	Voice		A Level Music	Yes

These students all had one-to-one instrumental or vocal lessons in school, or outside school. Eight out of ten had individual lessons provided by peripatetic teachers in their primary schools; all ten had individual lessons outside school and eight additionally had lessons in secondary school which suggests a high level of commitment to their chosen individual musical studies.

The starred student, CL2, had been attending the junior music school at the Royal Academy of Music in London and had completed the first year of the RAM BMus course before starting at the University of Liverpool. The double starred student, CL4, a violinist, had three A Levels at A and B grades and was admitted to read music on the strength of a distinction in ABRSM Grade VIII violin. Two students gave evidence of interests beyond classical music. The saxophonist, CL1, had been involved in big bands at school and had developed a strong interest in jazz. The singer, CL6, was also proficient on double bass and guitar and had been active as lead vocalist in a band whilst at school.

#### 4.2.1. Influences on musical learning at school

Students were asked to identify the people who were most influential in their musical learning at school as shown in Table 4.2., below. As one would expect, they relied on support from their parents, school music staff and peripatetic music tutors. Only one student, CL6, mentioned that he was also inspired by his peers and musicians whom he admired, reflecting his active participation in bands at school. This high level of support from music staff and tutors is seen across all types of secondary school, both state-maintained and private; students were able to access specialist teaching, suggesting that parents may have been active in funding music lessons, both within and outside school.

**Table 4.2. Influences on musical learning at school classical core cohort (n=10)**  
(Multiple responses possible)

	<b>Parents</b>	<b>Music Staff</b>	<b>Peripatetic Music Tutors</b>	<b>Peers</b>	<b>Admired Musicians</b>
Frequency	8	10	10	1	1

#### 4.3. Popular musicians 2012–2015

The 32 students who opted for the Popular Performance Module in all three years of their study submitted information about instruments played, qualifications awarded from secondary schools and answered questions about one-to-one tuition or self-taught experiences at school. Whilst the Background Questionnaire was circulated to all 32 students in the cohort, 20 sent replies, some of which were not complete.

Six of the popular musicians attended private schools and twelve attended state-maintained schools. The KS5 qualifications included eight students who had studied A Level Music, one of which also took A Level Music Technology; nine students who took the BTEC Level 3 qualification in Music and one student who had attended a British International school overseas who was awarded the International Baccalaureate Diploma (IB).

The data in Table 4.3., below illustrate that popular musicians were more likely than their classical peers to have multiple instrumental skills. Of the eighteen respondents, four stated that they were self-taught, and had not taken any individual music lessons at primary or secondary school. Twelve students noted that they had received individual tuition at school; of these, six also reported that they had lessons but were also self-taught, perhaps picking up additional instruments in order to maximise an opportunity to play in a band.



**Table 4.3. Background musical experience popular musicians 2012–2015 (n=32)**

Student	Instrument 1	Instrument 2	Instrument 3	Secondary Education	One-to-one lessons at school	Self-taught
P1D (m)	Drums			A Level Music A Level Music Tech	Yes	
P2B (m)	Bass					Yes
P3D (f)	Drums	Guitar		IB		Yes
P4V (m)	Voice	Piano			Yes	
P5B (m)	Bass	Guitar		BTEC Level 3		Yes
P6V (f)	Voice	Violin	Piano/ Ukulele	A Level Music	Yes	Yes
P7G (m)	Guitar			BTEC Level 3	Yes	
P8V (f)	Voice			BTEC Level 3		
P9V (m)	Voice	Guitar				Yes
P10V (m)	Voice	Piano		BTEC Level 3	Yes	
P11V (m)	Voice	Piano	Harmonica	A Level Music	Yes	Yes
P12G (m)	Guitar	Bass	Voice	BTEC Level 3	Yes	Yes
P13V (f)	Voice	Guitar		A Level Music	Yes	
P14V (f)	Voice			BTEC Level 3	Yes	
P15V (f)	Voice	Trumpet	Guitar	A Level Music	Yes	Yes
P16G (m)	Guitar				Yes	Yes
P17G (m)	Guitar	Voice		BTEC Level 3		Yes
P18G (m)	Guitar					
P19B (m)	Bass	Double Bass	Trumpet			Yes
P20V (f)	Voice					
P21V (m)	Voice			A Level Music	Yes	
P22B (m)	Bass	Guitar		BTEC Level 3		Yes
P23G (m)	Guitar					Yes
P24B (m)	Bass	Guitar	Piano	BTEC Level 3		
P25G (m)	Guitar	Voice				Yes
P26V (f)	Voice				Yes	
P27G (m)	Guitar	Saxophone	Voice	A Level Music	Yes	
P28G (m)	Guitar				Yes	
P29V (m)	Voice	Guitar		BTEC Level 3	Yes	Yes
P30S (m)	Saxophone			A Level Music	Yes	Yes
P31D (m)	Drums					Yes
P32G (m)	Guitar					

### 4.3.1. Influences on musical learning at school

Table 4.4., below shows the influences of musical learning at school for the popular musicians in this study.

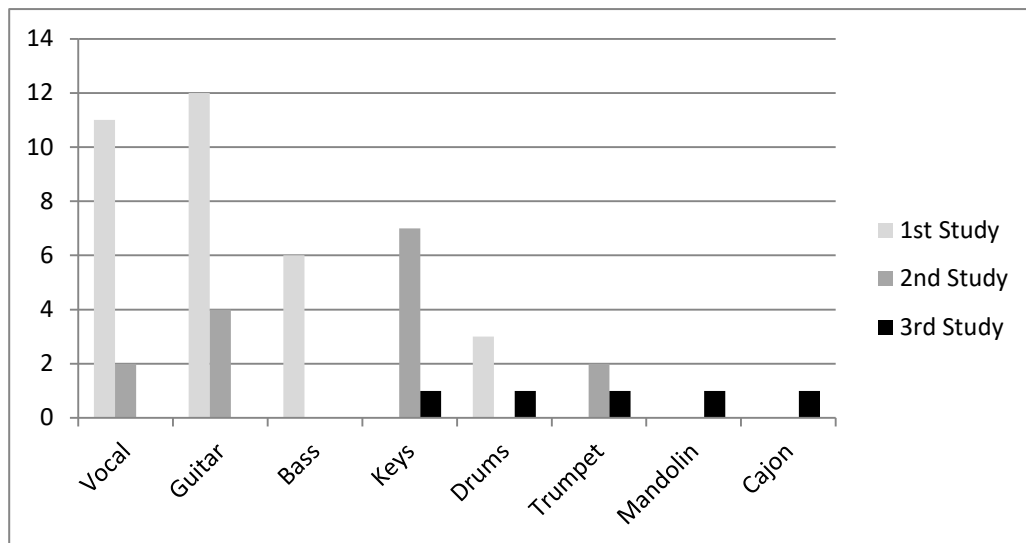
**Table 4.4. Influences on musical learning at school popular musicians (n=20)  
(multiple responses possible)**

	<b>Parents</b>	<b>Music Staff</b>	<b>Peripatetic Music Tutors</b>	<b>Peers</b>	<b>Admired Musicians</b>
Frequency	18	16	12	10	11

The popular musicians exhibited a mix of influences on their musical development whilst at school. It is noteworthy that all the respondents but two mentioned their parents as well as acknowledging the support of class music teachers and peripatetic music tutors. More typically, for self-taught musicians, they mentioned that they took inspiration from both their peers, pointing towards peer learning in bands at school and were also inspired by admired musicians whom they had seen play, or watched on YouTube or other online media.

### 4.3.2. Instrumental and vocal experience

As can be seen from Figure 4.1., below, the most common areas of musical experience gained before entering university for the popular music cohort were vocals, guitar and keyboard.



**Figure 4.1. 2012 Intake of Popular Musicians on Performance Module Instrumental and Vocal Experience (n=32) (Multiple responses possible)**

Fifteen of these students reported that they had secondary musical skills, and five mentioned both second and third areas of instrumental or vocal expertise. The Performance Module was one of over 30 possible modules that undergraduate musicians could choose, and information about students' practical musical abilities only emerged coincidentally from school teachers' reports or students' personal statements as part of the application process. This resulted in a rather uneven spread of musical skills in this cohort.

### 4.3.3. Gender

Gender as a focus for the experiences of classical and popular musicians is not explored in depth in this study. According to studies by Green (2002) and Hallam et al., (2008) which explore choice of musical instrument and gender, the cohorts of popular and classical musicians broadly speaking follow the gender stereotypes in their choice of principal study. Two male popular musicians cite voice as their only instrument, which contradicts the findings of Green who reports that boys typically give up singing in the early years of secondary school as they do not regard singing as 'macho'. There are five female singers, three of whom play additional instruments appropriate to their sex. The

biggest surprise amongst instrumental preferences in the cohort was an Anglo-Vietnamese female drummer, which I discuss below.

Green (1997, p. 55) describes a parent at a school concert who commented on a female drummer, reflecting common prejudices towards women playing ‘male’ instruments:

‘There was this young girl on stage and this enormous drum kit. I couldn’t believe that she was going to play it: but she walked across the stage and sat down behind it and she did play it — and she played it well too!’ Behind the speaker’s words is an indication that the idea of the girl’s femininity, as well as other qualities such as her youthfulness and small size perhaps had fleetingly become a part of the music’s delineations. But not only that: for beyond the level of delineation, when he listened to the music, he was ‘listening out’ to discover whether she could play well — that is, whether she could satisfactorily control or interpret the inherent meanings.

The drummer in our study is small and slight and should perhaps have provoked similar reactions. But the lead singer in the band in which she played, *The Sneaky Nixons*, praised her thus, despite his deliberate choice to portray himself as a macho, aggressive and anti-institutional musician:

It was unthinkable to have *The Sneaky Nixons* without P3D. She is a fantastic drummer, loyal and will always turn up if there is work to be done, (P17G, 2014).

Moreover, this female drummer was one of only three students out of the cohort of 32 to be awarded a first class for performance in all three years of study. This echoes the insight offered by Green (1997, p. 191) that women can only transcend the implicit patriarchy of popular music if they are excellent musicians. A detailed discussion of the role of women in the rock and pop industry is beyond the scope of this study; however, Leonard (2007) provides an in-depth study of this area. I am not aware of discussions

having taking place in either the Popular or Classical Performance Module workshops with regard to gender and instrumental or vocal musicianship and for reasons of space, I have decided not to explore gender issues in this thesis in more detail.

#### 4.4. Undergraduate Performance Module: course structure

All performance students, both classical and popular, attended weekly two-hour workshops with their respective tutors. As the Head of Performance explained:

The first years — pop and classical — get a lot of input in class into aspects of learning and practising. Some sessions are people explaining in front of the class what their one-to-one instrumental or vocal lesson content has been, followed by ‘how’ they practised it, what problems arose, discussions as to how it could be practised and then all have to make notes as to what they could use, (TS, 2015).

Table 4.5., below shows the main topics covered in the performance workshops by genre.

**Table 4.5. Topics in Performance Modules**

	<b>First Year</b>	<b>Second Year</b>	<b>Third Year</b>
<b>Classical</b>	Ensembles, Practising in front of peers.	Intonation workshop, practising in front of peers.	Historical context of performance, developing stage presence and performance skills.
<b>Popular</b>	Cover versions in tutor-assigned bands, performing to peers.	Original material in friendship bands, performing to peers, visiting speakers.	Original material in friendship bands, performing to peers, visiting speakers.

It is worth noting there was no song-writing option in the modules available to undergraduates at the time this study was conducted.

#### 4.5. The practice diary and reflective essay

The formal introduction of the practice diary at the University of Liverpool followed after the survey of the peripatetic music staff. The expectation from 2005 onwards was that performance students would keep a practice diary throughout the year which they could draw upon when they wrote their reflective essays at the end of the year. The purpose of the diary is to develop a regular habit of logging lesson content, review audio recordings and start to think critically about individual and/or band practice. The act of reflection embodied in the end-of-year assessed essay offers students the opportunity *to stop in order to think* about their experiences of practice. Table 4.6., below shows the guidelines made available to students for keeping a practice diary and writing their reflective essays:

**Table 4.6. Guidelines for practice diary/reflective writing.**

	<b>Popular Musicians</b>	<b>Classical Musicians</b>
Practice Diary/Blog	Students are to keep a practice diary which will include comments on all of their performance activities	<p>A record of each lesson (written or aural) so that the student can refer to this during practice</p> <p>A record of each practice session including most importantly <i>how</i> the practice was conducted</p> <p>Students should identify what they are going to practice next at the end of each practice session which might prompt more independent learning</p> <p>Students should identify longer-term musical targets, e.g. as soloists, as chamber musicians etc.</p> <p>Students are encouraged to read their whole practice diary at least once a month to review their progress</p> <p>Students may also keep concert reviews, lecture notes with their performance diary</p>

		for reference.
<p>Reflective account (End-of-year essay for assessment)</p>	<p>Your portfolio is to include a written reflective account of your development throughout the year, including reflection on all the practice, rehearsal and workshop/ensemble seminars.</p> <p>The key word is reflective — it means you should think about all your experiences and what they meant to you as a music performer</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Your lessons and individual practice</li> <li>• The development of your group</li> <li>• Your own development as a performer</li> <li>• Evaluations of performances you have attended</li> <li>• Reference to seminars and workshops</li> </ul> <p>Source: Guidelines for Popular Music Performance MUSI 104, 204, 304</p>	<p>Demonstrates clear understanding of personal learning, based on the practice diary records of practice during the year, and highlights any personal learning</p> <p>Makes reference to performance lectures and seminars, weekly lunchtime concert series, concert critique seminars and other musical events as appropriate</p> <p>May make reference to appropriate academic literature, performance scores etc. as appropriate</p> <p>Source: Student Performance Handbook 2012–2013 and assessment criteria for reflective essay</p>

#### 4.6. Summary

The 2012–2015 cohort of undergraduates who chose the Performance Module totalled 47 students, with roughly twice as many popular musicians (n=32) choosing performance in comparison with their classical peers (n=15). These proportions of classical and popular musicians are typical of cohorts for the last five years.





## CHAPTER FIVE: MUSICAL LEARNING 1 — CLASSICAL MUSICIANS

### 5.1. First Year: I thought I knew what practice meant

In the introduction, the question was raised whether ‘practice makes perfect’. When students arrived to start their performance studies, they were introduced to the practice diary as a means of recording their experiences of practice and performance. Below their experiences of keeping a practice diary are presented.

#### 5.1.1. The practice diary

What was the challenge facing the undergraduate musicians as they started their Classical Performance Module? One might expect that these students, most of whom had at least one Grade VIII qualification and had studied A Level Music, would have some ideas about how to practise. But the reality for all but one was quite different, as a pianist explained in her reflective essay:

Our goal was to critically reflect on our practice and interpret and learn music by always listening, meaning to engage in what we are doing and really listen, this being before, during and after our practice. Throughout the education system, emphasis is given on historical knowledge of music, analysis and musical forms. However, students are left relatively in the dark on how to practise, (CL12, 2013).

At the start of the first semester, the Head of Performance introduced the students to the practice diary following the guidelines published in the online student handbook shown below:

- 1 Lesson content.
- 2 Records of practice, in particular HOW you are doing it as well as how much, when and where.

- 3 Your future intentions as to when, where, and again HOW you are going to do practice the next time you do practice.
- 4 Specify frequently your aims, ambitions and tasks set for you and that you set for yourself, together with all that occurs as to why these are achieved or not.
- 5 Monthly, read what you have put, and comment. As in, you might comment that one of your goals should be to practise more because you only managed five times last month. Or that in three consecutive lessons your teacher has asked you to practise the same thing – something which is obviously not yet being done! (Student Handbook, 2012–2013; Head of Performance, private communication).

Nine out of fifteen students in the classical cohort made explicit mention of using a practice diary for the first year of study. Five of these wrote positively about its use, revealing the beginnings of some of the key elements of practice, such as self-awareness, planning and thinking about how they were practising and how they could improve:

The main positive outcome from the use of the practice diary for me was that I was able to learn more about myself when it comes to practising, (CL9, 2013).

My practice diary has helped me to be much more structured in my practice and I have found I have a better practice session if it is planned rather than spontaneous, (CL3, 2013).

I have found the practice diary a very useful tool as I do now stop and think about the issues that I am having and try to write down as precisely as I can what is going wrong and how I can change this, (CL4, 2013).

I found the process of keeping a practice diary very useful for improving my performing skills, to remember things that I noticed in private practice, as well as retaining knowledge from workshops, lectures, ensemble rehearsals and other performance media, (CL6, 2013).

Having a practice diary has encouraged me to think more specifically about what it is that I'm learning from lessons and rehearsals and writing this down reinforces it for me and serves as a reminder for a later date, (CL7, 2013).

However, despite students quoting catch-phrases from their seminars like 'Stop, think' and 'It's not about do, do, do', some seemed to struggle with understanding the purpose of the practice diary. The discipline required to write notes after lessons, rehearsals and other musical activities did not come easily to all the students, as one cellist explained:

I am now aware that I did not use my practice diary to its full potential; starting the year off I was determined to give it a try, but quickly lost faith in it, failing to write in it as frequently as I practised, which led to a backlog of information that needed to be written down. This then caused me to panic, so I left the diary and tried to store everything in my brain which I now realise is definitely not as effective, (CL10, 2013).

The other cellist was also sceptical, as she related:

I have struggled this year with keeping a practice diary. I found it more distracting from my practice to have to stop and write down what I am doing. I was also inconsistent with my monthly performance reviews. I still don't feel entirely confident about doing this; perhaps this is what I have not understood about this year, (CL8, 2013).

One technique used by a few students was to record their lessons and/or their practice sessions on their mobile phones or a mp3 recorder. This raises the consideration that perhaps for 21<sup>st</sup> century students, the written word — and even more so, the *handwritten* word — in a notebook is not the obvious medium for reflection, although it is understandable why the alternative of maintaining a digital blog was recommended, perhaps on a mobile phone, as students were expected to review their progress regularly

and needed access to their diaries or blogs at the end of the year to write their reflective essays.

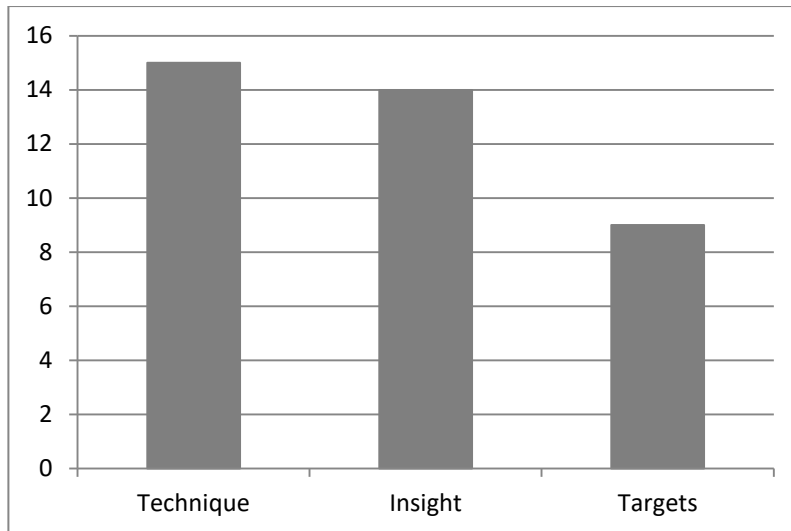
The viola player who had been at the Junior Academy and the RAM for a first year of conservatoire study described her own feelings about using a practice diary. She made it clear that she felt it unnecessary to write things down because she thought that the written word would somehow lessen the ‘liveness’ of her thinking about practice:

Yes, those first entries mark in detail what I covered in a lesson, but the words are only on the surface — they came from the pen and I was yet to produce them and *bring them to life*. Perhaps it shows a sign of laziness or a lack of faith in the diary, but the process was happening from within and therefore I was not able to connect with writing about it, (CL2, 2013).

Having given a summary of student views of the practice diary in the first year, I will turn to the major area of focus in the reflective essays, namely their private practice.

### **5.1.2. Discovering practice**

The classical musicians all wrote about their personal practice and described their individual experiences and how they worked with their peripatetic music teachers. Three main themes emerged from the reflective essays: technique, personal insights into the process of practice, and the identification of targets for future progress.



**Figure 5.1. First-year classical musicians: main themes in reflective essays (n=15)**

Figure 5.1., gives an overview of the key areas reported in reflective essays by classical musicians. The data show that all fifteen students reported on aspects of technique. Fourteen musicians also gave some insights into what they found easy or difficult, whilst nine identified specific targets for progress. One pianist also described the *overall* process of learning, as illustrated by this comment:

Recently I've realised how helpful listening and retrospective thinking is to my improvement. There have been ups and downs over the year and I realize that improvement rarely happens in a straight line, the only way I can explain, is that my practice has improved not in a straight line like this:

But more like this:

(CL12, 2013).

This description of the process of learning will be discussed in more detail in Part Three.

### 5.1.3. Technique

All the first-year classical musicians identified technique as a major area of focus in their practice. Students gave mixed responses: some described what their teacher was working on with them, others reported on their own attempts to tackle technically difficult passages. It is important to note here that the assessment criteria for the reflective essay do not indicate particular areas for focus such as technique or intonation. The frequent citations of technique in the student essays prompted a variety of explanations. For example, some students who were admitted with instrumental or singing skills below ABRSM Grade VIII may have felt themselves under pressure compared with their peers, and so chose to focus on technique:

Lessons have consisted almost exclusively of singing exercises to build up technique from the basics, rather than building upon flawed foundations, (CL6, 2013).

The lessons were solely focused on singing technique and perfecting my musical style, (CL15, 2013).

For five weeks I played nothing but long notes and scales. It took me a while to understand that this long and mundane process was essential to my playing, (CL14, 2013).

Others reported that with a new teacher, they were compelled to start from square one, and rebuild their technique:

In my individual tuition my technique has been picked apart and it has been like learning to play the violin all over again, (CL7, 2013).

It was inevitable that starting at university would involve a change of instrumental or vocal teacher which, as was revealed in the student accounts, was not something they

had given much thought to. As a result, there were surprises. Five students made specific mention of difficulties with their new teachers.

Starting with a new teacher also threw me off course, (CL10, 2013).

I was immediately put out of my comfort zone as I was assigned a new teacher. I had previously had the same teacher for about 10 years, so this was a major adjustment for me, (CL8, 2013).

Whilst the allocation of peripatetic teachers to students across both courses was managed by the Head of Performance, the expectation was that students should stay with their allocated teacher, unless there were special circumstances which necessitated a change.

#### **5.1.4. Insights**

The majority of the first-year classical students described behaviours which demonstrated varying levels of insight into their personal practice routines. For the sake of clarification, I wish to consider the Oxford English Dictionary's definition of insight:

the capacity to gain an accurate and deep understanding of someone or something, (OED, 2016).

The term, I would argue, is useful as an umbrella under which a variety of experiences may be gathered. 'Insight', therefore, for the purposes of this research, may indicate accurate and deep understanding of the process of practice, or the awakening of new personal knowledge about personal behaviours in practice and/or performance.

Several students explained how, based on notes from their practice diaries, they had determined the best time of day to practise, or how they selected an appropriate practice space, taking into account the differences between basement, ground floor and first floor

music department practice rooms and the possible embarrassment of being overheard by their peers.

Being challenged to rebuild technique prompted insights from students who reported lower levels of motivation, or a disinclination to do what their teacher had suggested. Two students reported that practising for too long led to boredom or lower levels of motivation. The solution for both — suggested by their respective teachers — was to practise for shorter periods, and more frequently.

Another first-year student was not keen to practise in the music department. When she planned her practice, she wrote that the schedule contributed to her lack of motivation because she set herself too much work to do. However, she hinted at a possible solution later in the year:

Finding the motivation to practise regularly was an issue... later in the year my motivation to practise improved when I identified more efficient ways of practising, (CL4, 2013).

Insight into the process of practice was documented more precisely by another student who stated:

Throughout the year I have learnt that there is a difference between simply just playing through a piece and actually practising a piece. Now I focus on specific parts of the piece that I know are a problem for me. I now question myself more as to why I cannot do certain things and try and find solutions, rather than just accepting that I cannot do it, (CL3, 2013).

The ability to identify problems and deal with them efficiently not only helped students to progress, but also reduced the time spent in practising,



The viola player focused almost entirely in her essay on her own emerging musical identity. She opened her reflective account by focusing on her awareness of herself as a musician, starting to understand how she practised and performed. She distinguished between her previous experiences of being taught and the university performance course:

Firstly I must say that I put my most meaningful improvements down to the fact that I have not been made to feel like a pupil. Instead I have been made to feel like a musician. And because of that, the mechanics and process has grown inside me and I have been able to do it for myself, (CL2, 2013).

She also noted the transition from re-creating a performance to being creative in performance:

When I started my year, in my private work, I was trying to achieve the feelings and match the sound identical to that of a performance and I was only satisfied if I had re-created that sound. This behaviour is now alien to me and pretty unimaginable. Who would only want to re-do? It motivates me knowing that it can always be better and one has to keep moving forward, (CL2, 2013).

Compared with her peers, this student had a much deeper understanding of what practice and performance was about and, arguably, may have already passed the 10,000 hours of practice suggested by Ericsson et al., (1993) to reach an expert level. This student's maturity is reflected in her conscious appreciation of states of flow:

My favourite thing to monitor during performance is when the page and notes just disappear. It is when you know that the music is alive and breathing and your body is so connected — it all becomes so effortless. And in that moment you just be and there is no how or do, (CL2, 2013).

Despite their best intentions and an understandable desire to document progress in their reflective essays, some of the first-year musicians did not see a great deal of progress overall in their practice habits. The leader of the University Orchestra gained considerable insights into her technical deficiencies, but still admitted:

My practice has become much more effective, but I still spend too much time playing through a piece and not practising the bits that need to be practised, (CL4, 2013).

In the light of the concerns expressed above about the veracity of personal journals, there would seem to be a contradiction here. How can practice have become more effective if the student was still playing through? I would suggest that there is perhaps a gradual transition from play-through behaviours to more self-critical awareness of personal practice, which I discuss in Part Three.

### **5.1.5. Targets**

As has already been stated above, the guidelines for the reflective essay for classical musicians make reference to setting targets, both from one practice session to another, and for longer-term goals.

Just over half of the first-year classical musicians set themselves longer-term goals. The goals cited by nine out of the fifteen musicians included a more productive use of the practice diary in the following year, breaking down pieces into smaller chunks to overcome technical difficulties and spending time more effectively and not playing through pieces. One cellist stated at the end of her essay:

I feel I have been equipped with a new tool to keep practising and building upon. I am fully aware everything I have learnt must be reiterated and continuously practised to reach and remain at the professional standard I hope one day to reach, (CL10, 2013).

A singer linked the improvements in his practice routine to a target to master his nerves when performing. A violinist made specific reference to the aim of keeping a regular practice diary so that she could think more specifically about what she was learning in her lessons, and thus improve her technique and subsequently learn pieces more quickly. Two students cited external examinations as their goals for the following year.

Targets were also important for maintaining motivation to practise. One pianist lamented that without short-term goals, she did not feel motivated to practise. A violinist reported that she was not motivated to practise because she felt that it was all ‘too difficult’. Another violinist reported that personal issues got in the way of her practice.

Whilst a full discussion follows in Part Three, the main theme which emerges from the first-year classical musicians’ reflective essays is a growing awareness of the process of practice and some individual attempts to change past behaviours in order to make practice more effective, which is reflected by the comments from four students below:

Throughout the year I have learnt that there is a difference between simply just playing through a piece and actually practising a piece. At the beginning of the year what I thought was me practising was actually just me playing through things and therefore my practice was not very efficient. [...] Now I focus on specific parts of the piece that I know are a problem for me. I now question myself more as to why I cannot do certain things and try to find solutions, rather than accepting that I cannot do it, (CL3, 2013).

My practice has changed from playing through pieces over and over again to analysing what I am doing and how I am playing. This change in approach has been aided by many different factors — performance class, concerts and critique sessions, saxophone lessons and personal practice, big band and function band, (CL1, 2013).

I learnt a lot about the art of practice itself during the course of this year and about how fundamentally when you practise, you are going into a room to do what you know you cannot, (CL11, 2013).

The sheer volume of private and public practice alone has to be the most transforming change I have been through. I have physically or mentally been with the instrument *all the time* which has formed a habit and commitment and I am very grateful for this, (CL2, 2013).

## **5.2. Second Year: What am I learning by reflecting?**

All fifteen undergraduates continued with the Classical Performance Module in the second year of study. They all took advantage of the instrumental and vocal lessons provided by the department of music and were active not only as soloists, but in a wide range of orchestras, choirs, chamber ensembles and concert bands on- and off-campus. One saxophonist played in *Funk Soul Continuum*, a function band which had been set up by a group of popular musicians at the end of the first year. Three string players got involved in acoustic bands with undergraduates from the Popular Music Module.

Following the practice of identifying main themes in the reflective essays for the first year, I discuss the students' reports focusing in three areas to look for evidence of reflective practice and change. The most frequently cited themes which emerged are not the same as those in the first year. This is partly due to the nature of the taught content of the first semester, and, as I will show below, can be explained by a change in student behaviours. The three themes under which students' comments are grouped are shown below:

Tuning and intonation

Metacognitive practice strategies

Change and 'A-Ha' moments

### **5.2.1. Tuning and intonation**

In the regular weekly lectures, the Head of Performance focussed in the first semester on intonation, working with the students on different temperaments for tuning a harpsichord. Two books were recommended to students for reference: Duffin (2007) and Padgham (1986). The objective of this exercise, which many students found baffling at the start, was to develop aural acuity and be able to recognise the interference beats of notes that were out of tune. This approach, as far as I can ascertain from hearing conversations between the Head of Performance and other music educators at SEMPRES conferences in 2013 and 2014 seems to be unique.

Morrison and Fyk (2002) give an overview of the different elements which contribute to our perception of tuning including pitch discrimination and pitch matching. In their discussion of the behaviours of experienced musicians, they note that advanced performers do not necessarily play ‘in tune’ with a specific tuning system. Rather, they adapt their tuning to the context of the ensemble and the piece that they are playing and may deliberately avoid playing at equal temperament. This is, of course, much easier to achieve in acoustic ensembles which do not include equally-tempered instruments such as the pianoforte. Sundberg (1982) compared the intonation of a string trio, playing with vibrato and a barbershop quartet. He found that intervals that were perceived to be ‘in tune’ were slightly smaller in the singers compared with the string players. The whole notion of being in tune is, of course, a matter of perception, both for players and the audience. For the undergraduates in this research project, the objective of tuning the harpsichord was clearly designed to give them hands on experience of trying to hear intervals of different and very precise dimensions and then consider how this notion of ‘being in tune’ could be applied to their own private practice and ensemble playing. It goes without saying that such an approach is only viable if the tutor is not only experienced in tuning harpsichords, but also has the aural acuity himself to hear the beats and understands the differences between different tempered tuning systems.

To begin with in the first half of the twelve week semester, five students mentioned their inability to hear ‘the wobbles’ or beats between notes which were out of tune:

At first, I was very sceptical that this would make a difference to my ear as I really struggled to hear the ‘wobbles’ that we were looking for in the sound. After about week six, I finally began to hear them and after this, I was hearing them in my own practice all the time and it became so obvious when something was out of tune, (CL8, 2014).

Eight out of the fifteen students reflected on these seminars focusing on intonation. One saxophone player reported:

Despite the initial resentment that I felt towards the lectures spent tuning a harpsichord, it did not take me long to realise and appreciate the vast development that it was making on my playing. I found myself constantly listening out for tuning issues in not only my own playing but others too, including professional concerts, (CL14, 2014).

This student went on to describe how behaviours changed not only for her as an individual, but also in the saxophone quartet. At quartet rehearsals, her group spent up to 20–30 minutes per session tuning chords at key modulation points. Another saxophonist suggested that she might now consciously refine her tuning as she played:

I feel that all the work on tuning throughout the year has improved my own personal intonation, as when playing with others, or with an accompanist, I am more aware of the sound I am producing and how in tune it is with others, (CL3, 2014).

A cellist added a further dimension, describing her new understanding of intonation to ensemble practice, orchestral rehearsals and tuning at the start of a concert:

It doesn't matter how long tuning takes: if it is wrong, it is unsettling for the audience, (CL10, 2014).

Both singers in the classical cohort wrote about their conscious recognition that they had been singing flat, or slightly out of tune, and that they now knew that they needed to correct this, even though one explained that this was a tricky process:

While other instruments have varying degrees of external physical action to produce a distinct pitch, singing is completely within the body and minor changes in pitch — especially without stopping and starting the note — are incredibly difficult to manage as it relies on slight manipulation of the vocal chords which, unlike moving a finger or changing lip position, is very hard to do and monitor as it has no visual and next to no sensory feedback, (CL5, 2014).

Nevertheless, by the summer term, this student had managed to monitor and change his pitch whilst singing by making a critical aural analysis of mp3 recordings from his singing lessons. Similarly, the other singer described the changes which he could make after the intonation workshops:

At the time, I didn't really understand what the benefit of this would be. I was very much of the mind-set that 'I am a singer. I don't need to know how to tune an instrument.' However, I went into these sessions with an open mind and I am very happy that I did. ... It was then that I started to notice when I was singing, I was staying in tune an awful lot better than I had been prior to the sessions. I believe that this is one of the most substantial bits of progress I have made this year, (CL6, 2014).

Paradoxically, while the students worked through different tuning systems, their aural acuity had generally improved so much at the end of the semester that they found equal temperament (which one would equate with modern standard tuning for a pianoforte or the pitches assigned to the keys of a digital keyboard) far from satisfying. There is much

which could be explored in this area which falls outside the scope of this research, not least the development of a similar intonation course for the undergraduate popular musicians.

### **5.2.2. Metacognitive practice strategies**

Metacognitive practice strategies include, for example, planning practice sessions or rehearsals, the ability to identify difficult passages and then use a variety of approaches to solve a technical problem, such as breaking down a difficult passage into small sections; changing the rhythm or the articulation and working at a slower tempo and gradually getting faster. Such metacognitive practice also involves critical listening to evaluate intonation and phrasing and may include elements of mental rehearsal applied to individual or ensemble playing and performance.

All the students wrote about practice strategies, and many acknowledged that there was a change in the process of practice. A cellist described how she identified changes to her practice routine which made her practice sessions more productive. The elements that she highlighted include careful planning for individual and solo practice, targeting areas which presented technical challenges and then breaking them down into small sections to resolve the problem. This student also helped another pianist with this approach, which demonstrated a thorough understanding of a strategy which can be transferred and adapted to help a peer.

One of the great things I learnt was the effectiveness of repetition. CL8 played a major role in this in helping me learn one bar of Bach's Invention no.1 in C major and perfect it within half an hour. To accomplish this, we slowed the pulse down, played with separate hands and repeated the bar at a steady pace ten times in a row. If I played one repeat incorrectly, I would have to begin the climb to ten again, (CL9, 2014).



The difference in practice behaviour was that a problematic passage had been selected for improvement. The slower tempo and repetitions were intended to get the accurate pattern of notes into muscle memory.

Similarly, a clarinettist reported that by focusing deliberately on small areas of technique like breathing and tonguing for twenty minutes a day, progress was made. Another wind player also identified strategies for improvement:

I found more effective ways to practise .... to slow down, play the passage five times correctly, speed it up and look for patterns, for example, scales in fast passages (CL15, 2014).

The four wind players who worked together in a saxophone quartet recognised that practice strategies were also important in their ensemble work. One member wrote:

In a rehearsal, it is important to stop and address problems, rather than just carrying on, (CL3, 2014).

Mental rehearsal techniques are associated with metacognitive practice strategies. One violinist who had struggled with technique in her first year reported that she made progress by studying the music away from her instrument. The leader of the University Orchestra similarly described mentally rehearsing good bowing technique and making the correct flowing movement with her right hand at spare moments with a pencil. A violinist described how she might stop for twenty minutes in the middle of a practice session and work without her instrument, focusing solely on the music:

Reading my music and picturing/hearing in my head the bowing and the fingering and the tempo and the dynamic and the phrasing and the sound. It is incredible how much difference seriously sitting and thinking about something can do, (CL13, 2014).

The viola player wrote almost exclusively in her reflective essay about what she heard in her head, and what she was thinking about:

I am imagining what can be done, and how I could be improving. The music is clearer and louder in my head, as is the image of the viola when I am not practising, (CL2, 2014).

She then explained that her private practice was even more effective after periods of not playing:

It was during the Christmas and Easter holidays that I did not play very much at all and these were the times when the music in my head was clearer and louder than ever, as well as the image of the viola. When I returned after the breaks, the mechanics and music started to fall better into place and began to feel free. I do feel the work I do away from the instrument has helped my bow hold to strengthen, (CL2, 2014).

She described how mental rehearsal away from the instrument created options for her to explore different bowings, colours and dynamics, demonstrating a higher level understanding not only of technique, but of the interpretation of the pieces that she was working on.

Looking at the reflective writing about practice strategies by these second-year musicians, there was more evidence which pointed to conscious thought about how to practise and an understanding of which strategies to use in a specific set of circumstances.

### **5.2.3. Progress and ‘A-Ha’ moments**

One of the original questions which emerged in discussions with colleagues of mine — both professional orchestral musicians and singers, as well as musical theatre

performers, chamber musicians, choral singers and organists — was how to define the moment when a developing musician ‘gets’ what practice is all about, and starts to use metacognitive practice strategies deliberately. As there is no theoretical model for an ‘A-Ha’ moment and the students were not told to identify such moments as a deliberate instruction as part of writing their reflective essays, the examples which I give below have been selected as they seem to suggest some kind of breakthrough in learning and understanding.

One of the singers missed half of the second semester through illness and reported that he had stopped monitoring what was going wrong in his practice sessions and was no longer finding ways to improve. He seemed to be totally stuck and understandably was demotivated. However, in the last seven weeks of the term, he made a major breakthrough with his singer teacher, which he described thus:

[NN] instructed me to walk around the room, singing my exercises at different objects as if they were people, moving to a different one each time. The result was staggering: the movement and visualisations left my brain free enough to not obsess over technique and to actually sing through the exercises as well as leaving enough room to focus on everything I knew about the right technique and actually do it, much more consistently than before, (CL5, 2014).

This new freedom made practice enjoyable again and the student was able to use metacognitive strategies to work on his technique and the interpretation of the songs for his final recital. Despite admitting that he was not using a practice diary, the student describes how he internalised the change which had taken place:

Whereas last year I was trying a new approach with practising, I feel that lately it has become more of a natural attitude and habit than something I am affecting to do, which is very promising. I feel as though I have managed to overcome a large obstacle to my progress as a singer, resulting in a much faster rate of progress than I was previously experiencing, (CL5, 2014).

The leader of the University Orchestra had noticed that she was playing behind the beat with a conductor, whereas in the Chamber Orchestra, which was led by the concert master playing violin, she could play in time, simply by following the gesture of the leader's bow strokes. For her, the 'A-Ha' moment came, prompted by a chance lesson with her old violin teacher from secondary school which provoked a new understanding of pulse:

He asked me to play the same piece as before, but with him pretending to conduct me and I was repeatedly behind his beat. We then discovered that if I breathe in time with the movement of the conductor's stick to prepare myself and the bow, than I am more often than not in time with the desired down beat, (CL5, 2014).

This new insight was highly relevant for this violinist, who was not only leading the University Symphony Orchestra, but also leading the viola section in the Liverpool Philharmonic Youth Orchestra. She was acutely aware of the need to develop section leadership skills if she was going to succeed with her chosen career after university as an orchestral player. Compared with her first-year reflective essay, this student had now learnt not to play through, but was practising with a conscious awareness of what needed to be improved, even if not all her shortcomings could be addressed in one year. The final comments that I want to look at are more general statements about how musicians perceived personal changes over the course of the second year. A violinist who played both in the Chamber Orchestra, the Symphony Orchestra, chamber groups and an acoustic folk band summarised her year thus, demonstrating an insight into her own sense of identity as a musician, which was not apparent in the first year:

Being a performing musician is part of who I am, and the progress I have made this year has helped me to realise how much it actually means to me, (CL13, 2014).

One of the four saxophonists not only played in the quartet with his peers on the Classical Performance course, but also worked with the *Soul Funk Continuum* on alto and tenor sax, the University Big Band and played in the pit band for the university musical. He not only developed in his individual technique, making progress with his embouchure and his finger technique, but also learnt how to bring practice strategies into the function band:

Some pieces contained tricky sections, such as ‘Sir Duke’ by Stevie Wonder, which focused on the saxophones. We decided to practise just the two saxophones until we got this perfectly together, going through different sections, working out the problems and overcoming them, (CL1, 2014).

This ability to transfer metacognitive practice strategies is also revealed in the reflective essays written by the popular musicians, which are discussed in Chapter 6.

### **5.3. Third Year: Seeing the bigger picture**

Third-year classical musicians taking the Performance Module had, for the first time, an opportunity to offer either a 40–45 minute solo recital, or a combination of an ensemble performance for 50% of the marks, and a short solo recital worth 20% of the marks. This change was introduced to accommodate students’ requests for assessment of performances in chamber music ensembles. This might also indicate that the students were worried about the rigours of a long solo recital, which I discuss below in Section 5.5.1., in the context of students who stopped the performance course in the third year.

Ten students who had taken the Performance Module in their first two years continued into the third year. Five gave up, choosing other modules, and one joined the course just for the third year, who has been excluded from this study. The topics which I will discuss in this section include:

Reflection on Practice

Progress and ‘A-Ha’ moments

Developing performance skills and stage presence

Work in ensembles

Giving up performance

### **5.3.1. Reflection on individual practice**

Individual practice did not necessarily get easier in the third year and there were few references made to a practice diary. One violinist, (CL4), revealed that she no longer used a practice diary, but wrote relevant comments directly on to her music. Another violinist struggled to write regularly in her practice diary, although she noticed that without planning, her private practice was less effective, as she described in her reflective essay:

Over my three years at university, I developed a habit of over-planning what I wanted to achieve in practices, due to my desire to play well and achieve. This resulted in a sense of failure if the practice didn’t go in the direction I had hoped for (even if it was productive!). On reflection, I have found that I respond better if I enter the practice room with an outline (a less detailed idea) of what I want to achieve. This motivates me, as I feel comfortable exploring unpredicted issues as they come up, instead of sticking to an agenda, (CL7, 2015).

One of the cellists surprisingly highlighted working on small sections of a piece as a demotivating factor in her private practice. Whilst she recognised that she might not be practising ‘the right way’, she did not offer any suggestions for changing her practice routine, which perhaps points towards a resistance towards the kind of introspection and focus on detail implicit in employing metacognitive practice strategies:

One point I noticed when reading my last two reflective reports, and something very much present again this year, was my lack of motivation to practise my

recital piece after months of working on it. I realised this was due to my incorrect practising style and the reason I was getting bored and frustrated was due to the small sections I was working on never quite being perfect, as I was obviously not practising them in the correct way, (CL10, 2015).

In contrast, a saxophone player reported how she had been taught to break down difficult sections to make progress in her practice. It is interesting to note here that students overall exhibited different levels of independent control of metacognitive practice strategies, perhaps also mirroring the individual progress they had made in mastering these techniques:

In my instrumental lessons this year I have been taught various ways of breaking the music up and ways of practising the music in smaller sections. For example, in complex passages that require precise finger work, I know now that it is more productive to repeat small motives over and over rather than entire phrases and to particularly focus on the intervals that I find most challenging, (CL3, 2015).

On the other hand, the two singers who had perhaps gained a deeper understanding of how to use metacognitive practice strategies and were comfortable about analysing their own practice and performance behaviours, started their third years of study on a positive note, as one explained:

The 2014/2015 session began well: after great progress towards the end of the previous term, I worked hard over the summer, cementing techniques which were finally starting to work in my last few weeks of second year. I found practising exciting and looked forward to doing it and was starting to be able to get a consistent forward, bright sound. I was pleased with this enthusiasm and drive that I started third year, which set me up well for resuming lessons, (CL5, 2015).

This student had chosen to attend some of the intonation workshops again in his third year as he recognised that he still had problems with tuning. This allowed him to see that he had made progress:

I found the harpsichord sessions in my second year incredibly useful and repeating some of the experience [in the third year] was equally beneficial, especially as my technique was a lot more reliable the second time around, allowing me to incorporate this into my practice more accurately, (CL5, 2015).

This understanding was echoed by a violinist, who wrote

Learning is not comfortable and occasionally [it] involves risk-taking. Overall, I have found that improvement and breakthroughs come in waves, and it is therefore never a steady learning process, (CL7, 2015).

The other singer related that in the third year he no longer went to lessons to develop technique, but had chosen the repertoire for his final recital and was working on pieces with his teacher. Nevertheless, he recognised the value of the work he had already done, consolidating his technique:

I have once again returned to a position where my one-to-one lessons have proved paramount in my growth as a performer and this is manifesting itself in very visible changes in my voice. Throughout the year it became clear to me that the work I had put in the previous two years had paid off... it had become second nature. My range also significantly increased, allowing me to perform songs that I would not have previously been open to, (CL6, 2015).



### 5.3.2. Progress and ‘A-Ha’ moments

The third-year students continued to describe their progress and ‘A-Ha’ moments in their reflective essays. For some students, the stimulus for a breakthrough in understanding about their own musical learning came from a previous teacher. The saxophonist visited a teacher near his home town before returning for the beginning of the third year of studies. As he related, a lesson with a different teacher produced new insights into how to control his embouchure using the mouthpiece alone:

One mouthpiece exercise was trying to play a whole scale by changing the embouchure only and a whole saxophone exercise was a call and response style task playing by ear, (CL1, 2015).

This, I would suggest, was particularly useful for this player as he was playing with *Funk Soul Continuum* and had started a jazz quintet and therefore needed more insights into how to produce glissandi and develop his aural skills, which were important for improvisation. He also experimented with new mouthpieces and a different ligature, which completely changed his sound, particularly with a ligature which had different settings which produced different tonal qualities. Armed with this new confidence in developing his playing styles, he started to work as a session musician, which illustrated the progress which he recognised he had made:

I recorded tenor and baritone saxophone parts at LIPA with a professional producer. My tracks have become part of a horn section for songs that are now released on iTunes and Spotify. This was a new challenge, as I had not heard the songs before and not seen the parts until we started recording. It was a good experience for me as this is sometimes the situation that session musicians find themselves in and it shows the importance of the ability to sight read. Since the recording, I have played at a number of gigs with the artist, (CL1, 2015).

These comments were interesting as they reflected a move away from the informal, aural approach which this saxophonist was accustomed to in *Funk Soul Continuum*, a university function band in which he played. As a beginning session musician, he realised that he needed to sight read accurately in order to perform ‘on demand’ in the studio.

One singer related two ‘A-Ha’ moments in his third year, both relating to technique:

I have had two ‘A-Ha’ moments in my lessons this year. The first was in November where I first managed to achieve an openness of the throat in my higher register which I had never managed before. The sensation was so different to what I had previously been experiencing in my upper register that I almost startled myself!

My second ‘A-Ha’ moment came in February, where I finally understood what [NN] meant by trying to feel ‘grounded’ when singing. This sensation was again quite a shock when I finally managed it. While I have been singing from the diaphragm for a while, I have not been engaging it properly which results in me losing breath quickly and not having the support behind notes. The correct use of the diaphragm, however, gives a downward sensation right from the diaphragm through the legs to the floor, (CL5, 2015).

In both cases, the breakthroughs were related to developments in technique, which all the classical musicians had been focusing on throughout their undergraduate studies.

### **5.3.3. Developing performance skills and stage presence**

Of the ten students who were taking the Performance Module in their third year, all had to give a final recital. Those who performed as soloists were required to give a 40–45 minute recital before a public audience. Six students also chose to offer an ensemble performance.

In preparing for these final performances, students discussed both the development of stage presence, advanced performance skills and managing nerves. They had also spent a semester investigating historical and aesthetic elements of performance in their weekly workshops, comparing what they experienced themselves with what they witnessed in the weekly recitals and discussed in concert critique sessions, led by the Head of Performance. This approach fostered a more holistic approach to their understanding of musical performance and allowed them to focus on particular elements which would help them to succeed in the end-of-year recitals. One cellist reported how she had negotiated with her teacher to work on the Schubert Quartet, rather than a 45 minute solo recital, and recognised that she could be helped with the more soloistic elements in the cello part:

There were elements in my quartet music where I needed to be more soloistic and she pointed these out to me and helped me to achieve the right sound. As always, working on my technique was still relevant and we focused a lot on bow control this year, especially expenditure and how to control the sound, (CL8, 2015).

For her solo recital, she chose the cello and piano movement from Messiaen's Quartet for the End of Time, which required an emotional performance, as she explained:

It was highly emotional, to the point of intense sadness and grief [...] What I wanted was to express the feelings of those musicians who performed the piece for the very first time in that concentration camp in 1941 and make the audience understand this, then I would have achieved my aim for the performance. It was imperative that I took its composition and performance history into account for my own performance, otherwise I do not feel like I would be doing a true representation of it. The performance was not just about me repeating the music which Messiaen had written, but about understanding what he intended it to be and recreating that, (CL8, 2015).

These comments point towards an understanding of the wider context of performance and working towards a particular interpretation. She wrote elsewhere of her personal emotional struggle with practice and it seems that the selection of this piece was in some way a symbol of her mastery of this process.

One of the singers related how the focus on repertoire in lessons enabled him to focus on storytelling in his recital, emphasising the importance of communicating the narrative in Vaughan Williams' Songs of Travel. He also recognised that by developing deep familiarity with his chosen repertoire, he was able to focus on his stage presence:

As I was more familiar with the music months prior to the recital, it allowed me to concentrate on stage etiquette as a priority, particularly how to appear more confident when performing, (CL6, 2015).

This is noteworthy as this student was also fronting a rock band with other university students and was perhaps indicating here the need to adapt his stage presence from his rock persona to a more appropriate style, befitting the classical repertoire he was singing. One violinist reported that she was now positively looking forward to her recital:

Throughout my degree, my nerves have become less problematic to my playing. For me, this improvement was achieved through frequently performing and having confidence in myself. Three years ago, I would have refused to perform a solo in public, yet at the end of my degree, I am actually *looking forward* to this opportunity, (CL7, 2015).

Other students were still worried about the stress of their final recital in their third year. The cellist in the Glas Quartet described how she had sought additional opportunities to perform in her second year order to help manage her nerves, resulting in a more confident approach in her third year:

Dealing with my nerves was something I believe I cracked in second year, reaffirmed by my performances this year, in which nerves have not once taken over as they used to. In the weeks leading up to my final recital, I was getting familiar butterfly and apprehensive feelings common in first year and years prior, but this time I was able to address why I was feeling this way and how to get over it, and this was profoundly satisfying. I realised I did not feel prepared for my recital and this is why I was feeling nervous, because deep down I knew I would make mistakes and this led me to finding where those moments were, further enhancing the practice experience, (CL10, 2015).

A saxophonist reported that she was overcome by nerves on the day of her recital, which she had also reported in her second-year assessed performance:

Under the pressure of the concert, I became very nervous and was not as relaxed as I would have liked. This led to my performance not being as good as I know I can play it and was most noticeable in the fast passages that required relaxed hands, (CL3, 2015).

One of the strategies suggested to overcome nerves in performance is mental rehearsal. It is interesting that this student did not write about mental rehearsal anywhere in her reflective essays. Was this something that could have been discussed with her teacher or in performance workshops? Unfortunately, I do not have the evidence to explain why there was apparently no progress in managing nerves between the second and third years, other than to suggest that perhaps more critical analysis and introspection might have helped this player to overcome this performance challenge.

The pianist who was still being led by her piano teacher to adopt metacognitive practice strategies in her third year attended a masterclass in the hope of gaining more support. She reported on the feedback from the masterclass thus:

‘The tempo and the rhythm are in need of quite a bit of sorting out as yet — the pulse shifts from phrase to phrase, so see if you can anchor it more steadily’. I was also told that the piece was not beyond my reach and, with time, I would be able to conquer it, the only way to do so would be to work section by section slowly and reassemble it later, (CL9, 2015).

Sadly, things did not go well in her final recital and she tried to explain what had happened:

For my recital this year, I was greatly disappointed by my efforts. I feel I had played the pieces much better and my nerves got the better of me. If I were to retake the last year, I would practise a lot more and make a greater effort to perform in public and practise on the piano I would perform my recital on, (CL9, 2015).

However, the student above who was less self-aware seems not to have been able to change her behaviour. On the other hand, the comments above suggest that those students who were open to the process of reflection could use the insights they gained about their nerves to develop strategies to perform more effectively.

#### **5.4. Work in ensembles**

Of the ten students who took the Performance Module in their final year, six played in ensembles: five string players were spread across two quartets, with the viola player rehearsing in both quartets. Both of these quartets had members who were not on the Performance Module: the Schubert Quartet had a student playing second violin who had given up the Performance Module; the Glas Quartet was led by a professor in the Classics department who played violin with the University Symphony and Chamber Orchestras. As two saxophonists had also given up the Performance Module, the sax player who also played in *Funk Soul Continuum* created a jazz quintet with other players in Liverpool to perform for his ensemble assessment, but did not refer to his work with

the jazz quintet in his reflective essay. I will discuss the two string quartets below, drawing on reflective essays and interviews, in order to explore how these musicians applied their individual knowledge of practice to playing in an ensemble.

The string players had all been playing chamber music throughout their three years of study, including working in tutor-assigned quartets in their first year and an independent group practising the Schubert Quintet in C in their first year, (CL4, CL7, CL8, CL8 and CL10). This pattern of informal chamber music continued in the second year including quintets, sextets and octets. The violinist who led the University Symphony Orchestra joined a chamber music course in Spain during her second year in which she applied what she had learnt from student ensembles to working with adult amateur musicians:

They all looked to me to give them advice as to how to improve their playing. It was rather evident that they all preferred to just play through pieces and work on sections that needed greater dynamics or some other problem that was easy to fix individually, so it was with great difficulty that I managed to convince them to listen to the other parts and rehearse just a few lines at a time, (CL4, 2014).

This demonstrated a clear progression from the play-through behaviours that she had been critical of in her first year. She also managed to guide her adult musicians to work carefully on intonation:

One of the most successful moments of the trip was when we were rehearsing a string quartet by Beethoven, Op. 132, and I stopped the rehearsal to make us all really listen to the tuning of the notes at the beginning of the third movement, as the simplicity of the writing makes it very obvious when it is not in tune. They all found this very helpful and when we rehearsed later on in the week, they would often ask if we could play slowly and listen to the notes that were being played, (CL4, 2014).

This would suggest that this student had internalised and applied what she had learnt individually to rehearse a chamber group. In addition, she and the string players travelled to France for a chamber music week in September 2014 where they joined other adult musicians to play chamber music. From this course, two quartets were formed which performed for their final assessments, which are discussed below.

#### **5.4.1. The Schubert Quartet**

The Schubert Quartet included three students on the Performance Module and a second violinist who had completed the first two years of the Performance Module but had decided to drop this module in her third year. The rationale for forming this quartet was explained thus by the cellist:

We all agreed that we wanted to focus our energy seriously on one ensemble throughout the year in the hope that we would end up doing paid quartet gigs, or at least get to grips with a serious piece of quartet repertoire. I suggested Schubert's 'Death and the Maiden' quartet as I had played snippets of it several times before and I was keen to work on it, (CL8, 2015).

The underlying problem, which all three players described in their reflective essays, was the input and attitude of the second violinist who was no longer on the performance course. The leader of the quartet described the second violinist's attitude thus:

She was often late to rehearsals, was easily distracted during rehearsals, had generally weaker intonation than the rest of us, was not at the same 'standard' as the rest of us technically or mentally and perhaps most frustratingly, did not write anything in the part, (CL4, 2015).

I approached two of the members of the quartet and asked them whether they would give me an interview about their experiences in February 2015. At this stage, they had not resolved all the problems, but I was interested, having tracked the inter-personal



problems experienced by the popular musicians in their bands, to see how the classical musicians approached similar challenges in their quartet:

Well, we've kind of realised that you can't unanimously get to a certain depth. The three of us can absolutely tune in on something, this is what we need to work on and we know what we have to achieve, (CL8, Interview, 2015).

This suggests that the first violinist, cellist and viola player had developed an intuitive understanding of what was required in rehearsals. However, it seemed that the second violinist did not have the same level of insight, which may perhaps have been one of the reasons why she gave up the Performance Module, because she had realised that she didn't want to challenge herself through reflection to improve. This aspect of their rehearsals was also described by the cellist:

It was sometimes hard to express in words what we wanted to achieve, since it was more of a feeling that we sensed (a particular sound or emotion within the music which three of us realised instinctively, but was not obvious to her) and it was a problem we encountered throughout the year, (CL8, 2015).

Nevertheless, when the classical musicians attended an open rehearsal given by the Italian arTre Trio, the first violinist observed how effectively they worked together:

We sat in on a rehearsal and I wrote a note to myself saying that it was amazing to see how fast they worked and rehearsed, but it was upsetting to think that we could never do that with our Schubert quartet, (CL4, 2015).

Such limiting beliefs were also expressed by the cellist:

After about a term of rehearsing, we were beginning to tire of the piece and I was not sure whether I wanted to continue with it. It seemed like we had hit a wall, musically speaking, where we could not proceed anymore on our own, as we had

lost motivation and also run out of suggestions ourselves as how to improve the quartet, (CL8, 2015).

They had tried the approach of playing along with the second violinist's part in rehearsal in the hope that this would help her to hear what was required and build her confidence. The first violinist explained ruefully:

We've done it so many times now, either me or CL2 [viola player] saying 'Let me play this with you' that it would be a bit unfair. 'Why are you still not getting this?' We did do it every rehearsal, (CL4, Interview, 2015).

It was clear that the difference in standards and attitude to practice was not just frustrating, but caused the other three students to worry about the forthcoming assessed performance:

It's frustrating where, I think it's the last movement, there's a bit of rhythm where we're all playing something slightly different, so there is nowhere for her to latch on to us, there's a huge bit where she is on her own for about two whole bars. Every time we come up to it, I'm always so worried that it is going to bugger up and there's nothing we can do, (CL4, Interview, 2015).

The first violinist rationalised the problem in interview and suggested that if all the members of the quartet had been taking the Performance Module, it might have worked out differently:

If we were in that situation, I think that would help us a lot because we would all be forced into spending all this time on the music and there would be no distraction, no time limit, nothing to keep us from tackling the tricky bits and keep us from getting them sorted once and for all, (CL4, Interview, 2015).

The main difference between the classical and popular musicians when faced with interpersonal problems in an ensemble was that the classical musicians continued to arrange rehearsals and play together at least twice a week, rather than avoiding rehearsals. A secondary consideration might also be that in an all-female group, there was an underlying desire to avoid conflict with the second violinist, who lived in the same house as the cellist. It seemed therefore that the only solution was to ask for external help from a member of the Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra as the cellist related:

Having coached sessions was extremely inspiring and pushed us to keep working on the piece as we could see it from a fresh perspective, (CL8, 2015).

After these coached sessions, the students seemed to regain their focus, as the leader explained, saying ‘most of these issues had resolved themselves after we set a recital date, maybe she felt the pressure and put the work in’, (CL4, Interview, 2015).

The quartet gave two performances of ‘Death and the Maiden’, one as part of the university’s public Wednesday lunchtime recitals and another, a month later, for the formal assessment at the end of the Performance Module. The viola player described the experience thus in her reflective essay:

The first performance of the quartet will stay with me for a long time. This is because it was the first time I felt something very solid and unified from a group. I also took a lot of risks and learnt how to deal with those risks in a live situation and because we knew the work very well, we had the confidence to let go and enjoy it. I had not felt the way I did after that performance in such a long time and I think this is because it was alive and we were not redoing something rehearsed, (CL2, 2015).

It appears from this comment that there was considerable trust between the members of the quartet, which was also echoed by the cellist:

Working with CL2 [viola] has always seemed very easy and natural and we both have natural musical instincts, so we react well to each other when we are playing together. This became apparent through our work in the Schubert quartet where, because of the weakness in the second violin, we controlled the music from the lower strings and supported the first violin to our best ability, (CL8, 2015).

On a rough calculation, I would estimate that they had spent four hours a week for 24 weeks in rehearsal at least, without counting run-throughs in the performance workshops, additional coaching sessions and rehearsals in the performance venue, resulting in a total of over 100 hours of rehearsal. In terms of assessment, the three members of the Schubert Quartet who performed were each awarded over 70% of marks for their recital, being equivalent to a first class.

#### **5.4.2. The Glas Quartet**

The second quartet, the Glas Quartet, was led by an academic in his sixties from another department in the university. This resulted in rehearsals in which the three female students chose to defer to his judgement as an older and more experienced musician. The viola player, CL2, also played in the Schubert Quartet, but made no mention of her experiences in the Glas Quartet in her reflective essay. So, for the discussion which follows below, I am drawing on the essays written by the second violinist and the cellist. Whilst neither of these students wrote extensively about their quartet experiences, there were some comments which are worthy of discussion. The cellist commented on the challenge of working in the quartet thus:

We were all of different standards and I was not aware that I should be playing up to the highest member's standard rather than trying to match the less experienced players because I was trying to blend in, having been told this after a practice recital, (CL10, 2015).

It is hard to understand from this comment whether the cellist was confused about quartet blend, which may have been about tone and dynamics, rather than her own technical ability. The second violinist was acutely aware of the challenges of playing with a significantly older leader and was initially reluctant to give feedback which might have seemed critical of his playing:

The first violinist was prone to rush if playing a challenging passage, meaning that the rest of us had to either follow him or play against his tempo (both responses are risky if we are in a concert situation). We found that the first violinist could not solve these problems in such a short space of time and through this we learned to communicate better, to be more assertive and all contribute to the pulse and dynamic as a unified whole, (CL7, 2015).

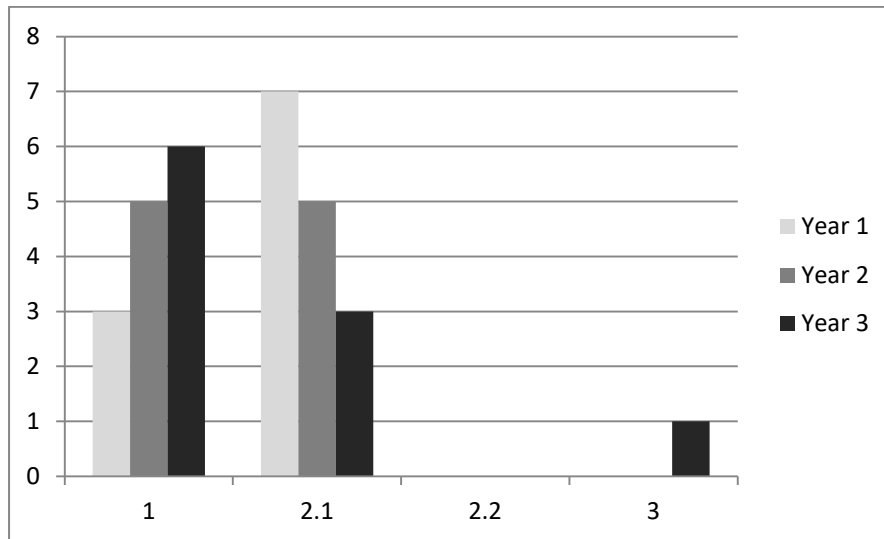
I find it surprising that there are no comments describing the role of the viola player, CL2 as she was by far the most experienced of the students. She was assessed playing with the professional Italian artre chamber musicians earlier in the semester, so perhaps she decided to take more of a back seat as she was enjoying the rehearsals with the Schubert Quartet and decided to help out with the Glas Quartet. The dynamics of the rehearsal process of the Glas Quartet are discussed further in Chapter 7.

As the 2012-2015 cohort of classical musicians were the first group of students to be offered the combination of a solo and ensemble performance for their final assessment, there are no data available which can be analysed to see whether students were more successful in just giving a solo recital for 45 minutes, or choosing the combined solo/ensemble performance option.

## **5.5. Results: classical musicians**

The end-of-year assessment for students comprised two elements: 70% of the marks were given for performance, which was either a single 45 minute solo recital, or a combination of 50% of the marks for an ensemble performance and 20% of the marks

for a solo performance. The remaining 30% of the marks were awarded for the reflective essay. Figure 5.2., below shows the final grades which were awarded to the performance students at the end of their third year of study.



**Figure 5.2. Classical musicians' grades over three years (n=10)**

As can be seen from Figure 5.2., above, there was a steady rise in the number of classical musicians who were awarded a first for performance (over 70% of marks).

Two students, the viola player CL2 and one of the violinists CL4, who led the University Symphony Orchestra, were awarded firsts for all three years of study. Both demonstrated improvements in their percentage marks between the first year and the second year, but there was a reduction in the percentage marks for the third year. The explanation could have something to do with both students making rapid progress in developing their metacognitive practice skills in the first and second years and then simply applying these techniques in the third year with less detailed descriptions in the third-year essay. The viola player did not disclose her thoughts about private practice in her third year with the same degree of awareness and detail compared with the previous two years and got a considerably lower mark for her essay in the third year — 63% compared with 80% and 75% in the first two years respectively. Perhaps, as she

reported, the process had become internalised during her second year and therefore she felt no need to add more in her third year. Two students CL1 and CL3 performed consistently over all three years, being awarded a 2.1 in each year. Three students CL5, CL8 and CL10 improved from a 2.1 in the first year to a First in years two and three. One student, CL6, gained a First in his first and third years, but dropped to a 2.1 in his second year.

Table 5.1., below shows the third-year grades of classical musicians and the number of extra-curricular activities in which they were involved:

**Table 5.1. Classical musicians: extra-curricular musical activities and final grades**

<b>Student/Instrument</b>	<b>Number of musical activities</b>	<b>Final grade for Performance Module (Third Year)</b>
CL4 (violin)	7	First
CL8 (cello)	5	First
CL2 (viola)	4	First
CL5 (voice)	3	First
CL10 (cello)	3	First
CL6 (voice)	2	First
CL1 (sax)	7	2.1
CL7 (violin)	4	2.1
CL3 (sax/clarinet)	3	2.1
CL9 (piano)	0	Third

The students with first class results were involved in a minimum of two additional activities with one violinist, CL4, playing for six other university ensembles and a musical production in the Wirral. The four musicians who were most actively involved in additional ensembles were string players, CL2, CL4, CL8, CL10. They not only all played in two orchestras, but were also active as chamber musicians. One of the two singers, CL6, had led a scratch band called *Paddy and the Nortiboiz* which competed in the selection rounds for the Eurovision Song Contest in 2014. It is perhaps also significant that of these six musicians, five were also involved in cross-genre musicking

and had played in bands with their popular musician peers, which is discussed in Appendix 3.

What was perhaps surprising was the pianist, CL9, who had gained a grade of 2.1 in her first two years and got a Third in her final year. This pianist had reported some significant improvements in her attitude towards practice, but had changed her teacher half-way through her first year. Whilst she reported that she got on much better personally with the new teacher, it appeared from her reflective essay in the third year that she was heavily dependent on her teacher for instruction in how to practise. This was not typical for the other students, who increasingly reported that they were taking control of their practice behaviours and were working independently. Whilst I did not have the opportunity to conduct an exit interview with this student, I would suggest that being awarded a third after two years of gaining a 2.1 for performance suggests that this student had perhaps lost her motivation for the Performance Module and expended her energies on other modules in her third year.

### **5.5.1. Giving up performance**

What makes students give up a particular module? Poor marks in previous years? Not liking the approach to performance or their course tutor or peripatetic music teacher? A conscious decision in the final year to maximise marks through a specific choice of modules? I was surprised to learn that five students had stopped taking the Classical Performance Module in the third year as they seemed to be making excellent progress.

I approached all the students who had given up and invited them to interview. Three met me for interview (two violinists and one singer); one pianist sent me an email whilst the last 'leaver' did not respond to my invitation to meet or send information by email.

Table 5.2., below shows the results for the five students who gave up the Performance Module after their first two years:



**Table 5.2. Exiting student grades (raw) for first and second years**

Student	Instrument	Recital	Essay	First Year	Recital	Essay	Second Year
CL11 (f)	Violin	70	62	2.1	64	66	2.1
CL12 (f)	Piano	78	66	1.0	68	64	2.1
CL13 (f)	Violin	52	72	2.2	63	72	2.1
CL14 (f)	Clarinet/Sax	61	62	2.1	58	68	2.1
CL15(m)	Voice	58	56	2.2	58	47	2.2

(Grade boundaries: 70%+ First; 60–69% 2.1; 50–59% 2.2, 45-49% Third)

Three students were awarded the same classification for the first two years: one improved and one got slightly worse. Four out of these five students got lower or the same marks for performance in the second year, which may suggest a reluctance to practice. Three of the reflective essays gained higher scores in the second year, whilst two were awarded lower grades. Perhaps this points towards individual struggles with reflective practice. With such a small sample, these results need to be examined further to identify other factors through interviews and email. The singer explained in interview that he was worried by the final recital:

A 45-minute recital in front of a huge concert hall. That is just too daunting for me. I don't think I can do it. ...Some people just want to get better and do it professionally or just want to get better, (CL15, Interview, 2014).

This student had not only been taking singing lessons, but also played in the saxophone quartet and the orchestra. His reflective essay in the second year revealed that he had not made much effort to organise the lessons which were offered by the department, perhaps pointing towards a lack of motivation to improve his playing or even a desire to avoid the relentless focus on individual practice and the practice diary. He also revealed that he had suffered from nerves in his second-year recital and had not attempted to find opportunities to practise his recital pieces in the performance workshops. He had also avoided regular attendance at the intonation workshops in the first semester of the second year. Thus I would conclude that he had realised that performance was perhaps not for him and with a grade of 2.2, he decided to focus on composition in his final year.

One of the violinists who gave an exit interview CL11 continued to play in the Schubert quartet and the Symphony Orchestra in her final year. She came from a musical family, but had been shocked upon arriving in Liverpool that she was surrounded by some very able string players:

I think I didn't play for a while because I was like 'I'm crap. I can't play'. I just got a bit freaked out and then I think it was just a confidence thing really. I came from quite a small school and thought I am alright and just kind of got by, to like actually have to put in the effort now, (CL11, Interview, 2014).

She went on to explain why the Performance Module was not for her:

I realise there were so many gaps in my knowledge, so like stylistically, different playing, different bows, different finger patterns, that I just hadn't really been aware of, because there is a higher level that I just hadn't really been taught, which was a big shock to me. So I guess I had to like pull everything back and start again and I was getting frustrated.... Basically I found I was getting too stressed and I found doing the performance module was taking the enjoyment out of it which I know isn't the case for everyone, but personally that was what it was like for me, (CL11, Interview, 2014).

She pointed out that in her opinion, the Performance Module was not just aimed at people who wanted to become professional musicians, but was also for students who enjoyed playing or singing:

All the people who are doing performance don't necessarily want to go on to be performers. At first I thought, 'Am I like a drop out, because I am not doing it?' Actually, I don't think I am because I am still playing, (CL11, Interview, 2014).

These comments suggested that even within the context of a performance course as part of a general degree in music, students had an unspoken expectation that success in

performance required the attitude and advanced skills that would be expected in a conservatoire.

### **5.6. Summary: classical performance**

The fundamental question which still remains is whether the act of writing a reflective essay for three years helped these students to become independent learners. Some, like this violinist, recognised that she had made significant progress, identifying elements of metacognitive practice strategies and a much deeper understanding of the process of musical learning:

Overall, I have found that improvements and breakthroughs come in waves, and it is therefore never a steady learning process. I have learned what it feels like to do everything at once: observe dynamics, articulation, notes, phrase shaping, technique, and much more. The learning curve is evident from the fact that only three years ago I struggled to read rhythms, or tune my own violin, amongst other things. I have discovered music that was previously unknown to me, and chamber music has become a large part of my life. I hope to continue to learn following my degree, feeling more relaxed about the process, as it isn't tied in with the requirements of a degree. As learning violin is never a predictable process, I have not 'achieved' everything in the way that other modules might require. Instead, I recognise that this is a continuous process and I will forever be able to go into finer detail and improve, (CL7, 2015).

Another student who was hoping to play the viola professionally succinctly described the challenges of making progress now and in the future:

This year I have felt simultaneously more and less like a professional player. More, because I think that I have improved, but less because I am more aware of my flaws and this year they seem to have demoralised me and affected me more [...] I now know with certainty that I want to be a professional orchestral player,

but I do not think that I am quite good enough to get through an audition year. Applying and auditioning is a different story because of nerves, intonation, technique, projection and many other reasons, (CL4, 2015).

The comments above describe the experiences of the classical musicians taking the Performance Module. The discussion in Chapter 7 offers insights into the process of musical learning, based on a practice diary, an annual assessed reflective essay and an annual recital.

## **CHAPTER SIX: MUSICAL LEARNING 2 — POPULAR MUSICIANS**

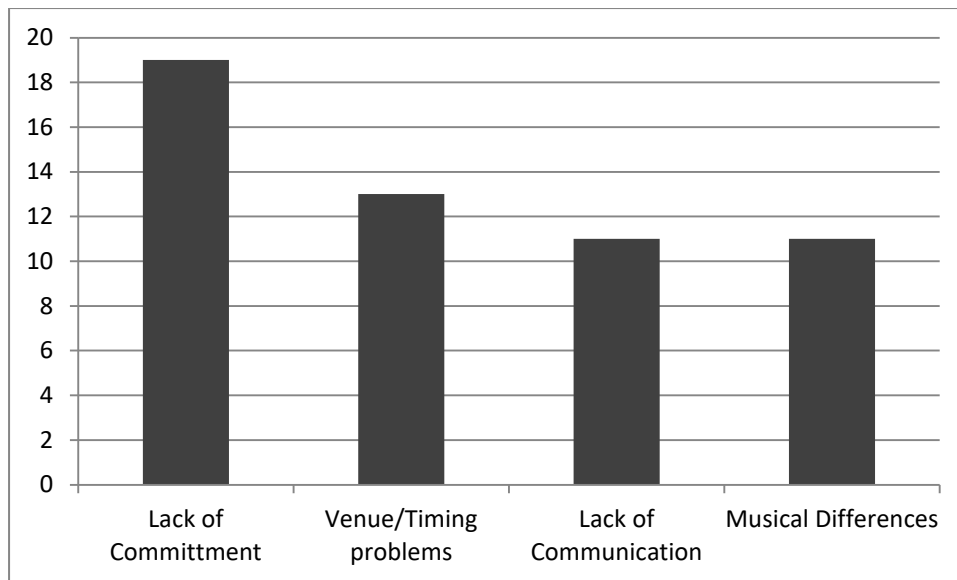
### **6.1. First Year: It's not quite what we expected**

The students who enrolled on the Popular Performance Module came from a diverse range of backgrounds, as already explained in Chapter 4. Their first task was to create three cover versions for a band performance assessment in December. Whilst many students anecdotally reported positive experiences of playing in friendship bands at school and mature students were accustomed to playing with musicians they had known for a long time in established bands, the first student band rehearsals took place in tutor-assigned groups, which created some surprises.

#### **6.1.2. The band experience**

In the first year, students were put into eight bands by the Popular Performance Tutor. Whilst the tutor endeavoured by his own admission to spread instrumentalists and vocalists across the bands, there were inevitable difficulties in a large cohort of 32 musicians who had not been recruited to balance instrumental and vocal skills. Of the students submitting essays, there were thirteen vocalists and ten lead or rhythm guitarists, but only three drummers and five bass guitarists (c.f. Figure 4.1). This imbalance led, for example, to one student band having four vocalists and only one guitarist – a challenge which the band members overcame by focusing on vocal harmony. Two students played voluntarily in two bands and one female drummer ended up playing for three bands.

Close-reading of the reflective essays revealed four areas of discontent in tutor-assigned bands, as shown by the data in Figure 6.1., below:



**Figure 6.1. First Year Popular Musicians: Band Experiences (n=32)**  
**(Zero to multiple responses possible)**

The most frequently cited problem was lack of practice and commitment, (n=19), followed by non-attendance caused by lack of venues and rehearsal times, (n=13), lack of communication between band members, (n=11) and differences in musical taste (n=11), which also affected the length of time required to agree set lists for gigs.

For the majority of the first-year popular musicians in the tutor-assigned bands, the challenge of meeting and getting to know new band members was enormous. As this bassist stated: ‘I expected a band chemistry, I found it hard to understand what we were trying to achieve’, (P24B, 2013). This point was reinforced by one of the guitarists, who was playing with a band in Leeds that he had started before coming to Liverpool:

Currently I am in band that has been together for over two years, in which we have chemistry, a song-writing style, a uniform sound and a unique stage presence. I find it very easy to play with this group of people as we are used to each other's playing styles. Being placed in a group of people I have never met

and having to make music at an advanced level is something that I have not had the experience of doing before, (P9V, 2013).

The biggest concern reported by nineteen out of the 32 respondents was the lack of commitment from other band members. Many students' reflective essays cited instances of musicians failing to turn up for rehearsals without giving any excuse. Whilst several bands tried to manage their rehearsal times using social media such as Facebook, it appears that this did not have any effect on attendance. Reasons given for non-attendance included the pressure of completing university course work, leaving the campus for the weekend on Thursday evenings, part-time jobs and social engagements:

A big problem that I found in our group was the lack of commitment/differences in commitment from certain members throughout the year. Most weeks we would not have a full band because someone would not turn up, usually without an explanation, (P20V, 2013).

For a couple of weeks our rehearsals as a full band came to a stop as nobody let us know until the day of the rehearsal that they couldn't attend, which meant we did not have time to book another one for that week, (P29V, 2013).

It was clear that both the drummer and the guitarist/vocalist had little desire to practise with the band due to commitments to bands outside the university, (P7G, 2013).

As one student put it, 'people just aren't around for rehearsals.' Most of the first-year students lived in university halls of residence and travelled to and from campus on university buses at set times of day, so it is difficult to comprehend that so many rehearsals were missed.

In contrast, four students out of the cohort of 32 students gave evidence of organising band rehearsals effectively, as the two comments below illustrate:

Throughout the year, I feel I have had a leadership role for the band, including ensuring everyone was happy with the chosen music, everyone knew what they had to be doing, as well as organising practices, booking them and ensuring everyone tried to stay focused throughout the practices without spoiling the fun, (P6V, 2013).

In band practice there was one person who took charge generally of the progression of the rehearsal and also how the songs should be changed and they were able to think of the song with each instrument in mind to suggest creative ideas, (P2B, 2013).

These comments also raise questions about the culture of music making in a band. Is this a democratic process, or does one need a strong leader to take charge? One female vocalist somewhat reluctantly emerged as the leader of her group:

I think becoming director of the band was out of necessity, but I have developed as a person from this and being the main organiser has made me more prepared as a performer, especially because of the uncertainty of whether one or two of the musicians would be able to pull off the gig at all, (P20V, 2013).

The guitarist who played for musical theatre performances managed his band members much more effectively after having seen other musicians work in a more disciplined environment. He described the lack of progress in the tutor-assigned band rehearsals thus:

There is a problem with the band's overall concentration in rehearsals. I believe this is because we don't have any kind of 'leader' in the band. I think this is because none of us have known each other for long, so we do not want to seem demanding, but the truth of the matter is that it takes ages to get anything done. This has been made even more obvious from my playing in the pit band for the



musical. I think we got so much done in those rehearsals as we all had a clear goal of what we wanted and we were all working hard towards it, (P16G, 2013).

Impressions of band practice as described in the reflective essays were inconsistent. Some groups seemed to manage with different personnel from week to week. Others simply did not practise. One guitarist in a duo failed to chase up his partner for two semesters and was then surprised that he had no one to perform with in his final gig for assessment and the course tutor had to step in and play with him on the day.

Personal differences of opinion and lack of agreement on set lists for the assessments in December and May were also mentioned in the reflective essays. One guitarist commented bitterly:

This band was in all honesty a nuisance. Many of the scheduled practices were half empty, with the few practices that were fully attended, rife with arguments, raised voices with lots of finger pointing and shoulder shrugging, (P17G, 2013).

Another guitarist reported ‘a huge clash in taste and musical ethos and culture’. One student was clearly dismayed with the other members of his tutor-assigned band:

At first glance, the group as individual musicians just didn’t fit. This was due to having a 60’s style guitarist, a 70’s style bass guitarist, an 80’s style lead guitarist, a reggae percussionist, plus a singer with an Adele-type voice, (P25G, 2013).

In contrast, other students saw the positive side of band members having different musical preferences:

As a band, we were very diverse in terms of musical interests and skills ... which allowed us to draw on a variety of genres as a band to create the most interesting and exciting performances we could, (P26V, 2013).

Even if there were some differences in musical tastes, one singer noted that when there was a lack of agreement over the choice of songs, this could be resolved by group discussion. Another female singer learnt from the difficulties experienced in her first year, and proposed for the following year that:

We could discuss our song choice over Facebook and make sure we have decided we all know the song well enough to get started working on it in rehearsal, (P10V, 2013).

Some of the tutor-assigned groups did begin to establish a more harmonious working environment. Musical collaboration to create covers emerged as a significant factor, as one singer explained:

The best bits in my opinion were the way we changed songs and made them our own without making them unrecognisable from the original, and also our harmonies and being able to include the trumpet without it sounding out of place, (P15V, 2013).

This view was echoed by a bassist who wrote:

I also really enjoyed reworking songs. It is such a fine craft to be able to take a popular song or a song you love and pick it apart and change the song so that it represents you as a musician. I thought that learning this craft this year has helped me a lot as a musician, (P24B, 2013).

One musician whose previous experience was as a solo singer/songwriter described the importance of personal relationships between band members:

The practices with just the band are useful also in forming personal relationships, because we didn't know each other prior to coming to university, and had to feel

each other out as far as musical tastes and ability in different areas are concerned, (P4V, 2013).

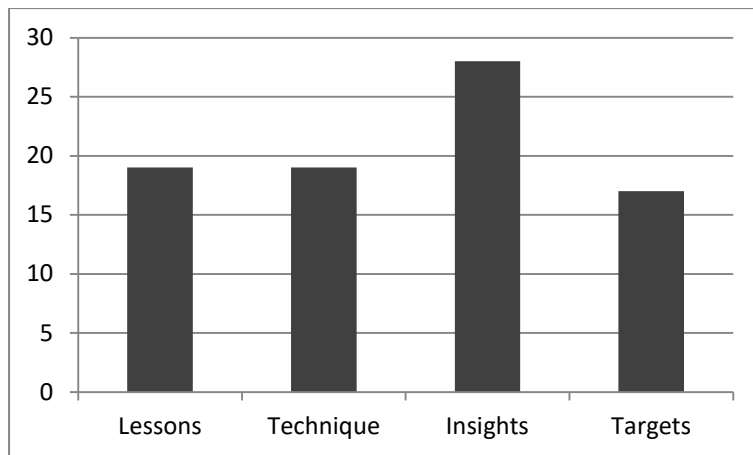
When musical tastes were shared by band members, the experience of working in a tutor-assigned band was positive, as this vocalist reported:

As a band at first we got on really well, we had similar kinds of ideas and liked the idea of being acoustic and an almost folky band, (P14V, 2013).

The student comments suggest that tutor-assigned bands presented a considerable challenge, particularly in the first semester. However, the majority of students managed to get beyond their grumbles and wrote about the process of musical collaboration and learning in their bands, which I explore below.

### **6.1.3. Themes in essays**

Close-reading and re-reading of the reflective essays revealed three main themes, namely technique, insights and targets, which were the same as reported by classical musicians. In addition, Figure 6.2., below shows the proportion of students who took advantage of the provision of individual tuition. Nineteen out of the 32 students took lessons provided by the department of music. One student commented that she had only had one trial lesson; another only went to two, but the rest of the students wrote about their lessons in their reflective essays with enough detail that it is reasonable to assume that they went to all ten lessons which were offered.



**Figure 6.2. First-year popular musicians: main themes in reflective essays (n=32)**

#### **6.1.4. Lessons**

Whilst it might be expected that classically-trained musicians would want to continue with individual tuition at university, the experience of individual lessons for popular musicians brought into focus different approaches to musical learning. Whilst the peripatetic music teachers who work as freelancers for the University of Liverpool have extensive performing experience in popular music and jazz, their approach to tuition could be either formal, informal or a mix of both. The female drummer explained why she did not take lessons thus:

I have never had any instrumental lessons. It was never part of my agenda, growing up. Mostly because, it was time-consuming, costly, and there weren't many female drum teachers. The first ever drum lesson I had was in Liverpool. It was an interesting experience. For me, it was like going to the dentist for the first time, (P3D, 2013).

Two out of the three drummers on the course took lessons with a German drummer who worked for the university music department. Whilst this tutor's formal approach had not suited the female drummer, the two male drummers who had been self-taught both found individual lessons helpful, as one described in his reflective essay:

My lessons have been focused on gaining more independence between all the limbs by following a bossa-nova beat with different stick patterns. Before this year, I had never taken any lessons in my instrument, so I was eager to learn. My lack of tutoring in my instrument showed, however, and I spent a lot of time taking [NN]'s advice and working on wrist position and, in particular, my feet and ankle position on the pedals, (P31D, 2013).

The guitarists had access to two teachers who preferred to teach technique through jazz modes. However, only half (n=5) the students who played guitar took up the offer of lessons. Two were somewhat reluctant to start individual tuition as one guitarist reported:

I have to admit I was a bit hesitant to begin with. My tutor was covering material that was mainly orientated towards a jazz style of playing, which was unfamiliar territory for me, (P28G, 2013).

He persevered with the technical work on chord voicings, alternative chord shapes and modal scales and reported that this enabled him to be more creative when working with his band:

Ultimately I noticed quite a significant improvement in my playing both inside and outside of lessons as the weeks progressed. I wasn't necessarily playing jazz style guitar in all other forms of music, but the techniques that came with learning the material allowed me to incorporate some interesting ideas that I hadn't considered previously, (P28G, 2013).

Not all the guitarists who wrote about their lessons were so positive. One lead guitarist who had been self-taught before coming to Liverpool commented:

Although I appreciated these chords and scales were useful, and perhaps vital in my progression to becoming a better player, I found the practice tedious, bland, insipid and dull, (P17G, 2013).

Four out of the five bass guitarists took individual lessons and were generally positive about their experiences. The formal style of lessons took a bit of getting used to, as one player explained:

The whole feel of the lesson was quite patronising. However, reflecting back to the first couple of lessons, I needed them to get a platform to create from, we repeated the scales constantly, repetitively arpeggiated them until every note and variation was drilled into my head and my finger technique was solid, as if my fingers automatically knew where they were going, (P5B, 2013).

For the vocalists, singing lessons focused on warm-ups, technical exercises and the physiology of singing, as this student related, using language which perhaps suggests that she was not entirely convinced of the benefits that individual tuition might offer her personally:

I feel that the individual lessons were quite useful. They helped me understand more about the body and how we use our voice as an instrument and that the more we use our voices and warm up, the more powerful and/or flexible our voices will be, (P8V, 2013).

The reactions of popular musicians in their first year to individual tuition were perhaps indicative of their previous preferred learning styles. Some self-taught musicians were wary of one-to-one tuition; on the other hand, those that had experienced more formal approaches to learning at school recognised that individual lessons revealed weaknesses in their technique, which they needed to address, which is discussed below.

### 6.1.5. Technique

The nineteen students who were receiving regular tuition wrote about technique in their reflective essays. Many of the vocalists, like their classically-trained peers, accepted to a greater or lesser extent that practice was necessary to develop their skills. Below, I present the students' reported experiences by instrumental/vocal group, starting with vocalists.

Vocalists were very positive about their one-to-one lessons, even though there was a relentless focus on warm-ups and technique, which was new for many:

Before I had any lessons from [NN], I didn't always warm up before individual practice, but by having these lessons, I now know the importance of a decent warm up and so before practising in the future, I will always warm up, (P15V, 2013).

No-one has every really taught me much about technique, but she has made me see that technique really does make singing easier ... She's also helped me a lot with realising that harmonies need to be completely together to sound good and that strong consonant sounds are the best sounds to use to make harmonies sound together, (P10V, 2013).

An experienced lead-singer who fronted a function band and also sang with a barbershop group in addition to the tutor-assigned band was not very impressed with his first singing lesson in which he was given a booklet which explained how the voice works, something which he thought he already knew. Nevertheless, he saw the long-term benefit of technical exercises:

I aim to use these exercises much more frequently, since not only are they useful in relaxing and warming up the vocal mechanism in the short term (i.e. for one

performance), but also over the years they will help to ensure the health and maintenance of my voice, (P4V, 2013).

Similarly, a guitarist who had initially been negative about individual lessons realised that if he worked hard in private practice, he could impress his peers, perhaps something which was important to him a lead guitarist:

After showing me a few alternative tunings, I was able to go home and religiously practise until I could really raise eyebrows with what to me was a completely new sound on an instrument I have been playing every day for almost eight years, (P17G, 2013).

There were other benefits for this guitarist, who also wrote his own material for a band which was formed in addition to the tutor-assigned bands, called *The Sneaky Nixons*:

After teaching me how to really screech a bend and twang notes in and out of tune as an undercurrent for a riff, [NN] brought in a Rockabilly book full of 1950s style licks to jam. This was one of my favourite set of lessons, rather than slog away at scales that were a chore to practise, I was learning suave guitar riffs that I could not only play, but go home and transpose, change slightly — key or tempo — and then use in my own songs and claim that I wrote it, (P17G, 2013).

A Japanese student made copious notes about his lessons with the guitar tutor and mentioned learning about the use of 7ths, chord voicings and also building on his ability to read musical notation. This inspired him to experiment with his instrument and equipment:

During the year, I experimented with all the settings of amps, pedals and my Les Paul's volume and tone knobs. Moreover, I became more aware of the pick attack's dynamics and positions which makes my playing more flexible, (P32G, 2013).



One challenge reported by three of the bassists was playing lines which were overcomplicated, as one student reported, revealing a gradual change in attitude:

Although at times the lessons were very tedious, and I found myself disagreeing a lot with how [NN] kept saying that a bass player needs to remain solid with the drums and stay to their bass lines, not differ, it was only as the lessons and the year went on that I began to see why and understand that sometimes all a song needs is a simple bass line, and that can make a song just as strong as a complex bass line, (P5B, 2013).

This bassist applied what he had learnt in his individual lessons within the band context. Not all the students were as honest. Another bassist was possibly a little bit optimistic about the progress he had made:

As far as my personal advancement on my instrument, I think I have greatly benefited from individual lessons. Being self-taught, I've never experienced a full one-on-one lesson and I think they were very interesting and enjoyable and I've improved mostly on my technique as a bass player in both my left and right hands, (P2B, 2013).

As an aural musician, this bassist persevered with scales and reported that he was also being helped to work with musical notation, something which he had not done before. But not all the bassists stuck with the technical focus from their lessons. One commented that he had gone back to YouTube videos to teach himself slap bass and explained:

I didn't apply the techniques learnt in my bass lessons simply because I couldn't get used to the motions, having previously been self-taught, (P19B, 2013).

The bassists were taught by two tutors who, as far as I can gather from the reflective essays, started by focusing on technique but then adopted a more informal, student-led approach to lessons, which is reflected by the comment below:

My individual practice this year has been focussed on learning to play melodic bass lines. This is something I brought up at the first lesson. [NN] has helped me learn this technique in many different ways. All in all, he has made me feel a lot more confident about experimenting with my playing style, (P24B, 2013).

One of the drummers, who had previously been self-taught, identified that lessons helped him to focus on his technique:

Having not had drum lessons before I began the course, I was a little unsure what to expect. I had been self-taught for six years or so, I was wary that being told what I should and shouldn't learn might limit what I could focus on independently. This wasn't the case, however, and having a tutor has in fact opened my eyes to my potential as a musician and helped me learn new ways of playing and practising, (P1D, 2013).

Individual practice as understood and expected of classical musicians at school entails hours spent in isolation rehearsing chosen repertoire and technical exercises. This is not the case necessarily for popular musicians, as this guitarist/vocalist explained in his reflective essay:

When it comes to my individual practice, I would say that on a bad day I would play the guitar for about half an hour to an hour and on an especially prolific day I could be playing or practising guitar in a variety of situations for as long as 4-6 hours. My techniques and the material I would play during individual practice varied, sometimes I would be jamming along to songs and figuring them out by ear, sometimes I would be solely practising songs that we were covering in the university module band and other times I would be writing and developing original music for both *The Sneaky Nixons* and for solo performance, (P25G, 2013).

This student had conflicting interests: was he to practise for the tutor-assigned band, or devote his time to the band that he had formed with friends, *The Sneaky Nixons*?

#### **6.1.6. Insights**

The popular musicians met their peers once a week for a two hour lecture/workshop in a large performing space. This gave an opportunity for bands to perform to each other and gain peer and tutor feedback. In addition, the tutor spent three evenings a week coaching bands in rehearsal. Here is a typical comment:

By jamming along to and transposing songs from a wide range of different genres from hip-hop to deep house, I have gained an insight into alternative scales, intervals, phrasing and percussive techniques that can be used to great effect in creating original sounds, (P25G, 2013).

One guitarist stood out from his peers as he gained experience not only from bands, but also played for a musical theatre production, recording how he dealt with a large amount of unfamiliar material. He listened to the musical numbers, practised difficult passages and ensured that he had the appropriate guitars and equipment. He noted that he spent a couple of hours a day in preparation, but did not say for how many days this practice took place. He then described a two-hour session in which eleven songs were rehearsed:

The pit band involved reading music, working in cramped conditions and having to know the songs inside out to be ready to go through each song once and be ready to perform in front of an audience. This was hugely different to my first university assessment band which would spend weeks working on one song and not making very much progress, (P16G, 2013).

This student also recorded his experiences working in a function band, *Funk Soul Continuum*, which was formed by students in his year. There were three undergraduates

from the Classical Performance Module and four students from the Popular Music Module. This inevitably led to a mix of formal and informal approaches to rehearsal:

The advantages are that you are able to learn the music easily as it is there in front of you and you know exactly what you are supposed to be playing. The problems occur when playing popular songs such as ‘Play that Funky Music White Boy’ and the sheet music is telling you a structure which is completely different from what the band feels it should be. I learnt that by playing the song and taking a cue from the singer can work much better, especially when playing funk/soul music, as it is so repetitive, (P16G, 2013).

Many of the insights shared by the popular musicians related to performance in contrast to their classical musician peers who reported insights into their individual practice. This illustrates one of the core differences between the two musical genres. Popular musicians in the first year were more analytical about band rehearsals and performances rather than personal practice, perhaps because at this stage, they were all working on covers for the university assessments.

The three drummers described their performance skills: ‘As a performer, I feel that I have developed technically and creatively by being open-minded when it comes to performing and being willing to say yes,’ (P3D, 2013). Similarly another drummer reported:

As a performer, I feel I’ve learnt the importance of putting your all into whatever performance you might be doing at the time. I’ve realised feeling as a whole with the band and the music you’re playing improves your performance dramatically, and you can feel it, (P1D, 2013).

A mature student guitarist who had prior experiences of efficient band practice explained how the tutor-assigned group appeared to require some management:

Having been in bands throughout my school and college years I did my best to offer a sort of structure to our practices, in my opinion if there is no structure to practices, chaos will ensue and valuable practice will be lost on incessant noodling and noise. In my suggested practice model we would get together and suggest potential songs, go away and learn the potential songs, then come back and give our opinions on which one/ones we should pursue, then do the said songs and decide how we can put our own twist on it, listening to everyone's opinions and exploring their ideas in full, (P2B, 2013).

Feedback from the course tutor also helped some students to understand how they could progress further. A bassist asked for feedback after the December assessed gig and realised that he needed to heed what his bass teacher had been telling him:

Although I got a high 2.1, I was keen to find out what it was that was stopping me from getting a 1<sup>st</sup>. And so when I got my feedback from my lecturer, I found out that the thing that was holding me back was in fact me doing too much, as if I'd packed as much as I could into it, and this is where I realised what my bass teacher had said now made sense, (P5B, 2013).

A bassist who had been recruited to play for a second-year band, *Johnny Panic and the Fever*, came to a similar conclusion, based on his experience of gigging in a variety of Liverpool venues:

After gigging in many different venues across Liverpool, I have decided that the best bass player is not the one who is constantly showing his skill, but the one who knows when to play and when not to play, (P23G, 2013).

A singer-songwriter took on the role of front man for the first time in his tutor-assigned group and described his experience thus:

Outside of university I am used to singing and playing guitar at the same time when I gig, whereas in this module, I was only singing. I feel this massively benefitted me, as I was allowed to focus solely on my voice, which is my main instrument and making it sound as good as I possibly can, (P29V, 2013).

Another vocalist was helped by his peripatetic singing tutor to rehearse with other singers in his band:

I have also seen that it's not just vocals that have to be together perfectly, it's also the instrumentalists – everyone in the band needs to know what is happening where so the performance can flow smoothly and, if they are not sure, they can just look at another member of the band to keep the timing together, (P10V, 2013).

Another insight into performance was offered by the guitarist who had played in the pit for the musical and was performing regularly with *Funk Soul Continuum*:

You need to be constantly aware of what is happening around you in the band at all times to be able to react to any situation. The importance of making notes in and after practices has also proved to be essential to being prepared for next practices and for gigs, (P16G, 2013).

Taking notes also helped the female drummer who was playing in three different tutor-assigned bands in addition to *The Sneaky Nixons* as the final assessments approached in May 2013. She drew a distinction between drumming in covers and drumming for original material:

I had to create drumbeats for the songs written by other members of the band, which was quite straightforward as the songs were mainly rock. It was challenging because it was difficult to remember the songs, since playing original music is different to playing music that has already been created. It took

time for me to remember the songs. I dealt with this problem by scribbling notes during practices and obtaining lyrics from the composers and, as a group, we dealt with this problem by practising loads in order to have a distinct idea of the songs, (P3D, 2013).

Despite the challenges at the beginning of the year with the tutor-assigned bands, the students' reflective essays revealed that some musicians were working hard to make their bands work more effectively, using both management and leadership skills to focus on their end-of-year gigs as well as beginning to refine their individual practice and band rehearsal strategies.

### **6.1.7. Targets**

Just over half (seventeen out of 32) students mentioned targets, either for improvement within their first year, or for the second year. However there were targets implicit in the course itself, as the popular musicians were expected to perform twice in their tutor-assigned bands, once in December and once in May. I was surprised that students found it difficult to agree on targets in their bands. The reality, however, as recorded in their reflective essays, was that some bands had considerable difficulties in arranging their set lists, as one lead singer lamented:

We wasted a lot of time in rehearsals just discussing our song choices, (P15V, 2013).

It would seem that agreeing a set list would be the most immediate target for all the bands, given the two assessments. Perhaps it was because of the lack of communication between band members discussed in Section 6.1.2., above that they struggled to agree set lists and agree on targets for rehearsals and performance.

### **6.1.8. Summary: first-year popular musicians**

The popular musicians' reflective essays demonstrated a wide range of experiences of practice and rehearsal. A mature student didn't seem to think that he had made any technical progress, as he explained:

In terms of technicality, I don't think I've changed due to have been playing for fifteen years, (P27G, 2013).

However he demonstrated a keen awareness of his development as a musician, based on what was going on *outside* university, as he reported:

I will continue to develop as a performer over the summer period due to playing with two different bands outside of university, both of which play a completely different style of music to the other. This will give me the opportunity to constantly learn different types of chords, scales and rhythms, ultimately allowing me to improve on a technical level and on a performance level. I think it's very important also to remember the basics of your instrument and so will continue to give guitar lessons, (P27G, 2013).

As this guitarist did not submit a Background Questionnaire, I know little about his musical background or motivation. He seemed to be unimpressed with the first year of the Popular Performance Module and revealed that he only made three rehearsals before the summer assessment in Liverpool. He didn't take lessons at the university, but his reflective essay clearly demonstrates that he understood what could be improved.

## **6.2. Second Year: Discovering practice**

32 musicians continued with the Popular Performance Module in the second year. 23 of these students explicitly mentioned going to lessons provided by the music department - an increase of four from the first year — and thus one of the areas on which they



focused in their reflective essays was technique and performance craft. Unlike the first year, when the students played in tutor-assigned bands, in the second year they were free to form their own bands. Some students played in just one band; others played in multiple bands, both within and beyond the university. The focus for many was writing original material. Some musicians brought previous experience of song-writing as individuals; others wanted to create new material in their band, with all the members being involved in the creative process.

In discussing the reflective essays submitted by the popular musicians, I am going to focus on five areas which were most frequently cited in reflective essays:

- Individual practice
- Band practice
- Working on original material
- Gigging
- Recording.

Song-writing was central to the development of bands, and I will attempt to differentiate between the behavioural aspects of working in a band and the actual process of creating original material. This links back to themes which were discussed in the first year such as personal musical taste, communication and collaboration.

### **6.2.1. Individual practice**

To use 'practice' as a term to describe individual work to improve technical or interpretative skills as understood by the majority of classically-trained musicians can be quite misleading in the cultural context of popular musicians. Nevertheless, a conscious awareness of the need to develop technique appeared to emerge during the second year, strongly motivated by positive experiences in collective musical performance in bands. A guitarist recognised the value of developing jazz guitar techniques in his lessons and becoming more creative, compared with his first year:

I have improved my versatility as a guitarist because I'm now getting used to playing in different styles and being more creative in music that I would normally only listen to and not get to play with a band. (P28G, 2014)

Whilst the guidelines for the reflective essay did not specifically ask students how long they were practising, the focus on practice for many was still within the band. This was made clear by one guitarist, who reported that in a week he would do seven hours of practice which included practising on his own, rehearsing in two bands and playing in gigs.

Not surprisingly, with a great deal of time spent in band rehearsals, there were fewer accounts of individual practice in the second-year essays and several students made it clear that what they practised on their own was linked to what they were rehearsing with their bands. A female vocalist reported:

On top of lessons, I also practise on my own. My solo practices are enjoyable, [...] although I feel like sometimes because I am on my own, I will slack off and maybe not be as picky with my playing as I would be in band practice or in my lessons: I do better when I am accountable to somebody, (P20V, 2014).

Similarly, a bass guitarist admitted that he struggled with his practice, saying

Over the course of the year I have struggled with individual practice. I tend not to practise much when I am not in a rehearsal situation, (P24B, 2014).

However, despite this possible lack of motivation, this guitarist knew what he should have been focusing on:

One big change in my practice routine from last year is I have tried to focus more on rhythmic bass lines. It is important as a bass player to know when to express yourself and when to hold back, (P24B, 2014).

This student was playing in a well-established band, *Johnny Panic and the Fever*, with other members in the third year who were already performing regularly in the city of Liverpool. The student described how he needed to build up his stamina to play an up-tempo six minute song for the band involving lots of position changes and octave leaps. He had also improved his technique for using harmonics and this brought him positive feedback from other band members, and most importantly, the band's singer-songwriter. His practice here was directly linked to performing and recording, as the band released a six track EP in April 2014. With plans for the band to continue in the future, he was motivated to develop his technique further:

I was very happy when I learnt harmonics and it has given me a desire to learn as much as I can about the different techniques a bass player can equip themselves with. Next year I plan to focus on slap bass. Even if I never encounter a song where slap bass might be the right technique to use, it never hurts to be prepared for anything and to add another notch to your belt as an artist, (P24B, 2014).

There was a fundamental difference here between the experience of practice in the first and second years. In the first year, when musicians were assigned to bands by the performance tutor, their experiences were very mixed and a direct link between practice and what bands were rehearsing was not apparent. Two students in the second year changed instruments in order to get more out of their band experiences. One guitarist switched to playing drums, although he had no experience of drumming at all, whilst a guitarist went back to the trumpet, which he had not played since he was twelve years old. This musician realised that he would have to build up his embouchure and technique in order to be able to get through a two hour band rehearsal and subsequent gigs and described a formal approach to practice:

I spent around 45 minutes most days practising scales and arpeggios and the parts that I needed to play for the band, gradually increasing the range and clarity of the notes that I was able to play. I practised techniques to strengthen my

tongue to allow me to add stronger, faster attacks to the notes that I play, (P33G, 2014).

Similarly, a saxophonist described his relationship with his sax teacher in terms which were reminiscent of formal approaches adopted by classical musicians:

My teacher is also friendly but stern which has led me to want to improve my playing as much as possible, putting a lot of effort into practising and getting what I have been given to practise right for the next lesson. Personal practice has also been effective as I have developed an effective plan helping me improve various aspects of my playing in a stimulating and challenging way. I feel the relationship with my teacher and my personal practice has helped improve my learning and pushed me in the right direction with what I want to do with my playing, (P30S, 2014).

It is perhaps significant that this musician was leading *Funk Soul Continuum* and was very motivated to make a success of this function band. Furthermore, the other saxophonist in the band was on the Classical Performance course and they shared the same teacher, which makes it more likely that a more formal approach was taken in one-to-one lessons.

Data from the reflective essays show that many of the popular musicians became conscious of the need to develop their technique which generated new possibilities in performance. This view was echoed by one of the most experienced guitarists in the second year, who was already playing with older, more experienced musicians outside the university. He recognised the value of developing jazz guitar techniques in his lessons at the university as this ‘has a positive effect on my playing in different genres of bands.’ He also learnt how to play scales and arpeggios in different positions to reduce large movements between frets which gave him more freedom to develop melodic lines and solos as a lead guitarist. He enjoyed jamming and improvising with his teacher and recorded chord progressions on his laptop so that he could improvise to these sequences

as part of his practice routine. He was able to see the value of a wide range of musical experiences, and reported that:

Playing in such distinctly different bands has improved my versatility as a guitarist because I'm now getting used to playing in different styles and being more creative in music that I would normally only listen to and not get to play with a band, (P28G, 2014).

A mature student who had fifteen years' experience of playing in bands outside the university demonstrated a similar mature approach to practice. He documented what he practised on his own each week, starting with material which was related to the band he played in and then moved to pieces of music which he believed would help him to develop as a performer. He also learnt from other professional musicians by playing along with a colleague who had 30 years' experience as a lead guitarist. He had not yet taken advantage of the offer of lessons within the university, but stated that he would like to try lessons in his third year, perhaps because he felt that he was learning more from the more experienced musicians in his band.

Given the informal nature of practice for some popular musicians, there were fewer references to the kind of metacognitive strategies for practice that classical musicians described in their reflective essays. Nevertheless, one guitarist described his developing ability to identify problem areas, thanks to his lessons:

My lessons have definitely changed my approach to practising as of now and in the future, I feel I can pinpoint my weak points much more easily to work on [...] and I can now efficiently practise and work on material that I know for certain will help me to develop as a bass player, (P19B, 2014).

It was important for many of the students to employ newly learnt techniques from their individual lessons in band rehearsals and the creation of original material. Here, a drummer explained how he had applied his new technical skills in the band:

Within my lessons, I've learnt various different rock beats which have tended to revolve around different bass drum patterns. These have improved the flexibility of my bass drum playing, which I have incorporated into a few of the songs I have performed with the bands I am in this year, (P1D, 2014).

A saxophonist noted that he had not had lessons for over a year and was a bit 'rusty'. This resulted in some formal work to build up his ability to improvise more effectively, as he recounted in his reflective essay:

To further advance my playing and to create better solos within my lessons I also had to learn all the modes: Ionian, Dorian, Phrygian, Lydian, Mixolydian, Aeolian and Lochrian. Learning these modes would also help to develop my solos as these are what are used over chord sequences to create harmonically interesting melody lines. In lessons I have also just started looking at the II – V – I chord sequence and how it is used within funk and blues. I have also been looking at how modes can be used to create a comprehensive solo over the top of this chord sequence and how it is possible to use one scale but changing what mode, or degree of the scale, is used, (P30S, 2014).

Some of the female singers were not greatly motivated to practise on their own. However, as the academic year progressed and the assessments loomed, one singer asked her vocal tutor to help her and a fellow singer in her lesson. This then allowed her to apply the metacognitive strategies of problem-solving by breaking tricky passages into small sections in her band rehearsals:

When we reach a problematic section of a song, we break down the problem by returning to techniques focused on in warm-ups. With this in mind, I then go through said section singing nonsense syllables instead of lyrics so that I can focus purely on technique, (P26V, 2014).

Another vocalist who had been working as a singing teacher in the year before going to university found it difficult to adjust to being in the role of a learner with her singing tutor. She lacked confidence in her own abilities, perhaps because through her singing lessons, she was confronted by the deficiencies in her technique. Nevertheless, she recognised that it was her negative mind-set that had affected her ability to learn, saying:

I have abandoned fears of sounding bad and continue to improve in lesson after lesson in getting the exercises right. The dramatic change [...] made me realise that the problems I had encountered were all just a case of the mind-set that I was in, (P20V, 2014).

A Japanese guitarist also reported that he was learning from his mistakes:

My development in this year is not only musically, but also mentally. Now I play guitar with more confidence than last year, because I used to overmuch focus on what I might make mistake when playing guitar, however, the nervousness precisely made me to make the mistakes. Whereas I now view mistakes as learning process instead of failure, so even if I played wrong notes on stage, I can naturally continue to play. This also makes me a better performer, (P32G, 2014).

Practising alone, as has already been noted, is not necessarily the norm for popular musicians. Their experience of learning together in the band is far more important, which I discuss below.

### **6.2.2. Band practice**

If the band is the centre of focus for learning for popular musicians, then it is worth exploring how the students described their band rehearsals. Many of the problems encountered in the first year of study with the tutor-assigned bands, see above 6.1.2., were no longer apparent as students had freedom of choice to form new bands, join existing bands or to perform with bands outside the university. Whereas in the first year

bands were concentrating on developing ensemble skills and making imaginative cover versions, in the second year many bands created their own original material, and this figured prominently in reports of band rehearsals.

Positive rapport between musicians in bands that were formed from friendship groups greatly influenced band practices. One singer described the process of rehearsal thus:

I feel we understand each other as musicians to the point that, if one person has an idea that they're struggling to articulate, someone else will know what they are trying to say, and help them explain it to the band (P6V, 2014).

On the other hand, friendship and fun could go too far. The female drummer related that 'jamming' was enjoyable, but may have hindered progress in rehearsals:

We compose songs by jamming out. Jamming is always really fun, and quite relaxing to do, but I feel like this does not benefit in having coherent rehearsals, (P3D, 2014).

Open communication was also important, as explained by a lead singer:

We now work solidly as a group, both healthily criticising and praising each other's suggestions when working on something new, (P10V, 2014).

One bass player explained in detail how a new band *Defunkt* worked in the second year:

One of the most enjoyable points of the second year performance module to me personally was forming a new funk band, which was planned from mid first year. As a result, our practices together were productive from the start. Personally, I feel that we were all able to play free and experimentally since the fact we were all well acquainted by this point, this became a core element to our creativity



since most of our improvisation sessions which we would normally start off and would lead to some basis of a song we would go on to construct, (P19B, 2014).

He also reported that as the year progressed, rehearsal sessions were planned more carefully:

After constructively rectifying the major playing issues we had, we began to plan our practice slots more carefully, running through the songs we had consecutively and collectively discussing ideas for new songs with a hands on approach to playing them as we discussed what direction to follow, and focusing on sections of songs that we felt needed work instead of wasting time by running through the whole song, (P19B, 2014).

This would seem to be a good example of conscious group awareness which enabled the band members to deal with musical problems and make progress. This band was rehearsing twice a week within the university, as well as holding additional informal acoustic sessions off-campus where they lived and playing at open mic nights. Another member of the same band, who had recently taken up trumpet again, described the detailed work which was done by the band after their first assessed performance in December 2014:

We spent a couple of weeks reviewing almost every bar of each song, analysing how well our parts fitted together and changing them accordingly (P10V, 2014).

These students, I would suggest, were developing the listening and arranging skills necessary to make their repertoire more effective in performance and could manage the social dynamic within the band successfully. This was echoed by the Japanese guitarist who was playing with a much more experienced guitarist in the band *Swerve II*. The two students worked together carefully to ensure that their roles were complimentary, as the less experienced guitarist reported:

Take 'Radioactive' as an example; in the intro and verse, P28G plays the chord progression, so I play some volume knob trick to add a violin-like sound effect, then when [it] come to chorus, I play the muted chord progression, P28G plays a melody of octave playing and arpeggios. The teamwork like this makes the music more dynamic and interesting in terms of texture and timbre, (P32G, 2014).

Effective teamwork within the band rehearsal was also described by the musicians who were committed to established bands outside the university, or who were working as session musicians. For example, this guitarist who played in a band off-campus described how important good teamwork was, supported by individual practice between rehearsals. Perhaps as he was playing with older, established musicians, the necessity of individual practice was better understood:

Everyone involved in the band has helped each other to develop, offering encouragement where necessary and constructive criticism along the way. The thing that makes the band gel together so well, is that everybody actually goes away from practice and does their utmost to learn their own parts as best as they can; everybody comes prepared musically for the next practice. This is ideal, as when we go to practise our songs, we're doing just that – practising our songs and not learning them, (P23G, 2014).

The more positive attitudes to band practice were, I would suggest, crucial to the process of creating original material, which I discuss below.

### **6.2.3. Creating original material**

In this group of popular musicians there were solo singer/songwriters who wrote for themselves or for their chosen bands. There were a few very successful partnerships, such as the two guitarists/vocalists in *The Sneaky Nixons*, P17G and P18G; a vocalist and guitarist in an acoustic duo, P21V and P34G – the latter was not taking the

Performance Module and two female vocalists P14V and P13V, one of whom composed the music and the other wrote the lyrics. It is important to remember that students in the 2012–2015 cohort were not able to choose a song-writing module as part of their course. All their efforts at creating original material were driven by individual or band interest and they were reliant on their previous musical experience to develop their compositions.

One of the lead vocalists had been writing his own material prior to coming to university. He recognised as he formed his own band, *Vanilla Guerrilla*, in the second year, it might be seen as a backing band for him, an impression which he wanted to avoid:

Bringing my own songs into the band was not an avenue that I wanted to explore, because I did not want it to appear as if they were almost my backing band, filling in the gaps in songs I had already written, (P29V, 2014).

In his reflective essay, this singer was at pains to create a lengthy narrative describing collaborative song-writing. Seen from another angle, namely the reflective essay written by the second vocalist/guitarist in the band, things did not work so well. There was conflict between the two potential front men, both in terms of song-writing and in their performances. Ultimately tensions grew to such a level that the second vocalist/guitarist left *Vanilla Guerrilla* in December 2013.

It was only after the band acquired a new guitarist P12G that song-writing as a team seemed to function smoothly:

We set about writing a fresh new song from scratch. I came up with the chord pattern, melody and lyrics, P12G came up with a killer catchy lead guitar riff for the chorus, and the main base of the song was there. This particular song, called ‘Say What You Want,’ is a summery indie pop tune, and is a good laugh to play so we enjoy it, (P29V, 2014).

Writing songs was not easy for all the musicians. There were still a few instances of conflict between band members, or a slow realisation that being able to compromise when working with new material was important. One drummer explained in some detail how he learnt to accept the views of others in the creative process:

I found that I tended to disagree with the songwriter's ideas for how the drums should sound, as the ideas tended to contrast with my own. I used this as an opportunity to use other band member's ideas as a way of expanding my playing, and attempting to combine my drumming ideas with other's from the band. This dislike for accepting other's ideas [sic] has shown me that I likely hold a little too much pride in my own playing style, despite knowing that an outsider's point of view is useful, particularly in a band situation, (P31D, 2014).

One guitarist and vocalist had been a boy chorister and orchestral player at school. He was thus accustomed to the kind of disciplined rehearsals typical of classical musicians and got extremely frustrated with a lead singer in his band who played and developed original material by ear:

I feel that when myself and [NN] the vocalist work together, I have to dumb everything down and refrain from using quick and simple music terminology to prevent any embarrassment in practice, for his lack of understanding would embarrass me personally. For him to have got how far he has got with no musical knowledge other than a DIY YouTube guitar lesson is 100% admirable, but for this reason we cannot work together musically, (P21V, 2014).

Was this student limited by his prior beliefs? He did not, from the tone of his reflective essay, appear to have been trying particularly hard to collaborate with the members of his band. There were other challenges in working in bands who were writing original material. A vocalist who had previously written original material on his own realised how his attitude had changed when working collaboratively in a six piece band, *Defunkt*:

I improved my patience when working with other people and it has also given me a glimpse of the effort that goes into composing a multi-instrumental song, rather than simply writing a chord progression and putting words over it, like I was accustomed to do, (P25G, 2014).

One of the newly formed bands decided that they would start by playing covers before progressing to writing their own material:

We did try to write some original music when the band started off, but by playing cover songs first it probably made us a tighter band because we didn't have to worry as much about the music and could concentrate on what everyone was playing. We now have about four or five original songs written as a band, and they all sound like 'our songs' rather than just having a random collection of songs coming from each of our own playing and writing styles, (P28G, 2014).

This demonstrates the importance of establishing musical trust between players. Professional musicians often talk about needing to play with a new colleague in order to understand whether they will get along musically, a view I have heard expressed by classical, rock, pop and jazz musicians. Whilst it seems clear from the reflective essays that most of the university-based student bands were rehearsing regularly and making progress, the musicians who worked with bands outside the university as well as on campus found it hard to keep up with all the scheduled rehearsals. One strategy which was adopted to overcome absences was to distribute sound files before rehearsals so that the members came prepared. Nevertheless, this resulted in some frantic rehearsals in the week before the summer assessments when all the members of the band came together. On the other hand, students who had already had some experience of session work were used to receiving sound files of material to practise before attending gigs or recording sessions.

#### **6.2.4. Summary: second-year popular musicians**

In conclusion, it is fair to say that the majority of popular musicians had made some or considerable progress in their second years. One of the mature students summed up his experiences thus, emphasising the importance of learning as a continuous process:

Looking back over the year it shows to me the importance of never accepting yourself as finished with a project. You must always strive to better yourself and if you ever reach the point where you think you cannot get any better it is time to quit, (P17G, 2014).

The student essays also revealed a pragmatic approach to solving musical challenges within their bands, whether related to issues of performance or collaborating on song-writing. Playing within friendships groups clearly helped all the students, mirroring the positive experiences they had enjoyed whilst at secondary school. For some, there was clear evidence of using networks to gain experience of session work, or playing with older, more experienced musicians.

#### **6.3. Third Year: A possible career in the music industry?**

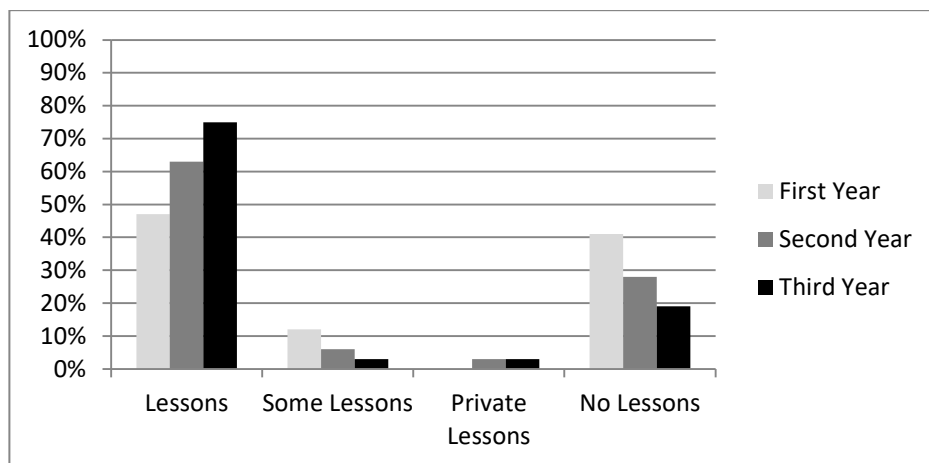
As the popular musicians started their final year, a question emerged. Were the students taking the Performance Module aiming for a career in popular music? And, if so, what did they think that might entail? As more students were gigging off-campus, as discussed below, they were exploring and learning to deal with areas of activity which were part of the commercial popular music scene in Liverpool and further afield, combined with working on technique and performance skills, supported for 80% of the cohort by individual lessons.

The most frequently cited themes in third-year essays are shown below:

- Lessons
- Developing stage presence
- External gigs and touring
- Recording

### 6.3.1. Lessons and working with peripatetic music tutors

As the data in Figure 6.3., below show, the proportion of students taking advantage of the offer of individual lessons increased over the three years of study, perhaps because they had heard from their peers that lessons were helpful, or they realised that they needed to develop their technique in order to perform well for the end-of-year assessments. Just 19% of the cohort had no lessons at all in any of their three years of study.



**Figure 6.3. Popular Musicians: individual lessons over three years of study**

The female drummer who had been so unimpressed by the drum teacher with one trial lesson in her first year took lessons with an ex-student in her third year, which suited her much better, as she explained in her reflective essay:

After two years of not having attended lessons with [NN], it was very weird having drum lessons at all. It's a bit condescending, personally, and I think P35D is a good teacher. Perhaps I felt a bit more relaxed because he was a friend before a teacher. And it is all very casual. I learnt new rudiments and learnt to like the metronome. I am a lot more solid with tempo than I was last year, (P3D, 2015).

She also added in interview that her lessons enabled her to embrace new and unfamiliar drumming styles:

Our drum style is quite different, but because it's so different, he teaches me a broader range of what to play. Sometimes I'll get it, because before coming into uni [university], I was a proper Latin/Jazz drummer and because of *The Sneaky Nixons* I became a very rock-ish drummer. He's pushing me back to basics from when I was starting out. It's just very chilled out, (P3D, Interview, SN2).

Another factor which may have influenced this drummer to take lessons was the development of *The Sneaky Nixons*, who had acquired a promotions agent and were planning to record singles and a first EP during 2014–2015, which is discussed in Appendix 2.

This focus on needing to reach more proficient standards of performance was linked to advice from peripatetic tutors, as a lead vocalist reported:

Out of the few role models and elder individuals who have helped and given advice academically, musically, career-wise as well as on personal issues, is my singing teacher. She has not only given me confidence in the little ability I did have, she has nurtured and progressed not just my vocal range, but the creative song-writing process has changed into a slicker, quicker and more natural process. She has also given me countless tips on how to prepare for recording and live performances, as well as fine-tuning vocal lines and my stage presence, (P17G, 2015).



The Head of Performance, who is responsible for both the Classical and the Popular Performance Modules, recognises that one desirable outcome for the students is that by the end of their three years of study, they should have developed practice skills to continue their learning independently in the future. One vocalist described how she was learning to develop those independent metacognitive skills in her final year:

My singing teacher's main objective has been for me to be able to see for myself what I need to do when singing a song, so that once I have finished university I am fully equipped to do everything by myself and even be able to teach others. This has largely caused me to focus a lot more when I'm singing so that I know what I'm doing wrong when I'm practising and what needs to be done to fix it, (P6V, 2015).

She went on to explain that the skills she had learnt included analysing a song, whether a cover or an original, identifying which areas needed work and then applying her knowledge of singing technique to improve her performance. A male vocalist detailed his work on technique extensively, noting that he at last understood that tips on technique did not apply to specific songs, but to anything that he was singing.

A female vocalist who had been classically-trained realised in her third year that the approach to singing popular music was different, as she reported in her reflective essay:

I appreciated how these lessons were different to [pre-university] classical ones; they were more relaxed and allowed more individual expression and input, less dictating from the teacher, (P26V, 2015).

Another female singer recognised that she would get more out of her lessons if she had a plan of what she wanted to achieve in the lesson:

In addition to this, a benefit of coming to each week's lesson with an idea of what I wanted her to help me with, was that no lesson time was wasted and we were as productive as possible, (P15V, 2015).

Another student who had spent a year working as a singing teacher admitted in her first and second-year reflective essays that she had a tricky relationship with her university singing tutor. In her third year, she seemed at last to realise the purpose of her lessons:

Due to having been a singing teacher myself for a year prior to coming to university, I had assumed that I would know at least the basics of the questions that she was asking me, but these perceptions were challenged as I discovered that I actually knew very little, and what I *had* learnt was very rudimentary. As a result, I realised that to develop professionally as a singer and performer, I needed to further my knowledge on how I was even producing the notes and sounds that I was singing, (P20V, 2015).

A mature student who had been somewhat reluctant to embrace individual tuition in the first two years realised in the third year that he had acquired skills which would help him in the future as a session musician:

I felt that in this final year I really got into the swing of things and could see more of the benefits that came with these lessons. We have been working particularly on my standard of reading notation for guitar music, which has given noticeable improvements in my sight-reading and notation reading skills. This will come in particularly useful in the future when I might find myself being asked to do session gigs that rely heavily upon written scores, or playing pit gigs for musicals and various other productions that have been intricately composed, (P28G, 2015).

Lessons not only helped students to develop their technique, but also offered support for additional areas of musical learning, such as reading notation or developing sight-

reading skills, or offered students an opportunity to begin to build their professional networks.

### **6.3.2. Developing stage presence**

One theme which emerged in the third-year reflective essays was the need to master nerves on stage and give a convincing performance. Drawing upon the reflective essays, it was clear that many were learning more by performing than by rehearsing. Of the cohort of 32 students, nineteen were involved in bands that played in public venues off-campus. Band members described how they had adapted to the challenges of playing in clubs and some of the undergraduates were able to hone their craft through frequent performances. There was a range in the frequency of these gigs; some students were performing every week, some were performing twice a month. For the majority, these performances were valuable, as a guitarist related:

We played a lot of gigs in several venues, such as Zanzibar, Bumper, Hope & Anchor and the Cavern Club, which really increased the understanding between band members in a live situation and also boosted confidence. We took part in two band competitions, the gig we played in Bumper for battle of the bands was a really good one and we went through to the final, (P32G, 2015).

He said that these repeated performances with *Swerve II* meant that he no longer felt nervous on stage. Similarly, the drummer in the band reported:

This consistent activeness of playing our new songs in lots of new venues every other week or so has tightened our set far more than just practising in the practice rooms could do. The experience gave us more opportunity to play the songs in a genuine live situation and see what worked and what didn't, as well as gradually getting more comfortable on stage, (P1D, 2015).

The guitarist in *Funk Soul Continuum* also noted that he had gained confidence from playing in over twenty gigs in his final year:

My on-stage confidence has improved significantly, to a point where I simply enjoy being on stage and I am not hindered by nervousness. I believe this is a result of lots of gigging and more experience in playing in front of a crowd. There is still room for improvement though, (P16G, 2015).

This view was echoed by the saxophonist in *Funk Soul Continuum*, who made it quite explicit that you could identify from a gig what needed more practice:

Having plenty of important gigs which have quite a bit of pressure has also allowed us to develop a lot. These gigs have pushed us to increase the professionalism of the band and get two hours' worth of music that everyone knows really well. Gigs are when you find if the music really works and also how well you know the music, and what needs work, (P30S, 2015).

Some bands managed to get access to Liverpool's larger venues, like the Bierkeller, as this bassist explained:

We had some amazing gigs such as in the Bierkeller, having around 200 people jumping on the tables, dancing to our music was incredible. I believe that gigging has developed our band even more as we gained more confidence on stage and knew what to do and how to do it. It also gave us a better understanding of each other musically as we knew when to engage with each other in the set and when to engage with the audience, (P22B, 2015).

The bassist who had played with *Johnny Panic and the Fever*, the band in which he was working with students from the year above, noted in his reflection that 'I find the easiest ways to ensure that you are going to be as confident as possible is to thoroughly prepare', (P24B, 2015). However, having endured many arguments and personality clashes in the band, he commented 'slowly, the band was killing my desire for music'. His decision, at the end of the third year, was that he was not going to play in a band in the future.

A classically-trained vocalist, who ended up singing backing vocals in her last year recognised that practice and performance were two quite different activities, a view which perhaps was not so common amongst her peers, who regarded performance as a kind of practice. She wrote

[Gigging] showed how unpredictable performance can be and that performance will always be different to your practices, as, for a start, there is an audience watching you and this unpredictability on the night is what actually makes the experience fun, (P26V, 2015).

The female lead singer of a band realised in her last year that band performances were not just about the music, but also the image that was projected of the band:

I feel that one of the things that helped our group develop this year was gigging outside of the performance assessments. This made us feel more like a real band and so we cared more about what we were putting out in the world and started to put a lot more effort into our writing and practising, (P6V, 2015).

Only one student wrote about cooperating with the sound engineer at a venue, an important aspect of ensuring that sound levels and balance are discussed before the band played. This singer reported that he did this in order to feel more confident:

For both *Vanilla Guerrilla* and *Lend me Your Ears*, I printed off set lists for everyone, with a guitar spec for myself and a set list for [NN], the sound engineer at the Zanzibar, detailing the sonic changes between songs. It's the kind of thing that only takes half an hour to do, but it not only improves your set sonically, one feels more comfortable and confident in mind as well, (P12G, 2015).

### 6.3.3. External gigs and touring

The Popular Music Performance Module does not require students to actively seek out performance opportunities off-campus. However, for the more ambitious musicians, playing in the city of Liverpool or beyond offered exciting opportunities. I discuss the experiences of the students involved in *Funk Soul Continuum* and the *The Sneaky Nixons* separately in Appendices 1 and 2. In contrast, the accounts discussed below include both students in university bands and individuals who began to work as session musicians, drawn from their reflective essays. These undergraduates were in a minority at this stage; as is documented below. For example, one first-year reflective essay offered glimpses of a student with an emerging professional network. This guitarist played for the Scottish singer-songwriter Sandi Thom and recounted his experiences thus:

My only real experience as a session player was last year when I had to learn and perform a set list for Sandi Thom. Luckily this band was a less stressful experience as I had more than a week to rehearse and learn the set! (P28G, 2013).

A bassist was asked to work for a folk band in his second year. As he didn't have any experience of this genre, he went to his bass teacher for advice and learnt how to control the rhythm without a drummer, as he described in his reflective essay:

I was asked to step in for another bassist in a folk band outside of the university course. The only problem was I had never played folk music before, and had little understanding of the style and what they required. So straight away I organized a few lessons with [NN] to address the challenge, we looked at different scales and bass lines commonly used in folk music. Once I listened to quite a lot of the style of music I began to get my head around the playing, the band didn't have a drummer so my job was to keep the rhythm rooted, and in hindsight this overall experience aided me in the development of my bass playing, (P5B, 2014).

This musician realised that this one-off opportunity required him to turn up able to play in the appropriate style and he had made the effort to prepare himself properly, showing that he had a sense of the professionalism that would be expected of a session musician. Moreover, he recognised that his bass tutor was also a valuable contact who could introduce him to other musicians on the Liverpool scene to get session work, something which he pursued more in his third year, perhaps in the hope that such contacts could help him to develop a portfolio career playing for several bands.

Working alongside established musicians offered one of the drummers an opportunity to network with professionals and gain insights into the wider aspects of popular performance and production, as he reported in his first-year essay:

I have particularly enjoyed my time spent touring and roadying for my friend Billy Lockett. Over 3 small tours and various different one-off gigs, I have been able to watch from close up and meet some brilliant artists and drummers. The experience from working on a show supporting Lana Del Rey at a sold out Apollo Theatre and then watching her whole production from so close afterwards was a particular highlight as I really got an insight of what it is like to be a touring session musician at the highest level and I really value the advice and tips received from the individuals I spoke to on that show, (P31D, 2013).

This drummer was also getting paid to play cajon for a Greek band, showing that he was interested in exploring a variety of musical genres:

My own performances away from the course have included a wide variety of gigs, mostly more as a percussionist on a cajon in function bands rather than behind a drum kit. I played a number of very well paid gigs filling in for their travelling cajon player in a Greek band, one of the most popular in the country, (P31D, 2013).

It is important to emphasise that these three students who were exploiting their contacts to extend their networks were in the minority, especially in the first and second years of study.

One student stood out from the cohort as he went on tour with his own band, *Fizzy Blood*, which was based in Leeds. He had continued to rehearse with this band throughout his first year and then went on tour in Europe as he described in his reflective essay:

Among the various shows I have played with my band in England this year, embarking upon my first European tour across three weeks has been my steepest learning curve. Throughout these three weeks travelling as far as the Czech Republic, I was able to view and evaluate many different performers and how they interact with the crowd as well as how they conduct themselves within that very unique environment. I saw many new things, and was able to apply characteristics of performers I deemed to be interesting to my own stage persona, (P9V, 2013).

He also recognised that stamina was necessary to survive the rigours of gigging every night, so he and his fellow band members found a neat solution to avoid excessive vocal strain, as he explained in his reflective essay:

Playing shows over consecutive nights is something I had done before, but not in such quantity. Therefore, as a group we decided to detune our guitars a whole tone in order to preserve our voices, (P9V, 2013).

This student, perhaps because of his range of experiences with his home band in Leeds commented that the university tutor-assigned band would not progress unless they performed in public:



Regardless of how often or for how long we practised, we would not improve as a band unless we began to play gigs, (P9V, 2013).

A mature student who had continued to play with his band on the Wirral throughout his first and second years of study reflected on the challenges of offering sets which appealed to local audiences. His band, as he related, played covers of music which may have seemed rather old-fashioned compared to the innovative music scene in Liverpool:

Mainly because of the age range within the band, we end up playing music which goes from the eras of 60's, 70's and 80's, as it's music which most members are familiar with. This creates some diversity but unfortunately, also has a direct impact on where we can play gigs – we're somewhat limited as a lot of bars and pubs want reasonably contemporary, well-known music; something which is current and in the charts. This, in my own opinion, is a contributing factor to the lack of gigs we've played since September, (P27G, 2014).

The benefits of playing to audiences off-campus were clear to those who created opportunities through their personal contacts.

#### **6.3.4. Recording**

The department of music has three recording studios, but students reported in conversation that it was hard to book these facilities. Thus students who sought to make demo recordings either used their mobile phones in rehearsal in the pop practice rooms or were forced to use other venues in the city, such as the facilities at LIPA, the Parr Street Studio and the Motor Museum. Professional recording involved costs which made it difficult for students on limited budgets to get into the studio, which contrasts with the experiences of students at other comparable universities such as York, Nottingham and Kent and the specialist facilities offered to popular musicians at Griffith University in Australia described by Lebler and Weston (2015). However, one student from London

who already had a promotional agent was gigging regularly, trying to build a new fan base in Liverpool, as well as recording an EP as he recounted in his first-year essay:

I would also owe my personal development to my promoter Thomas J. Speight. He has pushed me into playing almost weekly gigs and creating fresh new set lists, so my set doesn't get boring, so I now have a vast repertoire. I have written an EP of solo material that I have started recording and have interest from a label and a few friends of mine are in the process of remixing the first track from the EP. I have started drawing artwork and painting an exhibit for the EP, and wish to release them next winter as a cohesive project, to connect my artwork to my music, (P21V, 2013).

This EP recording took place in Liverpool, so another student from the course who had experience as a session musician helped out with drums and backing vocals:

I have played percussion and backing vocals on course friends' songs, recorded in the LIPA studios with P21V. This was all really different to my previous performance experiences which only ever really involved playing and recording drum parts in a band, (P31D, 2013).

The involvement of a music industry professional was, for *The Sneaky Nixons*, a turning point in the development of the band, see Appendix 2. Their lead singer related in his second-year reflective essay how the band began to take off early in 2014:

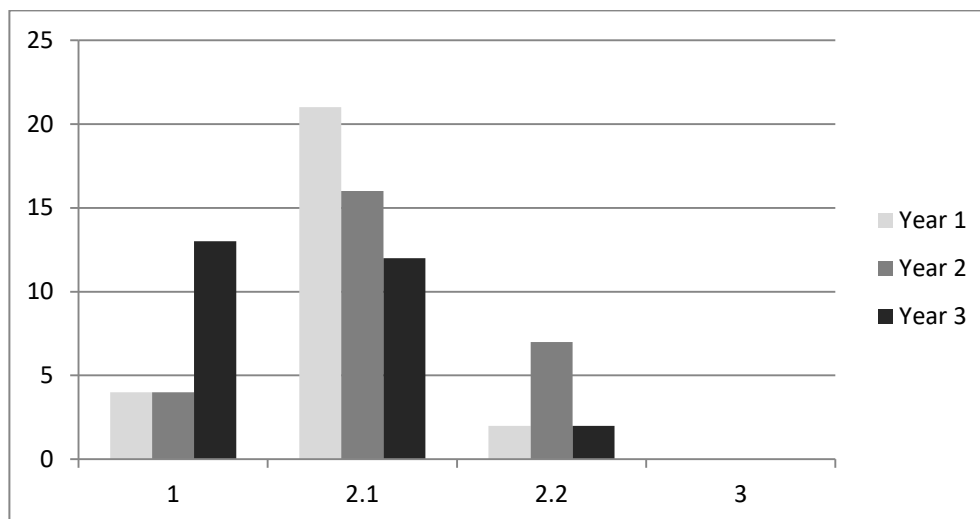
From February to Easter *The Sneaky Nixons* were busy. We had spent two weeks in the studio recording four demo tracks, and had lots of gigs to rehearse for, (P17G, 2014).

Whilst recording was not central to the developments of most of the bands which confined their performances to the university campus, some students used other contacts

to develop their skills in the studio. This raises a question about the role of recording in band development, which is addressed in Chapter 7.

#### 6.4. Results: popular musicians

For popular musicians, 20% of the performance grade is awarded for the December gig, 50% of the performance grade for the May gig and 30% is awarded for the reflective essay. The grades for the popular musicians over three years show a sharp increase from four to thirteen first class grades in the final year as shown in Figure 6.4. below. This might point towards the success factors which I discuss below in more detail, such as taking lessons, gigging off-campus and being involved in multiple bands.



**Figure 6.4. Popular musicians' grades over three years**

I have already published tables of key success factors for classical and popular musicians for their first and second years of study (Esslin-Peard et al., 2015) which I do not propose to discuss here in detail. Rather, I wish to focus on the behaviours which seem to be most significant for the popular musicians who were awarded firsts for their final year of the Performance Module. The data from the reflective essays point revealed that the musicians who were awarded firsts tended to be involved in more bands and were prepared to explore musical activities beyond the university campus.

As a comparison, Table 6.1., below shows the extra-curricular musical activities of the popular musicians who were awarded firsts in the third year of the performance course. Whilst these students were not involved in as many different types of ensembles as some of their classical peers, such as orchestras, choirs and chamber music, they sought additional avenues for making music in multiple bands or in the recording studio.

**Table 6.1. Popular musicians with firsts: extra-curricular activities (n=13).**

Activity	Drums	Drums	Lead Vox	Lead Vox	Lead Vox	Lead Vox	Lead Vox	Lead Vox	Guitar	Bass	Vocals/Instrumental		
Student	P1D	P3D	P4V	P6V	P10V	P17G	P27V	P15V	P28G	P5B	P14V	P26V	P13V
Number of bands	4	4	3	1	2	1	1	5	5	6	2	3	1
University Band	4	3	2	1	2		1	5	4	4	2	3	1
External Band		1	1			1			1	2			
Lessons	1	1		1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
Original Material	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
Gigging	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
Recording CD/Single		1	1			1				2			1

An analysis of the data from the thirteen students from the 2012–2015 cohort who were awarded firsts for the Popular Performance Module showed that the most important factors pointing towards a high grade were writing their own material and playing external gigs (n=13), taking individual lessons (n=12) and recording in the studio (n=4).

### 6.5. Summary: popular performance

Based on the analysis of the reflective essays, a gradual shift emerges from informal learning practices to using a mix of informal and formal learning behaviours on a continuum over time, influenced not only by individual motivation, but also by the needs of the band. Initial conclusions suggest that the discussion about how to rehearse in the

tutor-led workshops, coaching from the Popular Performance Tutor, keeping practice diaries and the annual reflective essay, enabled popular musicians to develop a conscious understanding of their practice experiences and make individual and collaborative choices about their further development. Whilst many of the students arrived at university exhibiting informal practice behaviours, they subsequently developed an ability to adopt informal and formal approaches to learning according to the musical context.



PART THREE:  
Discussion of Findings  
and Conclusions

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## **CHAPTER SEVEN: DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS**

This discussion starts with the research questions in order to frame the evidence that was gathered in Chapters 5 and 6.

- What experiences of practice and performance do the students describe in their reflective essays?
- Do students develop an understanding of their practice and performance behaviours through their reflective essays? If so, how?
- What role does reflection play in musical learning?

Below, I discuss my findings relating to student experiences of musical learning, drawn from their reflective essays with accounts of using the practice diary, individual practice and lessons. I then consider the emergence of understanding about practice, rehearsal and performance through the development of technique, the use of metacognitive practice strategies and the application of what has been learnt by the individual in ensembles and band rehearsal and performance.

The discussions about the role of reflection in musical learning include general considerations for reflective practice and the benefits of learning to reflect for the students in this study.

I then look at the grades awarded for performance and the reflective essays for the 2012–2015 student cohort and consider the combination of formative and summative assessment methods and I posit a pathway for reflective practice based upon practice diaries and reflective essays.

Finally, I consider a revision of my model of musical learning, present the Spirals of Reflection models and offer some evidence about the career pathways of students after graduation.

I also draw upon the interview with the Head of Performance in this discussion. He initially worked on reflection in music education in partnership with the ABRSM from 1995 to develop a training programme for prospective examiners and subsequently, since 2005, he has led performance and critical listening courses with reflective practice for undergraduate and post-graduate students in tertiary education.

## **7.1. Learning journeys and theories of knowledge**

Theories of knowledge and understanding, which were discussed in Chapter 2, offer a framework against which the learning journeys of the students in this study can be compared. Both constructivist and cognitive theories of learning can be applied to musical learning, as musicians not only build their knowledge of their craft by linking new experiences to prior knowledge, (constructivism) but also make sense of these experiences as changes take place in their internal cognitive processes. As I will discuss below, this research project indicates that reflective practice plays an important role in musical learning, as it can help the learner to discover underlying cognitive and metacognitive thought processes which underlie practice and performance behaviours. Additionally, for the popular musicians, and some of the classical musicians who worked in bands or ensembles, the social context of learning, as described by Wenger (1998) as ‘communities of practice’, featured in their written accounts of musical learning.

### **7.1.1. Overview of student experiences of musical learning**

As the students themselves reported, progress in musical learning was not necessarily linear, a view shared by Mills (2005, p.158). Each student worked on different areas of their craft in different orders, which echoes the study of undergraduate musicians made

by Reid (2001). The percentage frequencies of three themes which appeared consistently in all three years of study are show below in Table 7.1.

**Table 7.1. Main themes in reflective essays**

<b>Essay Theme</b>	<b>Popular First Year</b>	<b>Popular Second Year</b>	<b>Popular Third Year</b>	<b>Classical First Year</b>	<b>Classical Second Year</b>	<b>Classical Third Year</b>
<b>Technique</b>	74%	70%	77%	100%	100%	100%
<b>Insights</b>	78%	81%	96%	90%	100%	90%
<b>Targets</b>	52%	63%	63%	60%	70%	60%

For popular musicians, a focus on technique increased over the period of study in parallel with the increasing frequency of insights into personal musical development. These two themes appeared in the essays written by the students who were taking individual lessons, which suggest that they may have been encouraged to be more self-critical by their peripatetic tutors. Popular musicians were less likely than their classical musician peers to set short-term targets, particularly in the first year, perhaps because of their dissatisfaction with the tutor-assigned bands. I would suggest that the classical musicians were most self-critically aware and ambitious in their second year; in the third year, as has been discussed in Chapter 5, some realised that a career as a professional performer might be beyond their volition or capabilities and so mentions of insights and targets declined. Table 7.2., and Table 7.3., below highlight the similarities and differences between the experiences of classical and popular musicians.

**Table 7.2. Similarities in experiences and behaviours, 2012–2015 cohort**

<b>Classical Musicians</b>	<b>Popular Musicians</b>
Required to keep practice diary	Required to keep practice diary
100% uptake of individual lessons in all three years.	Uptake of individual lessons increases from 60% in first year to 82% in third year
Descriptions of individual practice in all three years (100%).	Descriptions of individual practice increase from 63% in first year to 78% second year, but decrease to 70% in third year.
All students (100%) describe working on technique in their three years of study.	Descriptions of technique decrease from 74% to 70% in second year, but increase to 77% in third year.
Personal targets mentioned in 60% of first year and 70% of second year essays; 60% mention targets in the third-year essay.	Just over half the students mention targets in first-year essays; the frequency of targets in second and third-year essays rises to 63%.
Insights into practice behaviours at 90% or over in all three years.	Insights into practice behaviours increase from 78% to 96% over three years.
Concerts off-campus for 60% of students; one student performs in third year as lead singer in Eurovision band.	Gigging off-campus for 70% of students in the third year.
Independent rehearsal in chamber ensembles, 90%, e.g. sax quartet, string ensembles, jazz band, function band, rock band, without input from tutors.	Independent rehearsal in bands, 96%, with less or no tutor involvement in second and third years.

Classical musicians described their lessons and their individual work on technique in all three years of study. The popular musicians, on the other hand, became rather more aware of the need to work on technique in their third year and demonstrated levels of insight in their third year comparable with the insights recounted by the classical musicians in their second year.

Classical musicians in their first year of study set themselves targets which related to the development of their technique and more effective uses of the practice diary. Popular musicians, on the other hand, were more likely to report targets in their second and third years of study, motivated by the aspirations of the band members with whom they were playing.

Contrary to Zimmerman (2002), whose research describes how high school students in the United States were *taught* metacognitive learning strategies, the data from this study suggest that the majority of students developed at least some metacognitive practice strategies during their three years of study, with varying levels of support from their course tutors. Echoing Hallam (2001, 2006) and Bathgate et al., (2012), the classical musicians described metacognitive practice strategies such as planning their practice sessions and breaking down difficult sections in order to tackle technical problems in their first year whilst the popular musicians were more likely to provide evidence of such strategies in their second and third years of study.

**Table 7.3. Differences in experiences and behaviours, 2012–2015 cohort**

<b>Classical Musicians</b>	<b>Popular Musicians</b>
Initially, a formal approach to musical learning, starting with technique; students playing in string quartets planned and managed rehearsals to cover technique and interpretation; five students involved in cross-genre musicking adopted informal learning strategies and worked aurally in bands.	Initially, an informal approach to musical learning, especially for self-taught students; however in the second and third years of study, evidence emerges of formal approaches to individual practice and band rehearsals, depending on context, e.g. forthcoming gigs.
Voluntary participation in ensembles, such as orchestras, chamber groups, choirs. One student did not play in any ensembles.	Compulsory participation in tutor-assigned bands in first year; playing in bands in friendship groups in second and third years; one student did not play in a band in the second and third years.
One classical singer, who formed the Eurovision band, wrote songs. Other cross-genre musicians were not involved in creating original material.	Song-writing was a key element for most students in second and third years; only two students did not get involved in song-writing.
Intonation module for 12 weeks in second year.	N/A

It is interesting that classical and popular musicians exhibited behaviours typical of both formal and informal approaches to learning, demonstrating that they could adapt to work with their peers in different musical genres and styles. In addition, some of the popular musicians deliberately took a more formal approach to developing their technique in the second and third years of study. Whilst popular musicians were obliged to play in bands,

all but one of the classical musicians voluntarily participated in orchestras and ensembles on- and off-campus. Participation in additional ensembles and bands seems to be a contributing factor to high grades in the third year, as has already been discussed in Chapters 5 and 6. All students were required to keep a practice diary for each year of their study. I discuss their experiences of keeping a practice diary below.

### **7.1.2. Practice diary**

The challenge of learning to use a practice diary effectively is considerable. As the Head of Performance explained, habit is what feels natural to you, but practice is about changing habits. Changing habits requires conscious thought and effort and students needed to discover how to change their practice routines. A number of higher education music institutions have introduced practice diaries or blogs as discussed by Daniel (2001), Creech et al., (2008), Monks (2009), Gaunt (2010) and Ginsborg and Wistreich (2010). As outlined in Chapter 2, practice diaries do not necessarily promote deep learning, as Bleakley (2000) and Cowan (2013) recount. However, it would appear that the combination of a practice diary with the annual reflective essay does have some impact on musical learning in terms of developing critical thinking, as the Head of Performance explained in interview:

It's not just the hours spent practising, therefore it must be, how do I understand this? Hence, a structured practice diary which itself is not necessarily reflective, and certainly not assessed. The assessment [reflective essay] was the annual stop, think, have a look. The question is, 'How conscious am I of the process?' (TS, 2015).

As the students on the Classical Performance Module outlined in their reflective essays, it was not immediately apparent what the benefits of a practice diary might be. They had not been asked to reflect on their practice before coming to university. Looking at my field notes observing the Head of Performance with first-year students, not only from the 2012–2015 cohort, but also from subsequent cohorts, it emerged that learning how to use

a practice diary required a lot of support, as Ryan (2013) emphasises. The Head of Performance in this study was very clear about what he wanted students to achieve through the process of practice, describing a four part transformation drawn from the Johari Window:

Unconscious un-control, conscious un-control, conscious control and hopefully getting as far as unconscious control, (TS, 2015).

This was made explicit when he asked students to practise in front of their peers. He posed questions like ‘What is the process of practice all about?’ ‘What is happening?’ ‘What is not happening?’ He was trying to lead them towards an exploration of the ‘how’ of learning, practising and finally performing. This process of asking the question ‘how’ in the performance workshops, week after week, led to students writing about how they approached tricky passages and demonstrated that they were beginning to grasp how to become self-critical about their own practice. This pedagogical approach, focusing on asking ‘how’, might be seen as a practical demonstration of the process required in practice to develop self-critical awareness. It is not apparent from conversations at conferences with academics involved in teaching performance in higher education that other institutions facilitate ‘public practise’ in workshops, which makes the approach in this research study unique.

The undergraduates were advised to read the notes they had made in their practice diaries regularly, which made them aware of the ‘play-through’ behaviours which Thomas (1993), Barry and McArthur (1994), McPherson and Renwick (2001), Hallam (2001) and Green (2008) amongst others, report are typical for juvenile musicians. Students on both courses who reviewed the practice diary regularly began to understand when they were making progress and when they got stuck, even if they lacked the courage to tackle their problems.

One of the professional musicians who close-read all the reflective essays for me in 2014 summed up the role of the practice diary thus in interview:

The practice diary acts as a kind of reminder of the end date for assessment. So, at the end of the first year, the practice diary would help me to improve, to see what I am doing wrong, linked to critical moments in performance. Those who pushed against the diary and wrote things like, ‘That was shit’ were not gaining anything from the diary, but they may have been gaining from the internal process, (RCA, 2014).

This highlights that even if students struggled to keep a practice diary, or wrote what may have seemed like facetious comments and were negative about the process, the fact that they had to keep a diary may have prompted the beginning of self-awareness about their practice behaviours.

There were fewer references to practice diaries in the second and third year reflective essays. Perhaps this was because the classical musicians had, after the first year, recognised the value of the practice diary and no longer felt it necessary to document its use. One of the students, the viola player CL2 who had been at the RAM before coming to Liverpool, wrote about having a practice diary in her head; the violinist CL4 who led the University Orchestra no longer kept a practice diary as such, but wrote practice notes directly on to her music.

Unlike their classical musician peers, the popular musicians made infrequent mentions of the practice diary per se, perhaps because its purpose was not discussed in workshops. It seems that the Tutor for Popular Music Performance may not have taken such a rigorous approach to reflective practice — an approach which, for him, was entirely authentic and aligned with his identity as a rock musician. There may also be an element of anti-institutional rock ethos here, as described by Parkinson (2013), which would seem to preclude the use of pedagogic models. I observed the Tutor for Popular Musicians coaching. He focused on encouraging students to think about their musical product, namely cover versions in the first year and original material in the second and third years. There were not, in the sessions which I attended, any discussions which were directed towards analysing the process of practice, either for bands or individuals. Thus I



have to conclude that the popular music undergraduates were left to their own devices to work out how to use their practice diaries and what to write in their reflective essays. Both sets of undergraduate musicians had access to the Performance Module handbook online, see Table 4.6., but I cannot say what use they made of this resource.

As emerged in Chapter 6, the popular musicians initially wrote about band rehearsals in their practice diaries. Those that appended their practice diaries to their reflective essays mainly used them as a log of when and with whom rehearsals had taken place. Some added descriptions of what material was played, but there was a distinct absence of critical reflective writing examining the process of practice, reflecting one of the weaknesses of reflective journals identified by Cowan (2013). The key point about keeping a practice diary was made explicit by the Head of Performance in interview:

I don't think a diary, if it's visceral and therefore real, I don't think it can be reflective. It's mixing two things up and it falls into the same trap of 'You'll get better by doing'. If you do a diary, you'll become reflective. I don't think that's true. If you do a diary, it is merely a log. You then have to do the 'stop, think'. You intercept the day-to-day hassle with a moment of deliberate thinking. That's not the same as believing that just because you're sentient, you are being reflective, (TS, 2015).

In contrast to other institutions which have used practice diaries or blogs as part of undergraduate performance courses, it emerges from this study that a practice diary alone does not necessarily lead to the development of reflective practice. However, the combination of the practice diary *and* the annual assessed reflective essay seems to be more effective. The practice diary becomes the principal source of information for the reflective essay; the act of writing the essay at the end of the academic year encourages self-critical thinking about rehearsal and performance.

### 7.1.3. Individual practice

As the Head of Performance discovered in his research with his peripatetic music teachers in 2005, the majority of teachers reported that undergraduate students did not know how to practise:

Two things struck me: that the instrumental and vocal teachers were all spending a huge amount of time in their lessons instructing people how to practise, what intonation was, the basics, the fundamentals if you like, (TS, 2015).

Similarly, Gaunt (2010) explores conservatoire students' perceptions of individual tuition and finds that most students did not keep a practice diary and only two developed skills in self-reflection. She reports (2010, p. 201):

The need for practice and for practice of good quality was a universal basic assumption, yet few were proactively engaged in trying to improve their own ways of practising.

Accounts of individual practice were central to the reflective essays of the classical musicians in all three years of study. This was to be expected as they had all experienced one-to-one individual tuition at school and had, to a greater or lesser extent, some understanding that practice was fundamental to their development as musicians. I asked students in the Background Questionnaire what they had understood by the term 'practice' when they were at school. Comments included:

Play pieces/scales over and over, regardless of any improvement, (CL5).

Playing through pieces, trying to get better, (CL3).

Playing a piece repeatedly on your own, (CL8).

The popular musicians' descriptions of what practice entailed whilst they were at school were very similar:

Scales, (P17G).

Playing/learning set pieces/scales for music grades, (P28G).

Working towards grades. Improving technique — not very exciting, (CL16G).

None of the comments in the Background Questionnaire alluded to any deliberate practice strategies which might have accelerated improvement or pointed towards self-critical analysis. It would seem therefore that the Head of Performance's assertion that students initially did not know how to practise was, for the 2012–2015 cohort, largely true. Nevertheless, there were marked differences between the change in the approach to practice for classical and popular musicians. As I have already explained above, the relentless focus on how to practise in the weekly performance workshops for classical musicians resulted in a growing self-awareness of practice habits, as related in Chapter 5. The Head of Performance described the reaction of a first-year student after he had practised in public in the performance workshop:

As this guy said, 'I've done more work in the last half hour than I have done in the past ten years', because nobody has explained it to him. By putting students on the spot, you're making them focus and concentrate rather than blindly going through a piece assuming that's what practice is, (TS, 2015).

Based on the evidence from reflective essays, the classical musicians grasped the key elements of deliberate practice and became much more self-critical about, for example, where they practised and what they were doing, even if some acknowledged that they were playing through, as this student wrote in her reflective essay:

My practice has become much more effective, but I still spend too much time playing through a piece and not practising the bits that need to be practised, (CL4, 2013).

Motivation, as O'Neill and McPherson, (2002) explain, is an important factor in practice. Juvenile students are heavily influenced by their teachers or their parents and

thrive on positive praise to motivate their practice. The assumption that undergraduates could motivate themselves to devote several hours a day to individual practice without any support from third parties was not supported by evidence from the reflective essays, particularly in the first year of study. Although classically-trained students wrote about planning practice sessions, which was clearly helpful for some; one, CL7, revealed that over-planning could be demotivating; others such as the cellist, CL8, found that writing about what she was practising in her practice diary distracted her from her practice.

One classical student, CL2, stood out in comparison with her peers. She had already completed one year of undergraduate study at the RAM before she joined the University of Liverpool. She explained in her first-year reflective essay that she was looking for the moments in which she lost herself in the music. This seems to point towards Csikszentmihalyi's definition of flow (1997):

A merging of action and awareness where consciousness, mind and body become ordered and harmoniously directed, without feelings of chaos, indecision or anxiety.

It is arguable, on the evidence of this student's reflective essay, that she had met the seven conditions that Csikszentmihalyi proposes for an individual to experience a state of flow, adapted from Kirchner (2011):

- Challenge matches skill level
- Totally absorbed in the task
- Goals are clear
- Provides immediate feedback
- Sense of control
- Loss of self-consciousness
- Transformation of time

Not only was she in a state of flow, but she was also exhibiting unconscious competence, the fourth quadrant in the Johari Window. This student's experiences were not typical for cohort. She was the only respondent to describe such an approach to practice in her first two reflective essays, possibly because she had already exceeded the 10,000 hours posited by Ericsson et al., (1993) for professional levels of expertise. The Tutor for Classical Performance summed up her approach thus in interview:

I don't think she keeps a practice diary, but I know she thinks that way, which is what I'm after. And it does still enable her to think retrospectively and reflectively, and enables her to come out with the things she has come out with, which score highly, in terms of how conscious are you of the process? How conscious are you of your own curriculum? (TS, 2015).

Popular musicians were less likely to describe individual practice related to the cover versions they were working on in their bands in their first year of study. This may simply reflect the fact that for popular musicians, the term 'practice' encompassed not only technical development, but all aspects of rehearsing with their bands, as Green (2002) explains. The lead singer of *The Sneaky Nixons* described individual practice and performance as 'playing', see Appendix 2. The sense of being 'in the moment' is also reported by Lebler (2007), who quotes a popular music student who wanted to focus on the act of performing, rather than thinking or writing about it, which echoes not only CL8, but also popular musicians who described their practice as playing in bands for up to eight hours a day.

Another important factor which hindered private practice was mentioned by the female vocalists P26V and P14V, who described their fear of making mistakes in lessons and thus were surprisingly not motivated to practise. Kruse-Weber (2012) and Kruse-Weber and Parncutt, (2014) emphasise the importance of managing errors in musical learning in a positive way and using mistakes as a starting point for thinking about improvements in personal practice. It was impossible for me to discover if this fear of making mistakes was a long-term problem for these singers or whether they were helped by their peers or

peripatetic music tutors to overcome their fears. On the other hand, guitarist P32G learnt in the second year to view his mistakes as part of the learning process.

The Head of Performance gave a description of musical learning for popular musicians, suggesting that being self-taught and working in groups could lead to critical awareness of the process:

They work in groups and they learn in groups and they are quite often self-taught, which means that they can invest a bit of their curiosity and self-thinking in it, which an awful lot of classical musicians have sterilised out of them. If your only model is 'Do what Teacher says and do the repetitive practice' then you're not getting the benefit of what an awful lot of the poppers do, (TS, 2015).

This prompted him to explore how to help the classical musicians to become independent of their teachers and take responsibility for their own learning in ensembles. The Head of Performance experimented with different proportions of individual and ensemble practice in the Classical Performance workshops to see how the classical musicians learnt in groups:

I think I'm seeing that the group work we have done has been supported by the extra input into practising, current first years [2013 intake], whereas I never saw lots of work in groups in the classical students supporting and then enhancing their practising. That's the interesting thing. When I did 50/50 practising and ensembles in the first year, the individual practice detail and studying fed into the rehearsal details of ensembles, but the other way round, rehearsal details in ensembles didn't feed into individual practice. Maybe that's one of the differences within which the pop structure exists. As in, you work in a group, but how does that teach you about the specific individual practice? (TS, 2015).

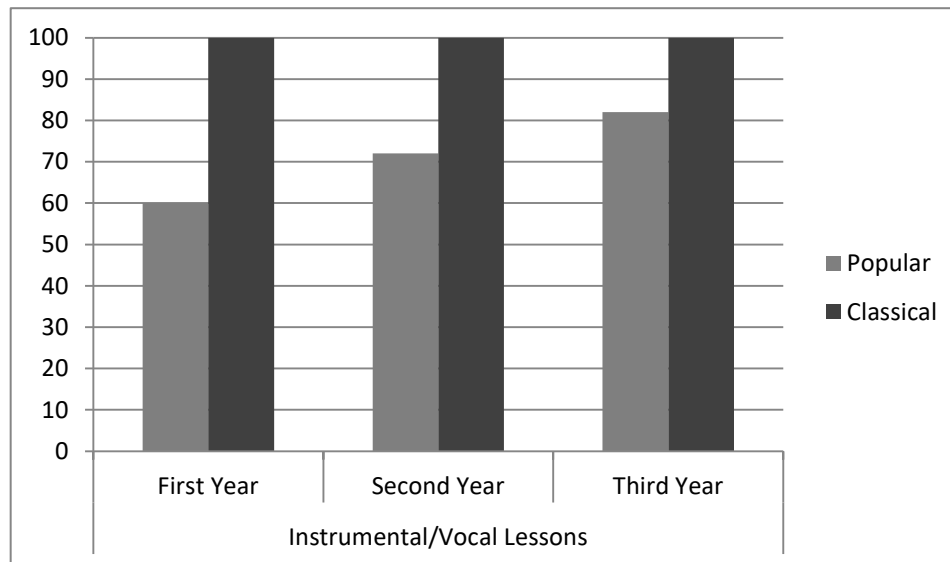
This comment highlights that learning how to rehearse effectively for classical musicians starts with understanding individual practice strategies, whilst I would suggest

that the opposite is true for popular musicians, who understand practice primarily within the band. Without having gathered video evidence of these ensemble sessions, it is hard to ascertain how classical musicians reacted to working in such groups and whether they knew how to use appropriate practice strategies to manage pulse, intonation and playing together.

Another factor which may influence individual practice is beliefs about one's own ability as a musician, as Nielsen (2012) reports. This research project did not specifically explore students' beliefs against a framework of the entity or incremental theories posited by Dweck and Bempechat (1983). Interestingly, there were some students who wrote about the perceived talents of their peers and compared themselves negatively with others. One lead singer, P4V, who fronted *Funk Soul Continuum* and appeared on national television with his barbershop quartet, *Proper Sound*, related that he had almost entirely abandoned his former activities as a solo singer/songwriter as he feared that he would be heavily criticised by his peers.

#### 7.1.4. Lessons

As has already been discussed in Chapters 5 and 6, undergraduates choosing the Performance Module in classical or popular music were offered lessons by the music department. Figure 7.1., below shows the uptake of lessons over three years.



**Figure 7.1. Uptake of individual lessons over all three years of study (%)**

Whilst all the classical musicians took advantage of this offer in all three years of study, the percentage of popular musicians taking individual tuition increased over the three years from 60% to 82%. Several popular musicians, such as P1D, P2B and P5B, found lessons very valuable, even though they had previously been self-taught. It seems baffling to me that popular music students were not all willing to take up the offer of free lessons, although as I have already shown in Chapter 6, reasons for not taking lessons included not getting on with the teacher or finding that using online resources were just as effective. For the popular musicians who took lessons, any skill development suggested by their peripatetic music tutors was seen as a chore, particularly in the first year of study, e.g. P17G. Indeed, given that many of the popular musicians had grappled with technique whilst they were at school, perhaps they were looking for new experiences at university and may have thought that they had enough technique to



play in their bands, which could also be explained by personal beliefs about their innate musical ability, as Holding (2010) describes. How did the students who did not have lessons know that their methods of self-instruction would be more effective? Perhaps they were relying on their peers for help, as was demonstrated by one of the mature students, P28G, who sought the help of a member of his off-campus band for musical instruction. Smith (2013) stresses that drummers may adopt hybridized approaches to learning which combine formal, informal and non-formal elements, which I would suggest is supported by the findings in this study with regard to popular musician vocalists and instrumentalists.

Furthermore, in the third year of study, popular musicians described their relationships with their peripatetic tutors as being more informal. Their accounts point towards collaboration between equals, rather than a master/pupil relationship. One vocalist, P15V, recounted how she went to lessons with a plan in order to get the most out of them. Others, like bassist PB5, used his tutor to build his personal network in order to gain more experience of session work.

## **7.2. Technique**

Whatever the musical genre, if musicians are given a chance to reflect on their behaviours as they grapple with the challenge of improving their performance, it is inevitable, I would suggest, that at some point they will consider whether they are technically able to master the material they are playing for performance, either as individuals or in ensembles and bands. Thus, writing about technique, I would suggest, provided the first indications that students were thinking critically about how they were practising. In terms of reflective writing, they were beginning to make the transition from descriptions of what they were doing to analysing how they were singing or playing. To put it another way, they were addressing Power's (2016) third question: 'Has this changed the way I think?'

It is well understood that the development of technique is accepted as a *sine qua non* for classical musicians, but many different models for musical learning have been explored, for example, by Miksza (2011), Papageorgi et al., (2010) and Reid (2001) to try to understand how this process unfolds. The reflective essays of the classical musicians demonstrated that in all three years, students quickly became aware of the deficits in their technique and they then tried to apply various practice strategies to improve their skills. Indeed it seems that recognising a deficit in technical ability may be an important turning point in the development of reflective practice, especially for classical musicians.

Whilst the majority of findings about technique were presented in Chapters 5 and 6, the comments of one classical vocalist below highlight the progress he had made in the first and second years, in which he had only worked on technique, compared with the third year of study, in which he worked on his recital pieces:

My singing lessons took on a different form, concentrating more on performing individual songs, rather than simply improving technique. This was a welcome change for me as I found the concentration on technique to be incredibly helpful in the first two years. Throughout the third year, it became clear to me that the work I had put in the previous two years had paid off. I no longer had to constantly repeat particular exercises in order to achieve success: it had very much become ‘second nature’, (CL6, 2015).

This is a typical example of the traditional approach to technique development for classical musicians and is echoed by other classical students who wrote about liberating their playing through specific technical exercises, both at the instrument, including embouchure development, intonation and bowing action, and away from the instrument, such as working on the rhythm or the interpretation of a particular piece. It would seem, as the Head of Performance emphasized to his students in lectures, citing the Johari Window, until there is unconscious competence with technique, freedom to perform is hindered.

On the other hand, for popular musicians, technique may not initially be a central part of their learning. As Green points out (2002, p. 84), popular musicians focus on technique later in their learning journeys:

Instrumental technique is a nebulous context, difficult to define, but referring in general terms to players' aurally monitored physical control over the interface between their body and their instrument. [...] The concept of technique as a conscious, conventional aspect of controlling the instrument or as an aid to development came late to most of the musicians in this study.

As the student cohort reported, those that did not take lessons were confident that they could pick up the necessary skills from YouTube tutorials, from their peers or more experienced musicians with whom they played. Playing covers does not necessarily lead to technique development, as the Head of Performance explained:

The whole thing about the pop world is that they're going to do that solo that way because that's the way I can do that solo, rather than 'I really ought to be aspiring to do a solo in this way, I've got a little bit of technical practice to do to support it'. But that means you have to have the external 'Can I?' which is what classical music has, (TS, 2015).

Popular musicians exhibited an increasing focus on technique over the three years of study which was closely linked to band rehearsals and performance. In the second and third years, popular musicians described examples of specific practice strategies such as using a metronome, P3D; working carefully on chord voicings and modes, P25G, P17G, P24B and P30S; rehearsing backing vocals, P10V and tackling specific tricky sections, either in private practice, P19B; or in band rehearsals, P10V and P19B. I would suggest that these students had begun to use deliberate practice strategies as a result of their personal reflections or may have been supported by their peripatetic tutors.

One student, P33G, changed to trumpet in order to complement his band's line up and revealed that he had not had any trumpet lessons since the age of nine. However, in his reflective essay, he described how he worked on his technique assiduously over six months, focussing on embouchure, breath control and pitching so that he could build up enough stamina to play a two-hour set. Another student, P19B, moved from electric bass to double bass in his third year. His experiences of learning a new instrument revealed his surprise at how hard it was to play the double bass — both physically and technically — but this gave him an opportunity to play in an experimental indie band which motivated him to continue his private practice to build his technique. These two students demonstrated, like the two popular musician tutors in McPhail's (2013) study, that they drew on their past experiences of formal learning and used formal strategies to build their technique on new instruments and echoes Slater's (2016) findings regarding mixed approaches to learning in the project studio.

Whilst the classical musicians could all read music fluently, at least in the clef that was relevant to their principal instrument, some popular musicians, such as P28G, revealed in his reflective essay that he relied on his peripatetic music tutor to help him with reading notation and sight reading. This need to develop fluency in a variety of notations, such as staff notation, tab and lead sheets, was of particular importance to popular musicians who were invited to play for other bands in recording sessions off-campus. There was, at the time when this study was conducted, no provision of theory lessons for popular musicians by the university. The members of *The Sneaky Nixons* related in interview that they had distant memories of doing theory at school, but laughed about their current inability to read music, demonstrating that for a band that worked aurally, notation seemed to be unnecessary.

Another key aspect of technique which merits discussion is intonation. There was a fundamental difference here between the Classical and Popular Performance Modules. Whilst the second-year classical musicians spent twelve weeks learning to tune a harpsichord to different temperaments, as I have described in Section 5.2.1., there was

no similar provision for the popular musicians. The Head of Performance was well aware of this imbalance, as he remarked in interview:

Technique includes, or has to include, things such as acuity of intonation perception which I would suggest my string players, no, all of my instrumentalists, actually have. But you have experienced poppers getting more and more out of tune and not noticing it during a gig. I cannot think of classical musicians who've been through this course being able to do that without getting a bit worried, (TS, 2015).

As this comment above suggests, accurate intonation is a critical aspect of successful performance for classical musicians. Despite their initial struggles to get to grips with hearing beats and hearing pure intervals, all the classical musicians developed a greater awareness of intonation by the end of the twelve week intonation module. One singer revisited the intonation course in his third year as an auditor and recognised just how much progress he had made:

Repeating some of the [intonation] experience was equally beneficial, especially as my technique was a lot more reliable the second time around allowing me to incorporate this into my practice more accurately. This, coupled with a singing exercise focusing on sliding up a fifth, has helped me become much more consistent (though hardly infallible!) with intonation, (CL5, 2015).

Another reason for putting students through what was clearly a challenging experience of tuning the harpsichord may also have been a conscious decision on the part of the Head of Performance to encourage them to reflect by putting them in a challenging situation. He described how he worked with a second-year student (2013 entry) in the Performance Module which showed that some students applied what they had learnt from the intonation workshops:

A couple of weeks ago [NN] came into second-year class on a Friday morning at 9, with a piece of Turina and said ‘I can’t play this in tune’. Ok, she’s a pianist. First of all, where else would have a second-year piano student saying ‘I wish to concern myself with intonation in a piece of not purely tonal music from an alien culture down in Andalucía’?

The work we did on it was utterly fascinating. It was entirely built on the first semester tuning and somebody who’s really curious and really thinking about it. That’s the sort of question which should come out of the course and does. We did a lot of work on it, played the major thirds slightly less etc., and in the end, we managed to get a really spectacular atmosphere out of the piece, even though she’s not got it under her fingers yet, she’s got the sound. She’s got a musical intention, a colour, and a characteristic, (TS, 2015).

Whilst this pianist was thinking very carefully about intonation, it was not the case that popular musicians devoted comparable time and effort to playing in tune. In my field notes from a gig I attended given by *Funk Soul Continuum* in May 2015, I recorded conversations with the band members in which I suggested that they had all been out of tune; not only the saxophones and brass, but the guitarists too. Admittedly, they played after midnight and the bar had been open since 7pm, but they seemed to be unconcerned about performing out of tune. This was, to me, even more surprising as three members of the band were on the Classical Performance Module and had done the intonation module in their second year! Perhaps this was more about ‘being in the groove’ (Seddon, 2005) or group flow (Sawyer, 2006) and not wanting to start a set with what might have seemed to be the tedious business of tuning up.

Furthermore, for popular musicians, the notion of being in tune must be seen in the light of different popular music genres. For punk musicians, as Cohen (1991) notes, band members took pride in playing out of tune and not developing their technique. So there is, I believe, a caveat here. Intonation needs to be considered in the context of musical

genre, the context of the performance venue and perhaps, most importantly, the expectations of the audience.

Taking technique as a whole, I conclude that the classical and popular musicians regarded the development of technique and the selection of aspects of technique which might merit individual practice differently. All the classical musicians — and some of the popular musicians — had already been exposed to formal technical work whilst they were at school. However, when they started their university performance courses, they took quite different approaches, reflecting their personal preferences for formal or informal learning and their prior experiences of one-to-one tuition and/or being self-taught. Without having conducted a survey with peripatetic music staff at the University of Liverpool as part of this study, it is hard to say whether the development of technique was largely driven by these tutors, or whether some students were motivated by their own playing and performance goals to work on technique. What clearly emerges is that the classical musicians focused on technique in all three years of study, whereas the popular musicians only began to develop their technique when they recognised that they needed to enhance their playing abilities to meet the challenges of what they were playing in their bands in the second and third years of study.

### **7.2.1. Metacognitive practice strategies**

Metacognitive practice strategies encompass a wide range of behaviours as summarised by Hallam (2006) and Jørgensen and Hallam (2009), amongst others, including the ability to plan practice sessions, identify difficult passages and use a variety of approaches to solve technical problems, such as breaking down a difficult passage into small sections; changing the rhythm or the articulation and working at a slower tempo and gradually getting faster. Metacognitive approaches to practice also involve critical listening to evaluate intonation and phrasing and may include elements of mental rehearsal applied to individual or ensemble playing and performance. Typically, experienced musicians use metacognitive practice strategies.

Despite the fact that most of the research into metacognitive practice strategies has been conducted with classically-trained musicians, it would appear that professional musicians — both classical, popular and those working in other genres such as folk, jazz and musical theatre — understand what is required in order to play at the highest standard and manage their practice within the time available. I refer again to Hallam, (2001, p. 28) who investigated expert practice and conceded that whilst the definition of ‘expert’ might be open-ended, experienced musicians ‘know how to do the right thing at the right time. There is no single expert way to perform all tasks’.

As I have documented in Chapter 5, the students on the Classical Performance Module were exposed to a wide range of practice strategies in their weekly workshops through practising in public with feedback from their course tutor. As a result, their reflective essays in all three years of study gave examples of using not only general practice strategies, but also metacognitive ones such as planning practice, breaking down difficult passages into small sections, working carefully on embouchure, bowing technique, quality of tone and intonation.

It emerged that all but one of the classical students had adopted more effective practice strategies without mentioning their teachers. This suggests that they were also gaining greater confidence in practising independently, perhaps because for those that were still using a practice diary, the diary offered a personal record of practice sessions, reminding them of what needed to be addressed. One violinist, nevertheless, admitted her own ignorance of how to practise:

This whole process really revealed quite a lot to me and showed that I had been quite ignorant in my practising and not self-analysing enough (CL11, 2014).

In her reflective essay, she reported that her teacher had helped her to identify short passages for technical work and encouraged her to work on technical studies and scales which would support her pieces. It was significant that this student gave up the Classical Performance Module in the third year — perhaps because she did not enjoy the



challenge of self-analysis and had been reluctant to take full responsibility for her musical learning.

The third-year reflective essays written by the classical musicians supplied fewer data on metacognitive practice strategies in comparison with the second year, perhaps because the big breakthrough had taken place the previous year. As one singer stated, ‘it had become second nature’. The relentless focus on technique had taken students on a journey through the four quadrants of the Johari Window until some, like the two singers, CL5 and CL6, were unconsciously applying their technical skills to realising a musical performance.

Practice became more important for all the popular musicians as their studies progressed over time, related to the needs of their bands, whether for university assessment or external gigs. Undergraduates reported both a more disciplined approach to individual practice and more focus on technique, as the following comments illustrate: ‘This year my practice has become much more focused’, P19B; ‘disciplined and intensive private practice to improve my technique’, P7G. These students also displayed behaviours that pointed towards the deliberate use of metacognitive practice strategies: ‘I started by practising the difficult things, slowly at first, then gradually increasing the tempo’, (P16G). Some students who were in multiple bands described their practice as aimed at developing their craft within bands, rather than on their own, noting that they were not motivated to develop their technique in private practice, as a guitarist explained: ‘My personal practice is sparse: from playing for eight hours a week in bands, my motivation [to practise alone] is low’, P25G. Smith (2013, p. 21) notes the challenge of identifying changes in practice behaviours and suggests that learning is realised both passively and actively. He reports that a student may miss the ‘A-Ha’ moment because she is so immersed in rehearsing or performing, so that the realisation of change may come later.

**Table 7.4. Comparison of specific descriptions of practice techniques in third year**

	Practice plan	Practice in short sections	Slow practice, repetition	Mental Practice	Insights	'A-Ha' moments
Classical (n=10)	4	5	4	5	6	4
Popular (n=32)	2	5	1	0	26	0

As can be seen from Table 7.4., above, popular musicians made far fewer direct references to practice plans, practising difficult material in short sections and practising slowly. However, all but six mentioned insights into their playing either as individuals or in the band. The classical musicians, on the other hand, described particular elements related to metacognitive practice strategies specifically, demonstrating what they had learnt in their performance workshops with the Head of Performance. It is important here to remember that the popular musicians may not have experienced the same discussions of effective practice techniques in their weekly workshops as their classically-trained peers, as I have already explained in Chapter 6. Thus the popular musicians discovered how to practise effectively on their own and tended not to use terminology related to metacognitive practice strategies in their essays.

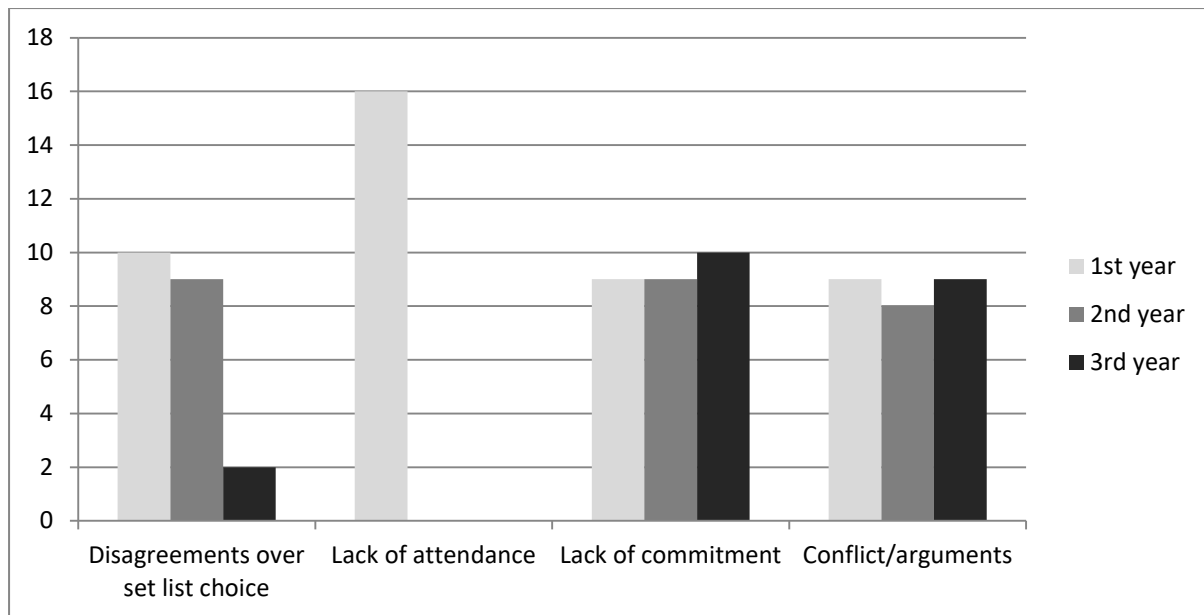
Whilst I have discussed the range of practice strategies which popular musicians adopted, I would suggest that there is another factor here which is important in the development of metacognitive practice strategies, namely the peripatetic music staff. One may assume that the classical students were able to learn about such strategies not only from their performance workshops, but also from their instrumental and vocal tutors. The influence of the Tutor for Popular Performance and peripatetic staff is less clear for popular musicians. For those who were playing in bands with some members from the Classical Performance course, such as *Funk Soul Continuum*, they may have picked up tips from their peers or adapted and transferred more effective rehearsal techniques from their band practices to their individual practice, which is discussed in Appendix 1.

### 7.2.2. Rehearsing in bands

The majority of the popular musicians described the difficulties they had experienced in their first year in the tutor-assigned bands in considerable detail, an approach commonly adopted for first year undergraduates on popular music courses, as Pulman (2011, p. 26) reports. These problems could perhaps have been avoided if students had been given specific guidelines, like those offered to students at Griffith University, which were sent to me by Donna Weston (private communication). These make it clear that complaints have no place in reflective essays:

If you have issues (gripes) you want to raise, this is NOT the place to do so. If you do have problems during the semester, talk to someone at the time they occur – it is not much point waiting until the end of the semester when the problems could have been solved earlier, (Popular Music Production Year One: 1529 QCM).

I do not propose to revisit the negative experiences of students in their tutor-assigned bands as these have already been discussed in Section 6.1.2. On the other hand, the combination of cover versions in the first year and original material in the second and third years is similar to the approach adopted at other institutions such as the Institute of Contemporary Music Performance, (hereafter ICMP), as Smith (2013b) describes. Nevertheless, the accounts in reflective essays show that for a minority of the tutor-assigned bands and the friendship bands formed in the second year, communication, cooperation and attendance improved, as Figure 7.2 below shows:



**Figure 7.2. Changes in behaviour in band rehearsals (n=32)**

**(Zero to multiple responses possible)**

What is interesting here is that whilst there is a marked decrease in disagreements about set lists and no reported problems with attendance at band rehearsals in the second and third years, largely due to the fact that students were playing in friendship groups, students continued to mention that some musicians were not committed to their bands and that there were arguments in rehearsals. I would suggest that the increase in lack of commitment could be explained by the difficulties of scheduling rehearsals with students who were playing in multiple bands, or bands off-campus. It is perplexing that some students still reported that there were arguments in rehearsals. I think this may, in some cases, such as the bands led by P29V, P17G and P10V, have resulted from the behaviours of a dominant lead singer. Other members in these bands described the challenge of working with a strong leader who may have been reluctant to collaborate democratically. It was notable that members of *Swerve II*, which had a female lead singer, P6V, worked harmoniously. This raises the interesting question of whether female lead singers take a more collaborative approach to the creation of original material and are more willing to compromise with band members than male musicians, which falls outside the scope of this study.

Lack of attendance or lateness was not unique to the 2012–2015 cohort. Soderman and Folkestad (2004) investigate the working practices of hip hop musicians in Sweden, comparing the rehearsals and working practices of one group with Swedish musicians, and one group with international musicians. In both cases, absences and lateness were part of the culture, as the authors explain (2004, p. 322):

In the hip hop communes, some of the members were absent from or delayed for the recording session. The participating members seemed to be unconcerned by these absences in the group. [...] When the group gave concerts and gigs, the same phenomena occurred.

Cohen (1991, p. 42) discusses the social strains of band membership and notes that, over time, bands who were going to succeed recognised that they needed some kind of manager, or needed to take control themselves when practising, booking rehearsal space or performance venues and contacting agents. Popular musicians in this study made similar comments, particularly in their second year essays. On the other hand, the members of one tutor-assigned band with two players who were heavily involved in session work and touring outside the university proactively managed their rehearsal materials online so that progress could be made despite absences. It would appear that the students who were working in an environment with more experienced peers were able to manage the challenge of organising their rehearsals and did not grumble, perhaps because they realised that they were learning with and from players who were already working at more proficient levels.

One mature student guitarist commented on the improvement in the tutor-assigned band in the second semester:

The chemistry in our band after three months of practising together meant that we were a lot more creative and productive in practices, (P28G, 2013).

It is worth mentioning that this guitarist also described his work as a session musician outside university. This suggests that he may have been using his prior experience of adapting to playing with musicians he did not know in session work. The group learning process demands, I would argue, a certain amount of maturity from band members, both in respecting differing opinions and in identifying a musical direction for the band. This echoes Pulman's (2014) research, in which he acknowledges that student bands might need help with developing rehearsal techniques and suggests that popular music performance tutors should be facilitators of learning, a view which Smith (2013a) describes.

I have already discussed Social Identity Theory in Chapter 2. I would suggest that the popular musicians at Liverpool were, to some extent, engaging in musical activity for the reasons that Cohen cites in describing the band scene in 1980s Liverpool (1991, p. 3):

A band could provide a means of escape where fantasies were indulged, but it could also play an important cultural and social role, providing an outlet for creativity and a means by which friendships were made and maintained.

Another interesting marker for the student reports about their band experiences was their use of language. Students who had positive experiences in their tutor-assigned groups wrote about 'my band' or 'our band'. Those that had negative experiences described making music 'in the group'. This seems to be in line with DeNora's (2000, p. 62) comment that identity is constructed in a social context and the level of identification with the band would seem to be closely linked to the friendships between band members and the successful outcomes of their band practice.

In the third year, there was a marked difference between the progress made by popular musicians who were in bands playing in the city of Liverpool and further afield, and those playing for course assessments on the university campus. Of the 32 students in the cohort, only twelve students played in just one band on campus.

One drummer, P1D, who was playing in four bands noted the need for rehearsals to be productive: ‘Jamming is always really fun and quite relaxing to do, but I feel like this does not benefit in having coherent rehearsals’. Regular performances on- and off-campus not only stimulated students to practise more, but also to think more critically about their performance. One singer reported, ‘the band had more purpose than just to perform at the final [university assessed] performance. We started getting gigs at various venues’, (P10V). There was also an increased understanding about stage presence. A vocalist explained, ‘the more I was gigging, the more confident I was getting, especially with my backing vocals’, (P26V).

As two members of the band *The Sneaky Nixons* explained in interview, they regarded public performance as practice, whether the gig was good, bad or indifferent. This view was shared by the members of the *Funk Soul Continuum*. A more detailed discussion of this concept can be found in Appendices 1 and 2. The lead singer in *The Sneaky Nixons* had been highly critical of individual tuition in his first year, but when he wrote about regular gigging, he focused on the importance of learning to deal with different venues, acoustics, technical equipment and playing to a live audience. Gigging outside Liverpool was mentioned by two other lead singers, P10V and P6V, as being particularly challenging. This underlines the value of learning outside the classroom, which by Jørgensen (2011) explores.

In the third year of study, many of the students took advantage of Liverpool’s vibrant music scene to see other bands live, which helped them to understand their own performances in a more holistic way. Watching other bands – both professional and amateur – made the undergraduates more aware of the complexities of stage craft, managing nerves and unexpected technical difficulties. Another significant factor was recording in a studio, either for a student band, or playing for another group of musicians, which some of the students described as session work. In some respects, I would suggest that the students were exploring the different roles which might be open to them after graduation, both as performers and in the studio. Smith and Gillett (2015) have stressed that popular musicians commonly create portfolio careers, juggling

different types of work and sources of income. The authors explored their own networks emanating from the punk band in which they played. Their analysis of their network of relationships (Smith and Gillett, 2015, p. 17 Table 1) illustrates the complex roles which the band holds with its suppliers, those it serves and wider stakeholders. To talk of ‘the music industry’ as if it were clearly defined is perhaps misleading, as the complex network of companies, bands, individuals and agencies is continually changing. Similarly, those students who described themselves as session musicians in their third-year reflections seemed to be describing individual incidences of playing in the studio for third parties or supporting bands at festivals. They were not, at this stage, earning the equivalent of a full-time wage from such work, which the term ‘session musician’ used as a description of an occupation might imply.

Drawing together the third-year student experiences, popular musicians who were playing off-campus and working in studios had a deeper understanding of the wider context of their learning, namely learning to perform in a variety of venues and to create a product that was acceptable to audiences. Through their reflective essays, they had started to develop a self-awareness of their individual and group playing behaviours and recognised how to combine formal and informal approaches to practice.

### **7.2.3. Rehearsing in ensembles**

I have presented the classical students’ experiences of rehearsing in two string quartets in Sections 5.4.1., and 5.4.2., above. These string players recounted how they had rehearsed difficult passages using metacognitive practice strategies. The Schubert Quartet reported different levels of commitment from individual players, highlighting the fact that one violinist who was no longer taking the Performance Module seemed to be less motivated to practise or, as the other members perceived it, made less effort in rehearsals, which echoes the findings of Davidson and Good, (2002, p. 190 and p. 195). Their experiences are closely mirrored by a study conducted by Winter and Gualda (2013), who explore the behaviours of chamber music students in Brazil. They report that areas of disagreement between musicians included different personalities, different



levels of musical experience, technique and different playing styles. They also highlight that successful chamber ensembles require self-motivated players. Anxiety about the end-of-year recital and a desire to gain a high grade increased the pressure on the three members of the quartet who were still on the Performance Module and resulted in them possibly worrying unduly about the fourth player's motivation.

The Glas Quartet, which had three female student members and a considerably older male first violinist, experienced difficulties in rehearsal which revealed both musical and hierarchical challenges. The female students deferred to the judgement of the male leader, exhibiting a gendered response to quartet leadership which Davidson and Good (2002) also note. They also had to negotiate in rehearsals to find ways to accommodate changes in tempo made by the first violinist in order to navigate tricky technical passages.

Considering the research studies by Young and Colman (1979), Davidson and Good (2002) and King (2004, 2006), who examine the experiences of classical musicians, Seddon (2005) and Sawyer (2006) who look at jazz musicians and Pulman (2014), who explores band rehearsals, I would suggest that there are many common factors across all genres which contribute to successful rehearsal processes. This was noted by a student, CL17, who played in an indie band, *Johnny Panic and the Fever*, which I discuss in Appendix 3. These include social aspects such as communication, planning and leadership, psychological aspects such as emotion and metacognitive rehearsal strategies and musical and musicological elements relating to the interpretation of the pieces to be performed. In all genres, participant musicians needed to be able to react flexibly to their fellow performers and, to a large extent, be able to solve their own social and musical problems in order to attain their goals.

### **7.3. The classical/popular divide revisited**

In the Introduction, the notional divide between classical and popular musicians was presented, including the negative views of one middle-aged classical musician regarding the technical proficiency of popular musicians. The experiences of the undergraduates presented in this study suggest, however, that there are far fewer differences between classical and popular musicians in their choice of learning methods than might have been expected, a view shared by the Head of Performance: ‘I think there’s probably a growing commonality and there’s probably more than I realise in some senses,’ (TS, 2015). Students adopted a mix of formal and informal learning strategies, according to the socio-cultural context. Some classical musicians explored cross-genre musicking, demonstrating that they could adapt to informal ways of rehearsing, which I discuss in Appendix 3. The majority of popular musicians demonstrated that they were also capable of using metacognitive practice strategies in their individual and band practice, thus adopting approaches which would seem to be both formal and rooted in Western art music. It is important to recognise that there are no barriers between musical genres, physically or conceptually within the music department at the University of Liverpool. Whilst some students may arrive with firm beliefs about their preferred musical genres, it appears that by working together in an open and enquiring musical environment, they can explore a wide range of musics adopting both formal and informal learning strategies as Feichas (2010) suggests, or as Folkestad (2006) states, ‘working across the formal/informal learning continuum.’ This study shows that for some students, the popular/classical divide is a myth.

### **7.4. Learning to reflect**

The first two research questions concern the students’ experiences and developing understanding of their practice and performance behaviours. The third question addresses the role of reflection in musical learning, which I discuss below.

Schön (1983, 1987), Moon (2006) and Ghaye (2010) offer different approaches to reflection which could be adopted in music education. Moon's work on 'Footsteps' has been adapted for undergraduate classical musicians to foster reflective practice. Ghaye's four stages of reflection have been helpful in explaining how string quartet players react and change in rehearsal and performance at teaching and learning conferences at the University of Liverpool because the student musicians were able to explain concepts like reflection-in-action in to a general audience in an open rehearsal. Boud (2010) calls for reflective practice to go beyond the individual learner and engage with the context and purpose of work with others. This, it would seem, is critical for the majority of musicians in this study who rehearsed and performed with their peers.

In this study, the starting point to develop reflective practice is keeping a practice diary as a record of the personal process of learning. Whilst the diary is a record of lessons, rehearsals and performances, reviewing the diary leads to insights into personal behaviours, as the Head of Performance explained in interview:

Those who have had teaching engage in the process, I think they end up far, far better players and musicians than those who have just gone to the weekly lesson and done a bit of work in a youth orchestra, which is what I did until somebody said 'You've got to learn how to do it properly'. The practice diary does try and focus on the 'how'. How are you being taught? How are you trying to learn this? And those who thoroughly engage in it really do make progress and understand the learning process. It's such an individual thing, (TS, 2015).

As players develop into mature performers, they seem to be able to adapt their playing at both a macro- and micro-level to give their best performance. This is what Higgins (2011) terms 'reflection for-, in- and on-action.' The adaptations may be a matter of intonation, dynamics, tempo or any other musical element, or indeed, a change may be made through eye contact, gesture or breathing. One-to-one vocal and instrumental teaching may open students' eyes to the myriad possible refinements in performance, but as Daniel (2001) shows, students need to take control of their own learning and practice,

rather than depend passively on the advice of their tutors. This view is echoed by Leon-Guerrero (2008, p. 93), who points out that students need to develop skills in metacognition and reflection as they learn and, more importantly, develop their practising skills and understanding.

How much guidance should be given through the workshops above and beyond the guidelines in the two student handbooks which are available online? At Griffith University in Australia, the course tutors for the undergraduate course in popular music post a different set of instructions for reflection for each year of study. As Donna Weston explained to me at a conference in Huddersfield in 2015, the tutor team felt that students needed specific guidelines for each reflective essay in order to ensure that what they reported showed progression over their three years of study. In the case of this research project, there are instances of repetition in successive years. The most frequently repeated statements from both classical and popular musicians in the first and second years were that they would either make more effort with individual practice or try to write regularly in their practice diaries. This reminds me of a phrase from *Alice in Wonderland*: ‘She generally gave herself very good advice (though she very seldom followed it)’, (Carroll, 1998, p. 14).

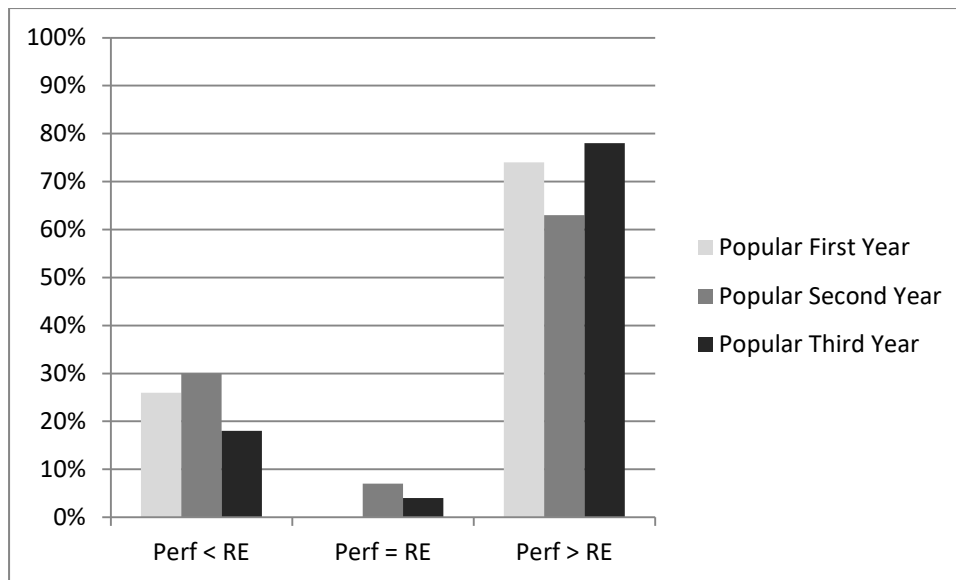
As Cowan (2013) and Bleakley (2000) both report, there is no guarantee that students will reflect effectively. Indeed, the process of reflection, as far as I can summarise from the reflective essays, seems to develop out of an individual narrative describing what one might call the ‘what’ of practice. Students started by recounting where, when, what and with whom they were practising before gaining the confidence to analyse these narratives and thinking about which elements need to be addressed for their individual musical development. In some respects, if one acknowledges that there may be students who are writing without any conscious thought of productive reflection, their essays are more like a description of a personal journey of discovery about practising and performing as musicians. Is this a bad thing? There is a real paradox here. If tutors ‘teach’ reflective practice or give too many specific instructions about what to write in a

reflective essay, there may be a danger that students will write what they think their tutors want to hear, falling into the trap of cue-conscious reflection.

Popular music researchers are, I would suggest, respectful of the ethos and culture of bands, whose members may have made their own careers without external help, as Cohen (1991) relates in her study of two punk bands in Liverpool. However, recent research by Smith (2013a) and Weston (2017) stresses the complexity of the working lives of popular musicians who rely on diverse networks within the music industry to build portfolio careers. What emerges from this study is that the assessed reflective essay may stimulate critical thought about the learning process and the popular musicians adopted some of the formal approaches to practice, which would be considered normal for their classical musician peers. In many ways, their reflective essays revealed that they were working fluidly across the formal–informal learning spectrum described by Green (2002), Folkestad (2006), Mak (2009) and Feichas (2010), amongst others. What is also perhaps important here is the influence of pop culture and the anti-establishment stance of popular musicians, echoing the DIY culture of punk musicians discussed by Moran (2011) and Shuker (2013).

### **7.5. Grades for performance and reflective essays**

This study raises the question whether there is a relationship between the reflective essay and performance grades. Figure 7.3., below shows the percentage frequency of grades for popular musicians over all three years for both performance and the reflective essay (RE). There are three categories into which data have been sorted, explained in the Key below.



**Figure 7.3. Popular musicians: performance and reflective essay grades**

Key: Perf < RE, which means that the grade awarded for the performance was lower than the grade for the reflective essay; Perf = RE, which means that the grades were the same and Perf > RE, which means that the grade awarded for performance was higher than the grade awarded for the reflective essay.

Grades for performance were markedly higher in the first and third years of study. The highest percentage of grades for reflective essays in the second year points to evidence of descriptions of emerging reflective practice. In addition, I also present the average (mean) marks for performance and the reflective essay, as shown in Table 7.6., below:

**Table 7.5. Popular musicians: average marks for performance/reflective essays**

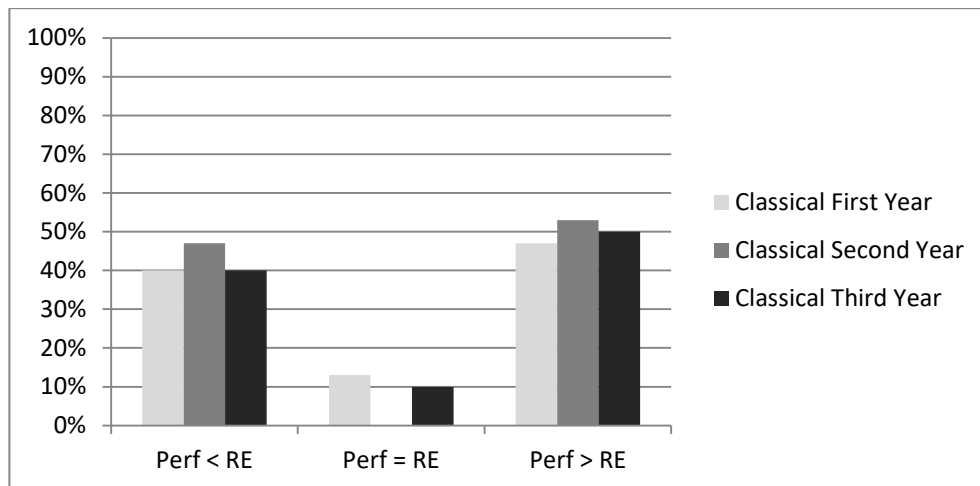
Popular Musicians	First Year Average (Mean)	Second Year Average (Mean)	Third Year Average (Mean)
Performance	67%	64%	69%
Reflective Essay	62%	62%	67%

In the first year, the highest marks for performance (79%) were awarded to the female drummer, P3D, whilst the top grade for the reflective essay (70%) was awarded to P17G. In the second year, P17G had the highest marks again for the reflective essay (72%), whilst the top performance grade (75%) was awarded to the male vocalist, P4V.

In the third year, P4V again came top in performance (78%), with a female vocalist, P6V, being awarded the highest grade (82%) for her reflective essay.

There was an increase in the average mark awarded for the reflective essay from the second to the third year of study. As has already been discussed, the majority of popular musicians became more self-critical of their practice in their second and third years and this became more explicit in their essays. If there had been a steady increase in the overall grades for performance over the three years, it might have been possible to suggest that reflection may have helped students to increase their performance marks. However, since performance grades dipped in the second year, the data presented here are inconclusive.

Turning now to classical musicians, Figure 7.4., below shows results over three years, showing the percentage frequency of the comparison of grades for the reflective essay and performance:



**Figure 7.4. Classical musicians: performance and reflective essay grades**

Whilst the data show a slight trend towards performance grades being higher than reflective essay grades, at least 40% of students each year scored higher in the reflective essay than their performance. This may reflect the input from the Head of Performance

in classical performance workshops, or suggest that some students who had weaker playing skills on arrival in their first year, such as CL13, nevertheless fully embraced the principles of reflective practice and thus wrote excellent reflective essays.

For classical musicians, average (mean) grades for performance increased over the three years as shown in Table 7.6., below. It is interesting to note, in contrast to the popular musicians, that the average grades for the reflective essays written by classical musicians peaked in their second year of study, indicating that this was the year in which they wrote most self-critically and analytically about their practice and performance.

**Table 7.6. Classical musicians: average marks for performance/reflective essays**

<b>Classical Musicians</b>	<b>First Year Average (Mean)</b>	<b>Second Year Average (Mean)</b>	<b>Third Year Average (Mean)</b>
Performance	67%	69%	70%
Reflective Essay	68%	69%	67%

The highest mark for performance (85%) and the reflective essay (80%) was awarded to the viola player, CL2 in the first year. In the second year, the highest mark for performance (90%) was given again to CL2, with the highest mark for the reflective essay (77%) gained by the violinist, CL7. In the third year, CL2 again came top in performance (85%), with the singer CL6 gaining the highest mark (80%) for his reflective essay. The high performance marks for CL2 are not surprising, as she had been a Junior Exhibitioner at the RAM and completed one year of conservatoire study before starting in Liverpool. Both CL2 and CL6 were awarded first in their final year of study.

As the average grades for the reflective essays written by classical musicians are so similar over the three years, one might suggest that an understanding of reflective practice may have helped students to improve their marks for performance over three years of study. This data set is very small (n=15) in the first two years of study, (n=10) in the third year, so it would be imperative to conduct similar analyses with more data to



see whether there is a clear trend in the quantitative analysis of average marks for reflective essays and performance.

It is also worth considering the case of student CL9, who scored poorly in her third year. She was awarded a 2.1 for the first two years of study for the Performance Module and a Third in the final year. Her reflective essays revealed in all three years of study that she was dependant on her piano teacher to guide her practice. There was little evidence of her describing practice routines which she had initiated. She did not recount making much progress with her recital pieces; rather she described the same ineffective play-through practice habits. Looking at the reflective essays of the full cohort, this pianist's experiences and those of a handful of popular musicians, such as P8V, P33G and P27G, reveal that it cannot be assumed that all the students will become reflective practitioners. Indeed, it seems that a poorly-kept practice diary leads to a weak reflective essay. From an institutional perspective, this suggests that more research is needed to discover the most appropriate pedagogical tools to support the development of reflective practice in music education.

#### **7.6. Assessment combining formative and summative methods**

What makes the combination of performance and an annual assessed reflective essay an appropriate assessment method in higher music education? Typically, a summative assessment of a recital marked by a panel of faculty staff is the traditional form of assessment employed in conservatoires to assess performance students. However, Mills (1991) challenges the efficacy of using long lists of assessment criteria for musical performance. In recent years, combined methods of faculty and student peer-to-peer and self-assessment have been introduced on some popular music courses as described, for example, by Lebler and Weston (2015), which may involve other factors which are assessed in addition to performance, such as mixing down recordings, taking on the role of the producer and evaluating the finished track for its commercial potential. In this research project, self-assessment is embodied in the end-of-year reflective essay providing an individual formative description of the process of learning. This creates a

combination of both summative and formative assessment, seen from two different perspectives, namely faculty staff and students. This allows students to be agents in their own learning and capture and recount their personal experiences of practice, rehearsal and performance as individuals and in groups.

However, the descriptions of students' behaviours and experiences are so diverse that it may be helpful to explore whether there is a way in which phases in the development of reflective practice can be identified. I tentatively suggest that six phases of development can be identified from the evidence provided in practice diaries and reflective essays in this study, as shown in Table 7.7., below. I would emphasise that the phases can be quite blurred; after a carefully written account of a productive practice session, one might be tempted to conclude that progress has been made to another phase. However, as the students themselves revealed in their workshops, they could have a good day followed by a bad day – and the change in the efficacy of their practice might be influenced by a wide range of emotional, motivational, social and cultural factors, not forgetting the pressures of delivering academic work to deadlines for other modules.

**Table 7.7. The Pathway of Reflective Practice**

<b>Phase</b>	<b>Source</b>	<b>Description</b>
1	Practice Diary	Narrative descriptions of what happened, when, where and with whom, including lessons, workshops, individual and group rehearsals and reviews of concerts and gigs attended.
2	Practice Diary/ Reflective Essay	Individual and group development of practice routines: narrative description of deliberate practice strategies; emerging evidence of a practice plan; no evidence of critical self-analysis.
3	Practice Diary/ Reflective Essay	Development of individual technique: narrative descriptions; some evidence of applying new techniques and reporting results.
4	Reflective Essay	Insights: self-critical awareness and analysis of strengths and weaknesses; evidence of how to address problems and solve them in the short, medium or long-term.
5	Reflective Essay	'A-Ha' moments: major breakthroughs in practice and performance with personal understanding and analysis as an individual or within the group.
6	Reflective Essay	Metacognitive practice strategies: detailed accounts of how MPS are used by the individual or by groups, linked to

		specific outcomes. Evidence of deep understanding of rehearsal/performance processes and ability to adapt in the moment.
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The current assessment criteria for reflective essays, (see Appendix 7), do not mention specific behaviours which could, with more longitudinal research, be identified as indicators of the phases suggested above. In using such a pathway to try to understand the development of reflective practice, it must be remembered that each practice diary and reflective essay is a description of an individual learning journey. It cannot necessarily be assumed that all students reach Phases 5 and 6 or consistently apply higher-order thinking to their practice; more detailed analysis of the available data from the 2012–2015 cohort and data from subsequent cohorts would be necessary to refine this model.

If the practice diary is a record of activities, it may not necessarily be reflective. This makes it apparent that a practice diary alone is not sufficient to develop reflective practice. Indeed, it is the combination of the practice diary and the assessed annual reflective essay which puts reflective practice at the centre of the learning process. The practice diary embodies a continuous record of individual and group practice behaviours which may include some self-assessment; the reflective essay provides an opportunity for students to evaluate the evidence in their practice diaries and give a critical, formative self-assessment of their personal learning. However, extending the assessment criteria to include elements of the pathway posited above may lead to a sharper focus on what kinds of behaviours the act of reflection should reveal.

The external examiner who moderated the 2015 results found evidence of reflective practice:

The University of Liverpool Music Department is outstanding in its provision of creative practice teaching (composition, composition-related and performance and performance-related disciplines) and this is evidenced in the richness and

subtlety of work I was able to sample during my time as external examiner this year.

By the end of both BAs, students are clearly able to engage in a wide range of creative practices, reflect critically on that practice, explore issues relating to musical cultures critically, and there is evidence of the acquirement at the highest level of core skills in both academic and creative practice modules across the range of student work I sampled, (Ian Biddle, University of Newcastle, 2015; private communication from Head of Performance).

It would seem in the light of the emerging development of combined assessment methods, particularly in popular music higher education, such as at ICMP and Griffith University, that the complexities of musical learning for individuals and groups should, I would suggest, no longer be assessed solely on the basis of a single recital or gig. The combination of individual reflective self-assessment of the process of learning, combined with the summative faculty panel assessment of performances challenges students to think about their agency in their individual learning journeys.

### **7.7. Learning to be a musician**

What does it mean to be a musician? Is it all about practice, as was suggested in the introduction? Or is it about a personal, sometimes private, passion for making music? Or is it about creating a product which will gain critical acclaim and bring commercial success to the performers? The Head of Performance described what he thought the effect of reflective practice was on the musical development of undergraduates:

This has been working quite effectively for eight years and you discover that there is some correlation between people's acuity of thinking and what they're able to do manifestly. My instinct is that for most of them, what they're able to do physically probably lags behind the thought processes by eight months. I don't know if that's right or not, but that's my instinct, (TS, 2015).

His comments suggest that reflection might play an important role in developing critical self-awareness, which in turn affects the process of musical learning. Musical learning has been described in many different ways, as was shown in Chapter 2, but these studies tend to focus on either classical or popular musicians. This research project has focused upon the journeys of classical and popular undergraduate musicians who described their musical learning through reflective essays and interviews, framed by the three research questions below:

- What experiences of practice and performance did the students describe in their reflective essays?
- How did the annual reflective essay contribute to the students' understanding of their practice and performance behaviours?
- What role did reflection play in musical learning?

What theoretical models can be drawn from this research project? If it can be shown that reflection contributes to the musical learning of undergraduate performance students, then a suitable starting point might be the definition of musical learning which was posited in Chapter 2 (Esslin-Peard et al., 2016, p. 5) which can be applied to musicians working in any genre:

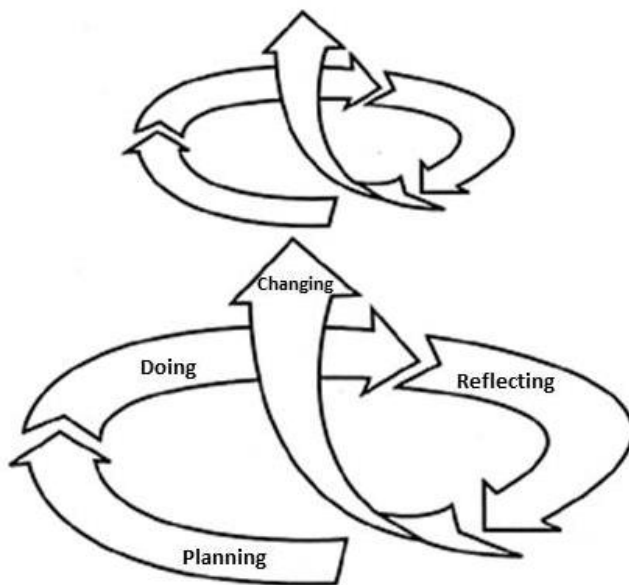
Musical learning involves problem-solving either individually, or in groups, leading to an outcome which demonstrates change and/or progress. Reflection underpins the process of practice and rehearsal for the individual or the group by stimulating conscious thought about *how* practice is conducted, prompting choices about *how* the process can be improved and what strategies can be adopted to reach desired goals.

This definition implies that learning to be a musician – or a better or more accomplished musician – does not entail mindless repetition or play-through behaviours, but a

conscious, self-critical awareness of what is happening in practice and performance and an understanding of how problems can be solved. The process involves cognitive strategies and a constructivist approach to learning. I would now suggest, based on the evidence of the students' reflective essays, that this definition of musical learning should be adapted as follows:

Musical learning involves problem-solving either individually, or in groups, leading to an outcome which demonstrates change and/or progress. Reflection *is core to* the process of practice and rehearsal for the individual or the group by stimulating conscious *critical* thought about *how* practice is conducted, prompting choices about *how* the process can be improved and which strategies can be adopted to reach desired goals.

This definition can also be presented visually. As I want to emphasize the way in which reflection can lead to conscious changes in the process of practice, I have moved away from a circular model of learning, as posited by Kolb (1984) and instead moved towards a set of three-dimensional spirals, as shown in Figure 7.5., below:



**Figure 7.5. Spirals of Reflection**

The Spirals of Reflection, which form the basic model, imply iteration in practice, rather than re-iteration. Re-iteration is the mindless repetition of a phrase, a passage or a song or a piece without any reflection. However, *iteration*, or mindful repetition utilising metacognitive processes, results in change. Iteration, I would suggest, implies a conscious process of planning, doing, reflecting and *changing* which is symbolised by the spiral. It is the act of reflection which enables students to break the cycle of mindless repetition by asking ‘how am I doing this?’ One way of measuring progress through the spirals might be to consider the phases in the Pathway of Reflective Practice, Table 7.7., above.

A possible shortcoming of the image above which, I believe is also underpinned by the reflections of the students in this study, is that practice does not always lead to immediate progress. Indeed, students have identified occasions on which they have been demotivated, unable to practise or have felt that they were unable to work independently. As performance students explained to me when I presented the Spirals of Reflection model to them in October 2014, many commented that while the model was helpful in describing productive practice behaviours, they also pointed out that there were days in which they might not consciously acknowledge that progress had been made; either they were ‘stuck’, or might even have thought that they had fallen backwards. This is an important insight: whilst musicians freely acknowledge that progress in musical learning may not be linear, it is not always so apparent to non-musicians that the process of learning may be messy — even bumpy — and closely linked to emotional states and personal beliefs about ability. The reasons for this might be, as I have already outlined, individual or group lack of motivation, negative emotional states or the physical conditions in which the practice took place.

There are more factors at play here than the development of metacognitive practice strategies or an understanding of learning across the formal/non-formal/informal continuum. In fact, as was discovered by administering the Background Questionnaire, see Chapter 4, musical learning is importantly affected by the socio-cultural context, the influence of peers, class music teachers and individual vocal and instrumental tutors.

Thus I would suggest that it might be helpful to consider a more holistic model of musical learning, drawing upon Welch’s Russian Doll model (2007) and Smith’s (2013) Snowball Self model for hybridised learning.

Looking back to the Spirals of Reflection model, there is nothing explicit which points to a need to make students aware of wider opportunities for musical development. Nevertheless, by virtue of their environment, students are exposed to many different kinds of musicking and they can explore many musical genres, including jazz, folk and world music, either through university-based ensembles or groups based in the city. Thus each student can create his or her own personal musical learning journey, based upon their individual needs and cultural preferences. Over the period 2012–2015, there were examples of a bass guitarist playing cello in the University Symphony Orchestra, a classical singer conducting a popular music choir, classical string players gigging in an acoustic folk/rock band, a rock guitarist working in the pit band for a musical theatre production and a classically-trained popular vocalist leading a barbershop quartet, *Proper Sound*, which appeared in a BBC One television programme. Thus I have adapted the model to include multiple elements of students’ musical biographies and the socio-cultural context of their learning, see Figure 7.6., below:

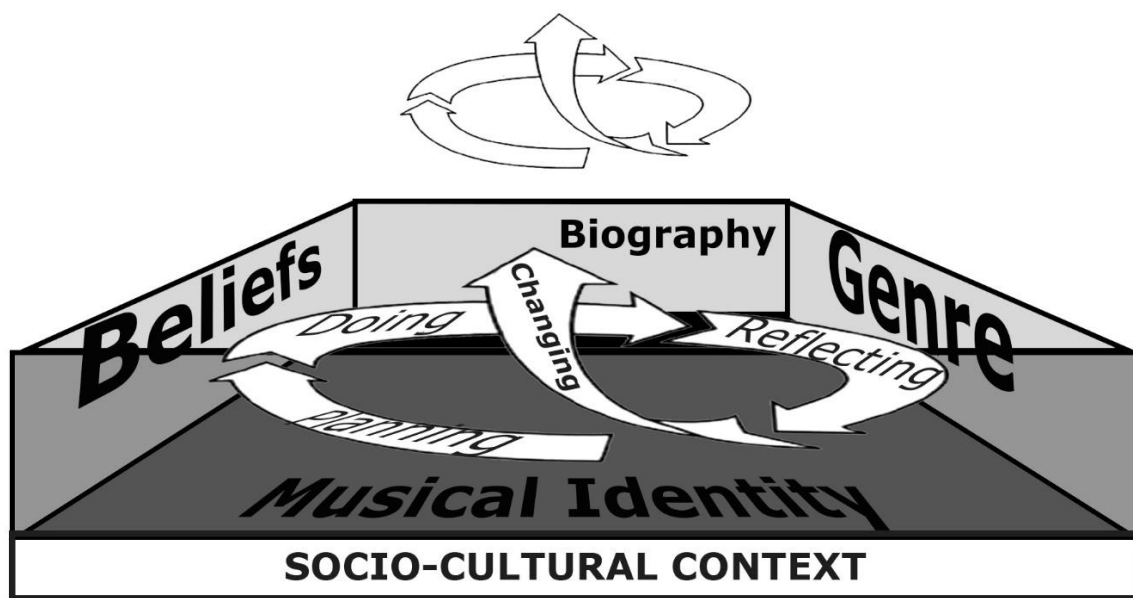


Figure 7.6. The Spirals of Reflection in Context.



This model, I would suggest, encompasses both constructivist and cognitive theories of learning, combined with the notion of communities of practice and the situated nature of musical learning. The model is timeless: it can be applied to a musician in the 15<sup>th</sup> century, such as the monk John Lydgate, or a 21<sup>st</sup> century rapper!

### **7.7.1. Asking ‘how’?**

How can this model help an understanding of musical learning in more general terms? I would argue that the spiral – even if it can point downwards, or simply be seen as flat at any point in time as perceived by a learning musician – represents the process of asking ‘how’, which would seem to be at the core of developing critical self-awareness and reflective practice. As long as a student is willing to ask ‘how’, there is an opportunity for change, growth and development. The question ‘how’ has no assumptions about the length of time of practice. Rather, it suggests a desire to discover how to make any amount of practice the best quality that it can be.

Students bring their personal experience of music before university, which is described here as ‘biography’. They also hold a set of beliefs about their musical potential and a personal preference for one or more musical genres. Furthermore, they are, or may be becoming conscious of their own musical identity. This happens in the socio-cultural context of the learning institution, both the university campus with its venues for rehearsal and performance, and the city of Liverpool. The institution provides support from tutors and one-to-one peripatetic music teachers who, in their own way, will also influence the learning journeys of students. A student can access this learning zone either as an individual, or as a member of a band or ensemble, or through both routes. The combination of these psychological factors and the socio-cultural and institutional context give rise to differing degrees of musical learning in the spiral of reflection. Musical learning depends not only on the individual, the group and the context, but also the degree to which a student can progress through a series of spirals. And, I would argue, the most efficient way to learn how to start on the journey of musical development is to ask *how*. By posing the question ‘how’, students become agents of

their own learning. Thus, musical learning is not necessarily limited to three years in a higher education institution, but may continue afterwards.

### **7.8. Being a musician for life**

Whilst it is definitely not a stated purpose of these undergraduate Performance Modules to produce professional musicians, as might be expected from a conservatoire, tutors can perhaps claim that graduates from the Classical and Popular Performance Modules have acquired some reflective skills which they may draw upon in later life, as the Head of Performance explained:

I like people to be able to work within what they can already do, knowing that gradually if they wanted to go up a level, hopefully they're equipped by the structure of the course — diaries etc. — to do that, should they wish to. They can really change things because they're equipped with the mechanisms, the psychological insights and the skills, (TS, 2015).

To discover to what extent these comments might be true, I gathered information from the students who had graduated from the 2012–2015 cohort. Whilst it was not a planned part of this study to track students once they left university, Table 7.8., below shows that twelve of the 32 popular musicians and four of the classical musicians in the core cohort were still playing and performing in a range of portfolio careers in spring 2017. I have also included three other musicians, P35D and CL17 from the 2011 cohort, as they feature in Appendices 1 and 3 respectively and CL16 from the 2013 intake, who played with *Funk Soul Continuum* and still plays with *The Sneaky Nixons*. The grades for the Performance Module in the third year of study are also given, as I was struck by how many of the musicians were awarded firsts or 2.1s. This may point towards the importance of individual musical identities, an enduring passion for making music or just a love for all things musical – factors which are beyond the scope of the present study.

**Table 7.8. Musical activities of graduates from Performance Modules (2017)**

	<b>Popular Musicians</b>	<b>Grade Third Year</b>
<b>Student</b>	<b>Occupation</b>	
P3D (f)	Drummer with <i>The Sneaky Nixons</i> and <i>Indigo Moon</i> , retail employment.	First
P5B (m)	Bassist with <i>The Sneaky Nixons</i> , occasional session work, security guard.	First
P17G (m)	Lead singer/songwriter with <i>The Sneaky Nixons</i> , catering employment.	First
P6V (f)	Peripatetic singing teacher, job in music events company, conducting academic research in ludo-musicology.	First
P28G (m)	Working as session musician/performer in Northern Ireland.	First
P15V (f)	Singer/songwriter, has appeared on BBC Introducing.	First
P29V (m)	Singer/songwriter, performing regularly and taking part in talent competitions.	First
P4V (m)	Choir leader, <i>Rock Choir</i> .	First
P16G (m)	Working in music events/music promotion.	2.1
P9V (m)	Front man with <i>Fizzy Blood</i> , UK tour spring 2017.	2.1
P31D (m)	Managing <i>Fizzy Blood</i> .	2.1
P30S (m)	Music producer/manager; playing saxophone in <i>XamVolo</i> and <i>Galactic Funk Militia</i> .	2.2
Non-core cohort		
P35D (m)	Worked as peripatetic drum teacher for the University of Liverpool after graduation; from September 2017, taking Masters in Music Performance in France	First
	<b>Classical Musicians</b>	
CL6 (m)	Front man with <i>Small Words</i> ; job in digital media/advertising	First
CL8 (f)	Job with London Sinfonietta, playing cello with semi-professional London orchestras/opera companies.	First
CL7 (f)	Intern with London Symphony Orchestra for a year; currently peripatetic violin teacher, plays in local orchestras.	2.1
CL1 (m)	Running function band, <i>Entertainment Nation</i> .	2.1
Non-core cohort		
CL16 (m)	Full-time job as French Horn player in the Armed Services; still performing with <i>The Sneaky Nixons</i> on trumpet.	First
CL17 (f)	Works for local music hub teaching strings and keyboard; auditioning for Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra deputy list; playing in indie rock group, <i>Elijah James and the Nightmares</i> .	First

The range of different activities shown above is typical of the kinds of portfolio careers that both popular and classical musicians experience after graduation, as discussed by Smith and Gillett (2015) and Mills (2002). According to a career advice website, (Prospect, 2017) around a sixth of music graduates are working in the music industry within six months of graduation. For the 2012–2015 cohort, the percentages two years after graduation are 40% for classical musicians and 38% for popular musicians. In addition, as Lebler (2008, p.194) points out in his role as a tutor for popular music, there are wider long-term benefits of developing skills in reflective practice:

As society becomes more complex and information-rich, people need to constantly re-think, be adaptable and develop new problem-solving strategies for new challenges. Therefore, students need to develop keen reflective thinking capabilities so they will be able to apply new knowledge to complex situations.

It is to be hoped that the other musicians in the 2012–2015 cohort have been able to apply some elements of reflective practice to employment not related to the music industry. In conclusion, I quote the closing paragraphs from the third-year reflective essay written by one of the two singers on the Classical Performance Module, CL6, as I believe this demonstrates the power of reflection in musical learning:

When choosing my first year modules after being accepted to the University of Liverpool three years ago, I chose Classical Performance Study as I believed it would be an opportunity to receive some vocal lessons and sing in front of people. The reality was something completely different. The three year Classical Performance module has revolutionised not only the way I approach practice, but also the way I approach performance and musical study as a whole. It has taught me that singing is not something that you just *do*. It's something that you have to carefully consider and think about. It has taught me that rehearsal isn't just singing through a few songs every night until everything accidentally falls into place. It is an academic pursuit, which requires careful evaluation and self-reflection before any sort of real improvement can be made. I like to think that

over the past three years, I have changed from a student who sings to a singer who studies. I have moved away from seeing performing as something that I can do with little effort and now see it as an academic pursuit that requires dedication and commitment.

As I embark on my next adventure, I can see that Classical Performance Study has not only affected the way in which I sing, but how I conduct myself in any academic work. I often apply the self-reflection, evaluation and presentation skills in my academic writing, as well as how I conduct myself in a work environment. It has helped me to develop how to work effectively and progress rapidly.

There is a concept that has been told to me many times throughout my childhood when learning how to sing and play the guitar. It can be traced back to a 1993 paper by Anders Ericsson, a professor at the University of Colorado and it suggests that to become an expert in anything, you need to invest 10,000 hours of time. Whilst this figure is a good indication of the level of commitment required to become an exceptional performer, my time as a performance student at the University of Liverpool has made me see this statement as misleading. Becoming an expert performer is not simply a result of repetition until you have done enough practice. It is not a case of clocking the hours mindlessly until the cogs accidentally fall into place. To become an expert performer you don't simply put in the time. You put in the effort as well. You learn the technique, instead of just the pieces. You learn to think, instead of just *doing*. You learn to perform, instead of just play. This is what I have taken away from three years of study and is a rhetoric that I hope to continue utilising in whatever happens next, (CL6, 2015).



## **CHAPTER EIGHT: SUMMARY, LIMITATIONS, IMPLICATIONS AND AREAS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH**

### **8.1. Summary**

I started this thesis by asking general questions about what practice means for musicians. Whilst professional musicians seem to understand what effective practice entails, music education researchers have failed to agree on what the key epistemological, psychological and social aspects of practice are. Whilst it would be foolhardy to think that a single research project can deliver an answer to these questions, particularly with regard to the practice and performance behaviours of classical and popular musicians, this study investigated the experiences of a cohort of undergraduate musicians in order to try and understand more about the commonalities and differences between students who exhibited both formal, informal and mixed approaches to learning. The aims of this research project were to answer the three questions below:

- What experiences of practice and performance do the students describe in their reflective essays?
- Do students develop an understanding of their practice and performance behaviours through their reflective essays? If so, how?
- What role does reflection play in musical learning?

Each of these questions has been addressed through the presentation of the experiences related by their students in their reflective essays, interviews and the Background Questionnaire and discussed above in Chapter 7. I adopted a phenomenological research approach in order to allow the students to express their own views of their musical learning; the triangulation of three sources of data produced an enormous amount of material which documents the minutiae of personal practice and performance experiences. This thesis presents a selection of the data which I hope accurately

describes students' behaviours and experiences and shows how students develop knowledge and understanding of their individual learning journeys. The theoretical models which I draw from the data are intended to offer frameworks which may assist music educators to develop new approaches to pedagogy for both classical and popular musicians.

## **8.2. Contribution to knowledge**

The findings of this research project provide evidence for new knowledge and understanding about the process of musical learning and posit new models for musical learning — the Spirals Model in Context (Figure 7.6.) and the Pathway of Reflective Practice (Table 7.7.) — in addition to more general findings relating to the core cohort of popular and classical musicians. I then discuss the relevance these findings may have for music education in tertiary institutions.

### **8.2.1. New models for musical learning**

The definition for musical learning posited in Section 7.7., embodies constructivist principles of learning as outlined by Zimmerman (2002) and acknowledges the experiential models developed by Kolb (1984) and Luft and Ingham (1955). I take a similar approach in my definition of musical learning, but acknowledge the role that reflective practice plays in the undergraduate Performance Modules at the University of Liverpool. I suggest that musical learning based upon reflection may produce a change in behaviours in addition to cognitive understanding of a learning process. In other words, the students' experiences as described in their reflective essays demonstrate that higher-order thinking may produce an awareness of the possibilities to change practice and performance behaviours.

However, the definition of musical learning cited above and the Spirals of Reflection model, Figure 7.5., do not convey enough of the context of musical learning. Thus I developed the Spirals of Reflection in Context, Figure 7.6. This model, rather like the



Russian Doll model posited by Welch (2007) offers a theoretical framework which can be used to represent the possible multi-faceted learning journeys of musicians, whatever their preferred genre. As becoming and being a musician involves so many different experiences and behaviours, I have incorporated psychological elements such as beliefs about musical ability and learning, Nielson (2012); Dweck and Bempechat (1983), Sloboda and Howe (1991) and Gagne (1995) and musical identities, Smith (2013), DeNora (2000), Tarrant et al., (2002) and Lamont (2002). The musical biographies of students echo the research of Smilde (2012) as participants may enter the ‘learning zone’ whatever their chosen musical genre. The socio-cultural context underpins all student experiences, evoking Wenger’s (1998) notion of ‘communities of practice’. The notion of the spiral of reflection at the centre of this model is, as I have already discussed, aspirational in its implied upward movement. This study has shown that students face considerable challenges in mastering reflective practice and they also acknowledge that they may have ‘off days’ when practice and performance do not lead to progress in learning.

### **8.2.2. A focus on the musical development of classical and popular musicians.**

This longitudinal study seeks to redress the imbalance in music education research into practice which has historically focused on classical musicians. Here, the musical learning experiences of classical and popular musicians are investigated, using the same research tools, namely the practice diary, the annual reflective essay, the Background Questionnaire and semi-structured interviews. There are no other studies which have followed undergraduate musicians in higher education for three years of study with a focus on how they describe their own learning in reflective essays. By interpreting the literature, for example about practice behaviours described by Ericsson et al., (1993) and Hallam (2001, 2006, 2010) with an open mind with regard to musical genres, it emerges from the discussion of the data that there are perhaps more similarities between the musical learning in the two groups than might have been expected. Just as McPhail (2013) reports, popular musicians in this study sometimes deliberately adopted more formal approaches to learning, whilst some classical musicians learnt to work informally

in bands. Whilst I acknowledge that not all musicians may be expected to be able to adapt their individual learning styles, this finding supports the research of Folkestad (2006), who concludes that learning may take place on a formal-informal continuum. On the other hand, if this finding were replicated in further research in similar institutions with both classical and popular performance courses, then it would perhaps challenge the historical approach to popular music studies, which may have been originally developed by adapting formal pedagogies from the tradition of Western art music. It is clear from recent research, for example, by Smith and Gillett (2015), Robinson (2012) and Parkinson (2013) that popular music studies are being closely scrutinised and researchers are debating how to design and deliver undergraduate courses which encompass both formal and informal elements of learning and learning situations which mirror the real world, as explored by Lebler (2007, 2008). Perhaps the overriding message here is that classical and popular musicians may individually choose a range of formal and informal learning methods. It is not the case that classical musicians only adopt formal approaches to learning or that popular musicians only learn informally.

### **8.2.3. A new approach to performance assessment**

Traditionally, musical performance has been assessed through a single recital. This is the model used for grade exams, such as those offered by the ABRSM, Trinity/Guildhall and RockSchool. This approach of a single recital marked by a panel is also adopted for advanced diplomas and some post-graduate performance qualifications awarded by conservatoires. Over the last twenty years, some higher education institutions such as Kingston University, the University of Ulster, the University of Newcastle, the University of Huddersfield, Middlesex University and the ICMP, all based in the UK, and Griffith University in Australia have used additional methods of self-assessment for music performance students such as practice diaries and blogs, video recording and assessed reflective essays. However, the University of Liverpool is the only institution as far as I can gather which requires performance students to write an extended reflective essay at the end of each year of study which is awarded 30% of the marks with 70% of marks given for performance. This means that the process of musical learning is

seen from two different perspectives; the summative assessment by faculty staff, and the students' own perceptions of their musical learning as documented in their reflective essays. There is thus assessment of both the process and the outcome of practice.

#### **8.2.4. The assessed annual reflective essay**

The assessed annual reflective essay, based upon a practice diary, for performance students at the University of Liverpool is unique, principally because the length of the essay – 1,500 to 2,000 words – gives students space to think critically about their experiences of practice and performance and provide examples of their musical learning, both as individuals and in bands or ensembles. Without the combination of the practice diary and the assessed reflective essay, it would be difficult to gain the same level of insight into the factors which affect musical learning, whether psychological, social or cultural. In comparison to other music higher education institutions, the requirement for students to write the annual reflective essay for assessment seems to facilitate a more productive use of the practice diary, as the practice diary is the principal data source upon which students can draw to write their reflective essays. Nevertheless, it is important to remember that just marking a practice diary would not produce similar results. It is precisely because students have to review their practice diaries in order to write a reflective essay that makes them to think about their learning. Thus students develop greater self-awareness and identify changes in their practice behaviours, including 'A-Ha' moments.

#### **8.2.5. The role of reflection in musical learning**

Another important contribution to knowledge is the role which reflection plays in the individual learning of the music students in this study. Whilst reflection has been a part of pedagogy in higher education for the last twenty years in other academic disciplines, such as teacher training as Pollard (2002) recounts and engineering as Cowan (2013) discusses, this is the first study to discuss reflection in the context of musical learning. A small number of researchers have explored the use of practice diaries to support learning

in music education, as Mills (2002), Hunter (2006) and Monks (2009) describe, whilst Gaunt (2008, 2010) explores the role of reflection in the conservatoire, seen from the perspectives of both students and peripatetic music staff. These accounts illustrate that the introduction of reflective practice is challenging for both students and faculty staff. The development of reflective practice at the University of Liverpool has been developed by the Head of Performance. In some respects, this research project has sought to validate his approach. Whilst this could lead to a somewhat myopic view of reflective practice within a single institution, it would appear from conversations with academics at conferences that this introduction of reflective practice for performance undergraduates is generating considerable interest and could be tried out elsewhere.

Reflective practice may also offer benefits for students taking post-graduate courses. Esslin-Peard and Shorrocks (2017) report from their pilot project with Chinese MMus students that reflection is also a valuable aid to musical learning for students who have different cultural and educational backgrounds. The introduction of reflective practice in the music department at the University of Liverpool has had an impact not only on students, but also upon the music department staff. Tutors who led the Performance Modules and peripatetic music teachers were themselves prompted to reflect on their own pedagogical approach and consider the possible implications for the place of reflection in the institution to improve teaching practice and course design.

#### **8.2.6. The wider role of reflection for assessment in higher music education**

Reflection is a powerful tool in music education. It can be applied to musical learning in any genre, to any instrumental or vocal discipline. It unpacks what may be intuitive know-how and can transform that know-how into knowledge about being a musician and becoming a better musician and may promote life-long learning as Mak (2004, 2009) suggests. Furthermore, a musician who has self-critical awareness about his playing is able to escape from juvenile play-through behaviours and make more progress in less time. Reflection helps to debunk the myth that 'practice makes perfect' and reveals the non-linear nature of musical learning whilst also giving musicians and other

participants in the creative arts independent control over their development as individuals or in groups, not only within the context of a learning institution, but in wider contexts, such as their local community.

### **8.3. Limitations**

Looking back over the research that has been conducted over the last five years, it is worth considering the potential shortcomings of the chosen methodology and to consider how weaknesses could, in future research, be overcome or avoided.

#### **8.3.1. Methodology**

The current research project was based on a mixed methods approach to handling quantitative and qualitative data, with a focus on qualitative data.

Regarding sample size, only one cohort of students was involved in this study, comprising 47 undergraduate musicians who studied from 2012–2015. This has resulted in a sparing use of percentages as the data set is so small. If more time had been available, or if this research project had been conducted on a full-time basis on campus, it would have been desirable to follow more cohorts to generate a larger data set, which might have made it feasible to look at the correlation between percentage grades for the reflective essay and performance.

In Chapter 3 I made my musical background evident: I am a classically-trained musician with experience as a secondary teacher of teaching and coaching rock, pop, jazz and world musicians in addition to classical music. I direct classical and jazz choirs, and coach chamber ensembles and rock bands. I have made every effort to conduct this research objectively without any personal bias. It was perhaps an advantage that I was not based on campus, as I was not regularly in contact with students. There may, nevertheless, be ways in which I have influenced the students which I am unable to quantify.

### **8.3.2. Data collection**

The principal sources of data were the undergraduate reflective essays and semi-structured interviews. In hindsight, it would have been very helpful to have been able to administer the Background Questionnaire to all students at the beginning of their first year of study in order to understand more about their prior musical learning and individual biographies. In the case of this research project, questionnaires were distributed on paper and through GoogleDocs in the third year of study, which may mean that recollections of musical learning at school were skewed by undergraduate experiences.

It also seems, in hindsight, that it would have been excellent to have been able to offer an Exit Questionnaire, or an online forum in which students could have shared their musical experiences after graduation. If, as I have suggested, reflection enables life-long musical learning, then it would be valuable to track the longitudinal musical progress of graduates, not only for the 2012–2015 cohort, but with all graduates in order to explore to what extent this hypothesis is true.

### **8.4. Pedagogical matters arising from this research project**

This research was not publically funded, so my views as the principal researcher in the discussion below are entirely personal and framed to encourage reflection by faculty staff about their courses and pedagogy.

The biggest challenge in this research project was to try to understand how the two Tutors for Classical and Popular Performance approached reflection. There was a lack of parity between the pedagogical approach in the Popular and Classical Performance workshops. Whilst the guidelines for reflective writing were similar, they were not identical. Each tutor revised the guidelines independently. Similarly, the assessment criteria for performance were not aligned. There seemed to be a tacit understanding that both lead tutors and other faculty staff involved in performance assessment knew what

they were looking for in terms of excellent performance for the end-of-year recital or gig in both classical and popular genres. It would be worthwhile to review and align the guidelines for both reflective writing and assessment to create more parity between the two performance courses.

Given that the original impetus for introducing reflective practice at the University of Liverpool in 2005 was a general agreement by peripatetic music tutors that their students did not understand how to practise effectively, it would have been valuable to interview or collect views from the peripatetic tutors in the period of this study from 2012–2015. Their input may have made it possible to distinguish between the influence of the course tutors and the instrumental and vocal tutors in terms of the development of effective practice strategies.

Lessons were offered to all students taking the Performance Modules but, as has been discussed in Chapter 7, some popular musicians were reluctant to take advantage of this provision. Looking at the wider institutional context of offering individual tuition to performance students, perhaps a different approach is needed, such as introducing students informally to the peripatetic music staff at the beginning of their first year of study. It would seem from the reflective essays and conversations I had with students that they felt that the choice of teacher was strongly influenced by their respective course tutors. On the other hand, there is nothing to suggest that the two performance tutors were unwilling to discuss possible choices of peripatetic music tutors with their students. It would require more longitudinal research to be able to establish whether there could be long-term benefits of individual instruction for popular musicians.

There appeared to be some inconsistency in the application of the course regulations with regard to the submission of practice diaries and meeting deadlines. Online documentation for the Popular Music Performance Module stated that there would be a 5% deduction in marks for a missing practice diary and a 5% deduction in marks for students who failed to attend their individual lessons offered by the department. The Classical Performance Module handbook did not refer to deductions for missing practice

diaries. As an external researcher I cannot judge whether this had any impact on the way in which marks were awarded and final grades computed.

### **8.5. Implications for higher education institutions**

This research project highlights both the benefits of reflective practice in undergraduate musical performance courses and reveals some areas which require careful consideration by music departments and faculty staff.

The use of a practice diary has, in the literature that I have reviewed, appeared to be difficult to manage in its own right. The findings of this research project indicate that using a practice diary as a data source for an annual assessed reflective essay markedly increases the likelihood that students will keep a practice diary. For institutions which offer performance courses in multiple musical genres, it is important to ensure that guidelines for practice diaries are carefully aligned. Is a written practice diary the most appropriate medium for students in the digital age? Perhaps it would be worth exploring the use of online blogs, or audio and video diaries as Moon (2006) describes. As Cowan (2013) has indicated, online mentoring can also be helpful to promote reflective practice as long as the tutor asks questions, rather than directing students. Another approach would be to set up an online chat forum in which students could exchange views about their practice diaries and musical learning, possibly moderated for a few hours a week by a tutor, a member of the peripatetic music staff or a doctoral student.

To what extent do students need support in developing their own reflective practice? This research project demonstrates that classical and popular musicians developed reflective skills, with various kinds of support from their tutors. It would be desirable to ensure that tutors for performance courses in different genres have access to a core set of workshop materials which could be made available to students, particularly at the beginning of their studies. The key point here is to ensure that the activities are focused on students, rather than tutor-led, to ensure that individual critical self-awareness about the process of practice and independent learning skills is stimulated. Power (2016) posits



a simple model for reflection, based on three core questions, which points towards the kind of guidance which might be valuable to support student learning about reflective practice.

It is clear from the study conducted by Gaunt (2013) in a conservatoire that it is not only students who need help to develop skills in reflective practice, but also faculty staff and peripatetic tutors. Facilitated workshops can help to make staff more aware of different approaches to reflection and it would also be beneficial to ensure that music faculty staff experience some of the group work which is offered to students, in addition to being introduced to the literature about reflection in tertiary education and, more specifically, in music education.

What other resources could be offered to students? Self-help guides may offer useful advice, but in my experience students are not necessarily going to read what is on a reading list, particularly not if, as self-taught musicians, they expect to discover their craft through rehearsing and gigging, not through formal instruction. As Smith asserts (2013a), the professional portfolio careers of popular musicians involve far more than just playing in a band which, I would contend, is also true for classical musicians after graduation, who may be playing in an orchestra or a chamber group in the evening as well as holding down a full-time job. One approach would be to invite guest speakers to talk to students about their own learning journeys and how they have learnt to manage the process of musical learning through reflection and balancing the day job with musical rehearsal and performance. This suggests that reflective skills need to be developed not only with a focus on technique or building musical craft, but under a much wider umbrella of musical practice and performance, including socio-cultural elements and taking note of the real life experiences of professional musicians, whatever their role in the music industry.

## 8.6. Areas for further research

This research project has focused the experiences of students on the Performance Modules. However, this project has not sought to explore students' views of their peripatetic instrumental and vocal lessons, in the manner of Gaunt's (2010) study of conservatoire students' perceptions of their one-to-one lessons. Those students who were taking lessons at the University of Liverpool wrote about their lessons and teachers, but were not asked to evaluate the lessons; any opinions which were expressed were in the context of learning technique. Similarly, as peripatetic music teachers work 'behind closed doors', it would be valuable to explore their opinions about the introduction of the practice diary and the reflective essay, both with undergraduate and post-graduate students to see whether they think that these have made a positive impact on student progress and understanding of reflective practice. As Gaunt (2013) emphasises, it cannot be assumed that peripatetic tutors understand reflective practice and conversations with the Head of Performance highlight the paradox that, in his view, famous professional musicians may not be the best teachers!

As the current research project followed just one cohort of students, it would be valuable to extend this research to include successive cohorts of students. As there is a great deal of data, a wide variety of themes could be explored. This could either focus on individual year groups, comparing for example the experience of first-year popular musicians in tutor-assigned bands or explore sub-themes raised by this study, such as managing nerves. With a larger data set, it would be possible to conduct some statistical analysis into the relationship between grades for the reflective essay and grades for performance to see whether, for example, a high grade in a reflective essay is a reliable predictor of a high grade in performance. Such an analysis could be conducted using Grounded Theory, for example, and a software programme such as nVivo.

Longitudinal research may also reveal trends in the role of reflection in musical learning which could have implications for programme design and changes in pedagogical approaches for performance music studies in many genres. If reflection is to have any

lasting impact, for example, on popular music studies, it would be highly relevant to explore how it might be applied to wider areas of the popular music curriculum, such as modules on studio recording, entrepreneurship, networking and band management. It would also be interesting to see whether sharing best practice about reflection and musical learning might be of interest to other higher education institutions, which could generate a larger data set and encompass musicians working in other genres, such as folk, jazz and world music.

The intonation module as taught at the University of Liverpool to classical undergraduate performance students, as described in Section 5.2.1., seems, based on discussions with other music academics at international conferences, to be unique in its approach. I would suggest that there is further research to be done to explore how intonation is taught — or whether it is taught at all — in tertiary music education. In addition, for the University of Liverpool, it would be worth exploring whether some aspects of the classical intonation module could be adapted for the popular musicians. The Head of Performance and I have led intonation workshops for students in secondary education for classical and popular musicians. There is a real need here to find a way to create an equivalent experience for popular musicians, who were not able to attend the harpsichord tuning workshops. This would also prompt research which could explore whether popular musicians can perceive the ‘beats’ in rehearsal and performance and develop their aural acuity.

Cross-genre musical ensembles offer another area for further research. There are two aspects which are of interest here. Firstly, there are classical musicians who deliberately choose the Popular Performance Module. As the number of such musicians may be less than five per year of intake, longitudinal research over an extended period would be needed to generate enough data from which conclusions could be drawn, for example, about formal and informal learning behaviours and the role of the institution and its location in supporting — or not supporting — students in such informal music making. Furthermore, such research would be enhanced if data could be collected from students after graduation to see whether the cross-genre musicking experiences had a lasting

effect on their musical journeys or not. Secondly, there have been instances of undergraduates changing from the Popular Performance Module to the Classical Performance Module after the first year of study. I interviewed four students from the 2013 intake who had swapped to Classical Performance; their comments suggest that some popular musicians were looking for a more formal approach to their personal learning, whatever their prior experiences at school of popular and classical music. Research into the experiences of such students could offer useful pointers towards the development of popular music pedagogy and the need for flexibility and adaptability in such courses as suggested by Smith (2013a).

It would be highly beneficial to establish a working group across different tertiary education institutions to explore how assessed reflection can be implemented and improved, not only for music performance courses, but for the Performing Arts in general. The Pathway of Reflective Practice (Table 7.5.) may serve as a useful starting point to investigate and compare key transition points in the development of reflective skills across different undergraduate music courses for classical, popular and other musicians. This could lead to a set of teaching and learning resources which could help tutors to support students to develop their reflective practice, for example by fostering the understanding and adoption of metacognitive practice strategies using the Pathway of Reflective Practice (Table 7.7.).

Another potential research area would be to explore how students from different cultural backgrounds react to and learn through reflective practice. A pilot project was started in June 2016 at the University of Liverpool to compare the reflective essays written by Chinese MMus performance students and first-year Classical Performance Module undergraduates. The focus of this project is to discover how Chinese students who have been educated in the Confucian tradition approach reflection. Initial results of this pilot study, as Esslin-Peard and Shorrocks (2017) describe, may have implications not only for the pedagogical development of the MMus course in Liverpool, which has a high percentage of Chinese students, but also offer new avenues of research for faculty staff involved in the partnership between the University of Liverpool and Xi'an Jiaotong-

Liverpool University in China to develop reflective practice in other curriculum areas and may also be of interest to other academics working with Chinese students.

In Chapter 4, passing mention was made of gender in relation to the choice of instrumental and vocal studies by the students in the 2012–2015 cohort. This year group had one female drummer and one female vocalist who also played trumpet in two other bands. In the year below, the 2013 intake, there were two all-female bands, *Indigo Moon*, started in 2014 and *Tidal Grace*, which was formed in 2016. One future avenue of research might be to explore the role of women in successive cohorts of students taking the Popular Performance Module. Gender studies offer a variety of lenses through which female musicians might be examined, including choice of instrument, role in the band, relationships with other female and/or male musicians and sexual identity, as Leonard (2007) and Smith (2013) report. When I met the female drummer P3D at *The Sneaky Nixons* album launch in London in February 2017, she suggested that research should be done to see whether listeners supplied only with audio files could distinguish between male and female drummers, an approach adopted by Sargeant et al., (2005) in their investigation of listeners' perceptions of gender differences in young male and female cathedral choristers.

The discussion of success factors for the classical and popular performance students who were awarded firsts in their final year of study suggests that extra-curricular activities are a contributing factor not only for wider musical learning, but also contribute to high grades in the final assessment, both for performance and the assessed reflective essay. It would be valuable to conduct longitudinal research to see whether students on the Performance Module who were more engaged with extra-curricular activities, multiple bands, studio recording and session work gain higher grades than their peers. Furthermore, it would be interesting to explore whether there were differences or similarities in the level of engagement of classical and popular musicians in this regard.

Finally, given that this research project focused on undergraduate musicians, it would also be valuable to conduct research with adult professional musicians to discover what

knowledge they have of reflective practice and whether they use reflection to enhance their rehearsal and performance strategies, taking an approach such as Creech et al., (2008) adopt. This also begs the question whether professional musicians use any kind of diary or blog to record their thoughts about practice or whether, as in the case of the undergraduate viola player on the Classical Performance course, the diary is kept ‘in the mind’ rather than through a physical or digital medium.

### **8.7. Learning through the looking-glass**

It seems to me that reflective practice allows all musicians a powerful tool to understand their own rehearsal and performance practices and debunks the myth that ‘practice makes perfect’. Perhaps the dictum should be ‘learning through the looking-glass’. I do not mean a looking-glass here in the sense of a mirror, although there is an aspect of reflexive thinking in reflection. I am thinking more of Alice in *Alice through the Looking Glass* (Carroll, 1998, p. 127) climbing through a mirror into a different world, a world of change, challenges and surprises. Reflection, as Boud (2010) reminds us, can produce just such challenges and surprises and this was evident in the students’ reflective essays in this study. Self-critical awareness of the individual and group processes in musical learning, developed through reflective practice, whatever the musical genre, cannot be ignored if music educators want to help students to progress during their undergraduate performance studies and continue to take an independent, analytical approach to their musical development after graduation.

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**Table R1: List of reflective essays: Classical musicians**

**Core cohort 2012–2015**

	<b>Instrument</b>	<b>First Year</b>	<b>Second Year</b>	<b>Third Year</b>
CL1 (m)	Saxophone	x	x	x
CL2 (f)	Viola	x	x	x
CL3 (f)	Clarinet/Sax	x	x	x
CL4 (f)	Violin/Viola	x	x	x
CL5 (m)	Voice	x	x	x
CL6 (m)	Voice	x	x	x
CL7 (f)	Violin	x	x	x
CL8 (f)	Cello	x	x	x
CL9 (f)	Piano	x	x	x
CL10 (f)	Cello	x	x	x
CL11 (f)	Violin	x	x	
CL12 (f)	Piano	x	x	
CL13 (f)	Violin	x	x	
CL14 (f)	Clarinet	x	x	
CL15 (m)	Clarinet	x	x	

**Students outside the core cohort**

		<b>First Year</b>	<b>Second Year</b>	<b>Third Year</b>	<b>Year of entry</b>
CL16 (m)	Trumpet	x	x		2013
CL17 (f)	Viola	x	x	x	2011

**Table R2: List of reflective essays: Popular musicians  
Core cohort 2012–2015**

	<b>Instrument</b>	<b>First Year</b>	<b>Second Year</b>	<b>Third Year</b>	<b>Year of entry</b>
P1D (m)	Drums	x	x	x	2012
P2B (m)	Bass	x	x	x	2012
P3D (f)	Drums	x	x	x	2012
P4V (m)	Voice	x	x	x	2012
P5B (m)	Bass	x	x	x	2012
P6V (f)	Voice	x	x	x	2012
P7G (m)	Guitar	x	x	x	2012
P8V (f)	Voice	x	x	x	2012
P9V (m)	Voice	x	x	x	2012
P10V (m)	Voice	x	x	x	2012
P11V (m)	Voice	x		x	2012
P12G (m)	Guitar	x	x	x	2012
P13V (f)	Voice	x	x	x	2012
P14V (f)	Voice	x	x	x	2012
P15V (f)	Voice	x	x	x	2012
P16G (m)	Guitar	x	x	x	2012
P17G (m)	Guitar	x	x	x	2012
P17G (m)	Guitar	x	x		2012
P19B (m)	Bass	x	x	x	2012
P20V (f)	Voice	x	x	x	2012
P21V (m)	Voice	x	x	x	2012
P22B (m)	Bass	x	x	x	2012
P23G (m)	Guitar	x	x	x	2012
P24B (m)	Bass	x	x	x	2012
P25G (m)	Guitar	x	x	x	2012
P26V (f)	Voice	x	x	x	2012
P27G (m)	Guitar	x	x	x	2012
P28G (m)	Guitar	x	x	x	2012
P29V (m)	Voice	x	x	x	2012
P30S (m)	Saxophone		x	x	2012
P31D (m)	Drums	x	x	x	2012
P32G (m)	Guitar	x	x	x	2012

**Students outside the core cohort**

P33G (m)	Guitar	x		x	2012
P34G (m)	Guitar				2012
P35D (m)	Drums		x	x	2011
P36B (m)	Bass	x	x		2013
P37G (m)	Guitar				2013



## **List of interview dates and transcripts quoted.**

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# PART FOUR: APPENDICES

**Appendix 1** Case Study – The Function Band: *Funk Soul Continuum*

**Appendix 2** Case Study – The Rock Band: *The Sneaky Nixons*

**Appendix 3** Case Study – Cross-Genre Musicking

**Appendix 4** Ethics approval documentation

**Appendix 5** Background Questionnaire

**Appendix 6** Glossary

**Appendix 7** Assessment criteria for reflective essays

## Introduction

The following three case studies shed light upon the musical development of two bands and six classical musicians who performed in bands, based upon their reflective essays, individual and group semi-structured interviews.

*Funk Soul Continuum* was a student function band which performed in Liverpool from 2013 to summer 2015.



**Photo A1 (2015): Funk Soul Continuum**

*The Sneaky Nixons* was formed by five first-year popular musicians in 2012 soon after they started their undergraduate studies. I have been in contact with the lead singer and the two other founder members (the drummer and the bassist) from 2013 to 2017



**Photo A2 (2017): The Sneaky Nixons**

# Funk Soul Continuum

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*Funk Soul Continuum* was set up by a saxophonist during the first year of his undergraduate study. Whilst there have been ethnographic studies of popular musicians, such as the volume by Cohen (1991) documenting two punk bands in Liverpool, I am not aware of a study of a function band. This case study, therefore, presents a window into the working practices and performance experiences of the eight musicians who played in the band from 2012 until June 2015. As the members had mixed musical backgrounds, including exposure to both classical and popular musical genres, this raised an interesting question of how they worked together. I was keen to investigate whether there was a preference for formal or informal learning behaviours as the band matured as Green (2002), Seddon (2004), Feichas (2010) and Smith (2013) describe. All but one of the students playing in the band had studied or were studying music or popular music at the University of Liverpool.

## 1. Data sources

I was able to see the band both rehearse and perform and I decided to invite the members to give me interviews between 2014 and 2016. Table A1 below shows the data sources which were available to me. I had access to the reflective essays from the students who had taken the Popular or Classical Performance Modules and six out of the eight also completed the Background Questionnaire (see Appendix 5).

**Table A1. Data sources for *Funk Soul Continuum***

Musician	Reflective Essay	Reflective Essay	Reflective Essay	Reflective Essay	Background Questionnaire	Interview
P4V, lead vox		2013	2014	2015	BQ	17.2.2015
P30S, sax			2014	2015	BQ	29.10.2014 20.2.2015
CL1, sax		2013	2014	2015	BQ	29.10.2014 17.2.2015
P16G, guitar		2013	2014	2015		29.10.2014
CL16, trumpet			2014	2015/ 2016	BQ	30.5.2016
P36B, Bass				2015/ 2016		N/A
K1, Keys						N/A
P35D, drums	2012	2013	2014		BQ	29.10.2014 19.2.2015

## 2. Musical background of the band

Four of the band members, including its founder, P30S, were in the 2012–2015 cohort of students: the drummer, P35D, came from the year above; the bass player, P36B, and the trumpeter, CL16, were in the 2013 intake of students. All took either the Popular or Classical Performance Module. The keyboard player, K1, was in the 2012–2015 cohort but was not studying music. From the background questionnaire, the data showed that out of five musicians for whom data was available, four had studied A Level Music at school; two of these had also studied A Level Music Technology. The keyboard player revealed in rehearsal that he had a classical background as a pianist and thus could read music. The data reveal a group of musicians, the majority of whom could read notation and had experience of one-to-one instrumental or vocal tuition at school. This would suggest that they were familiar with a formal approach to practice and performance typical of Western classical music, even if they had chosen to take the Popular Music BMus rather than the Classical Music BMus.



### 3. Beginnings

Three students described their experiences in *Funk Soul Continuum* (hereafter *FSC*) in their first-year reflective essays. They started, as the guitarist explained, by working on their covers from notation:

We all relied on sheet music to learn the songs, but as it came to our last rehearsal before our first gig, most of us have completely stopped using them... I feel that by playing the song and taking cues from the singer we can work much better, especially when playing funk/soul music, as it is so repetitive. Reading sheet music can make something relatively simple a lot more difficult than it needs to be, (P16G, 2013).

The guitarist also explained that using music slowed rehearsals down, as not all the players were equally fluent in reading notation. As the classical saxophonist made many of the band's arrangements, he offered the wind and brass players music to learn the arrangements.

At the start it did slow us down because everyone was given music, the drummer was reading off music and me and the keyboard player. [...] The thing is, I'm not very good at reading music. It just restricts me. I am not an amazing guitar player so it's better for me to just know what I need to know and write it down myself, not notation, but notes for me to understand, (P16G, FSC, 2014).

Another method which the band used was to send round audio files of the songs which were going to be worked on at the next rehearsal, as the arranger explained to me in interview:

When we're trying to learn new songs, sometimes we've had rehearsals where everyone's listened to the song and knows the song and we'll come in and we'll play it and we'll have a new song down in 20 minutes. And then sometimes

people won't listen to the song and it will take a whole two hour rehearsal, everyone will be listening to it and then trying to play the part from it, it will drag on and on, (CL1, Interview, 2014).

Initially working without notation for the classically-trained musicians seemed impossible. The guitarist related that the keyboard player had never learnt a song by ear, but developed his aural skills by playing with the band. In fact after the first few months of rehearsal, all the members of *FSC* were playing aurally, illustrating that the classical musicians had changed their approach.

There was also a difference in views about how to approach a rehearsal and there was some tension between solving musical problems informally and just having fun, as the guitarist explained:

One thing that we've all realised is that a rehearsal where we get a lot done is much more fun. If we just go crazy, it's fun at the time, but coming out of a two hour rehearsal, you realise you've not done much, (P16G, *FSC*, 2014).

The inconsistency in early rehearsals might, I would suggest, have been due to the need to adapt to informal and formal approaches to rehearsing. It took some time until the band members found effective rehearsal methods. The guitarist described how problems were solved in rehearsal, revealing that he had either developed some critical rehearsal skills, or could have picked these up unconsciously from his classical musician peers:

If we do have problems in rehearsal it's normally a case of stop, work out where it is, sort it out, if it's near the beginning we'll just go again, see if it's a problem that came out of nowhere, work out where it was and work on that little section until it's right and then move on, (P16G, *FSC*, 2014).

This was echoed by the classical sax player:

We did have a really good rehearsal. We did a wedding fair, two days before, we had two backing vocals. We just stopped, you and K1 didn't play, we did all three vocal parts, working them out, then put them with the horns and it was like, you could tell at that point that it was sounding really good, then we did it with the band, breaking it down and then building it back up, (CL1, FSC, 2014).

Not surprisingly, the popular saxophonist recognised that gigs were also a kind of rehearsal, echoing many other popular musicians' learning about performance in their third year. He described the benefits of performing thus:

Playing it live — that improves the songs the most, because you can't stop halfway through, you've got to know it. It makes you properly concentrate and think about it, that's where we really improve our songs, (P30S, FSC, 2014).

The long-term learning for the classical saxophonist was all about flexibility. He noted at the end of the interview that there had been 'a massive change, classical to pop. Bridging the gap and being able to go from one to the other is better now. At the start it was a bit "How am I going to survive?"' (CL1, FSC, 2014). The popular saxophonist revealed that playing in *FSC* had helped him develop his improvisation skills:

I just like taking life as it comes. Going in whichever direction life takes me and I feel like going down. I don't feel I've become a really technical musician, my improvising has improved, my leadership has improved, (P30S, FSC, 2014).

The guitarist had played in a musical theatre production in the first year, which he had taken very seriously. He recognised that this entailed more formal rehearsals, whilst also revealing that he was now learning how to run *FSC* as a business:

Musicals were much more formal, I'd done a bit at college, but not a big production. It was fun, but when it becomes much more structured and formal it wasn't what I wanted to do. I find it funny how, not in terms of actual playing,

but as a musician, I'm starting to understand how to treat a band as more of a business. That's exactly what this is. It is becoming a business. We've learnt that if we didn't treat it like a business, then nothing would happen really, (P16G, FSC, 2014).

He continued:

That's the thing. It is fun even when you class it as business. It's funny how CL1 says he's become more casual in rehearsals, but for me, I've become more formal. Opposite! (P16G, FSC, 2014).

These excerpts illustrate that the members of *FSC* learnt by trial and error how to work effectively together, with the popular musician guitarist taking a more formal approach to rehearsals. Conversely, as rehearsals continued, the classical saxophonist discovered that he did not need to provide notated parts for all band members, and sound files seemed to be the medium that everyone used for individual practice. I sat in on a rehearsal in October 2014 and made notes. What struck me was the positive atmosphere: the band worked efficiently and helped each other with musical problems, each sharing their knowledge. Reference was made to YouTube tracks when a problem was encountered which they could not solve.

However, the lead singer who was also performing with his close harmony quartet, *Proper Sound*, felt that rehearsal time was wasted, particularly in the second year, as he explained:

It kind of annoys me how there's been a lot of times where we've agreed to learn a song, and it's a case where everyone shows up and they're learning how to play it there and then. So I'm sitting there, waiting for them to know the song. As a singer, I should just be able to jump on top and sing straight away, (P4V, 2015).

Perhaps because he had already experienced being a front man in a band at school, he expected *FSC* members to be note-perfect when he turned up to sing the vocals. This desire for efficiently run rehearsals was echoed by the bass guitarist who had been recruited to the band in his first year. He recognised that there was a real difference between playing in a band whose members wrote their own material and a function band like *FSC*, as he explained in his reflective essay:

What we have learned is that it is not only the role of a function band to be professional in their sound. To be considered a professional musician, you must act accordingly and appropriately in every manner whilst working: load in, sound check, all the way through until the last bit of equipment has been dropped off, (P36B, 2015).

It is clear from this comment that frequent concerts were stimulating reflection about the wider aspects of being a musician which went beyond making music, which I discuss further below.

#### **4. Managing the band**

In 2014 and 2015, *FSC* performed more and more frequently. The experiences of gigging were described by the students in their reflective essays and in interviews with me. The students were learning not only about what made a successful musical performance, but also how to manage the group commercially, making bookings, managing finances, grappling with travel arrangements and getting their instruments and equipment to venues.

I start by considering how the students managed the band. The saxophonist on the Popular Performance Module founded the band and acted as its leader. In the second year, he was still very much in control, but acknowledged that other members of the band were contributing, such as the classical saxophonist who provided many of the

musical arrangements. The guitarist started to take over some of the bookings, as he described in his reflective essay:

One thing I have learnt is how to negotiate fees for private function gigs and to also have a good relationship with the people that are booking us, to make sure it is a simple process for both the band and the bookers, (P16G, 2014).

In the first year, the band had borrowed a PA from the University Big Band. This was not feasible in the long-term as they could not always rely on the equipment being available when they had a gig. Thus they clubbed together in 2014 to buy their own PA, as P30S explained:

We have recently bought a new decent-sized PA and sub, which will help in getting more gigs and playing bigger venues as well as the possibility of getting [signed] on a function, parties and weddings agency, which would mean getting a lot more gigs which are a lot better paid next year. We are also already booked to play at Fiesta Bombarda after [the] summer, another direction the band can go in, (P30S, 2014).

However, more and better paid gigs led to pressure on the band members as the guitarist reported:

We now have many £1000+ gigs booked, which compared to the £50 gigs we had at the start of this year, is a great achievement. The difficulties have been clear, though, including friendships being strained, unproductive rehearsals and a couple of disappointing gigs along the way, (P16G, 2015).

The band members could not agree whether they wanted to continue as a student function band, or approach an agency to manage wedding gigs and possible work on cruise ships over the summer of 2015, as the saxophonist explained:

There are many ways the band could've developed this year, we could've concentrated much more on originals doing those styles of gigs or we could've gone even more down the function band route and got some recordings done and get on a lot of wedding band agencies. It could have also developed much more slowly if we didn't push to get so many gigs and we may not have played at weddings and gigs of that calibre, (P30S, 2015).

However, the frequency of *FSC* rehearsals and gigs was problematic for the lead singer who was performing frequently with his barbershop quartet, *Proper Sound*, which meant that he missed many rehearsals. This led to more tensions in the group and the singer himself was upset at being replaced by a deputy, as he described in his reflective essay:

A dep [deputy] vocalist would receive the same amount of money that I would have received, yet I feel this is totally unfair since the very fact that as a band we have the capacity to charge the fees we currently do, stems directly from the growth of our reputation in which I played an undeniably significant role... If the lead vocalist were to change for their event, then the client is not receiving what they initially asked for, especially since the lead vocalist is the 'face of the band', (P4V, 2015).

Whilst he recognised that this view was unpopular with other members of the group, he had made a very strong impression on audiences as 'the next white Bruno Mars' and the band had made considerable efforts to build and promote their image, as two band members explained:

A major factor in helping the band develop is creating an image and logo that really fits with the character of the band and letting people know what we do. This meant that we could really start to concentrate on progressing the band into a professional looking outfit and create an aesthetic that looked good online, such as Facebook and Twitter, (P30S, 2014).

As a funk and soul band, you want to have a total image, not just sound, (P35D, Interview, 2015).

As part of their social media presence, the group made a promotional video and an audio show-reel which they posted on their YouTube channel in February 2014 and shared on Facebook. The videos show the members of the band wearing matching ties and waistcoats. In the third year, it was clear that the band's founder had delegated more of the management of gigs to other members, as he explained in his reflective essay:

As the band has developed this year, so has my role. Compared to last year, I have relinquished some responsibilities as more band members have got on board with the project and have become less of a band leader. This is also because we have improved and gelled a lot more as band and everyone is prepared to help out a lot more. I don't need to lead the band at gigs nearly as much anymore as everyone knows their parts a lot better and I can trust everyone to play the music correctly, (P30S, 2015).

The accounts above demonstrate that as the band developed, the musicians worked as a collective to manage the musical, logistic and business aspects of *FSC*.

## **5. Performing is practice**

Between October 2014 and June 2015, *Funk Soul Continuum* performed over twenty times, ranging from a residency in the PanAm bar on Friday nights, playing at Liverpool venues such as the Zanzibar, the Cavern Club and Parr Street Studios and performing on Ladies' Day at Aintree during the Grand National horse race meeting. The Aintree performances involved playing for half an hour each hour over a time span of eight hours, combined with a gig the previous evening and playing for the Friday residency afterwards. This required a marathon effort, as the bassist related in his reflective essay:



The amount of stamina and energy it took to perform that consistently was almost overwhelming at times, not to mention the blisters that emerged from playing for that long in such a short amount of time. This said, we pushed on and we not only met our target of playing all three gigs, however we were extremely satisfied with how we played as well, (P36B, 2015).

Their performances at Aintree also inspired another student on the Popular Performance Module to seek performing opportunities off-campus, as this vocalist explained in her reflective essay:

Watching *Funk Soul Continuum* playing on the main stage at Crabbie's Grand National Ladies' Day made me want to be far more pro-active at putting my band 'out there', (P20V, 2015).

As the bass player explained, *FSC* had made considerable progress in the two years in which he had been a member:

The first gig that I played with Funk Soul Continuum was Christmas 2013 when we played in the corner of a tiny pub in Anfield; this was something I chose to reflect on when we were playing to over two thousand people at the Grand National. Getting this opportunity created a real buzz within the band and instilled a sense of achievement which made us truly believe that there was a career to be made from this, (P36B, 2015).

Given the challenges of a major public performance at Anfield, the classical trumpeter also noticed a more rigorous approach to rehearsals:

Towards the end of the year, maybe February time, [...] we would print out rehearsal schedules, like arrive five to nine, with different schedules and different songs to work on. I mean, like highlight our strengths and weaknesses between rehearsals, and then do it. Especially when weddings were coming up, when we

were playing at the Grand National, and they weren't just student gigs anymore, they were quite well paid — you could argue about 'well paid' for an eight-piece function band. The money was going up, so we really had to take it quite seriously, (CL16, Interview, 2016).

This classically-trained musician realised the importance of effective preparation before important gigs, a view which I would argue was shared by the other band members as they played more high-profile gigs.

## **6. Discussion**

At the beginning of this case study, I posed the question whether the band worked with a preference for formal or informal learning styles. Given that the members of *FSC* had experienced different musical training before university, what do their experiences reveal about working across the formal-informal continuum, as posited by Folkestad (2006)?

In the initial stages of rehearsals, it emerged that students exhibited their prior preferences for working either formally or informally. The classical saxophone player provided musical arrangements for the band members, assuming perhaps that his peers would be comfortable working from notation. This was not the case, as the guitarist revealed that he found it easier working without music. The trumpeter who was classically-trained and was playing with the rock band, *The Sneaky Nixons* quickly learnt his parts and then played without music.

Organising rehearsals with an eight piece band required strong leadership from the popular saxophonist and founder of the band. However, it is clear from the students' accounts that in the early stages there was not always a plan for rehearsals. This resulted in some wasted time and considerable frustration for the lead singer, who had expected, based on his experiences of being a lead vocalist at school, that he might just turn up and

sing with the band, who already knew their parts. What became clear as the band developed is that with more public performances, rehearsals were better organised.

It is worth noting here that seven out of the eight members of the band were either current or former students on either the Popular or Classical Performance Modules. They had all been exposed, to a greater or lesser degree, to the requirements of the university to keep a practice diary and submit annual reflective essays for assessment. This focus on reflection may have made them more willing to speak to me in interview and allowed them to reflect critically on the development of the band and how they worked together. Arguably if they had not been studying performance, with the requirement to reflect, they may not have been able to offer the same insights into the challenges which they had faced.

What these students achieved — a strong presence in Liverpool, particularly in 2014–2015, with their performance at Aintree for the Grand National Ladies’ Day — was entirely motivated and driven by the members of the band, without any coaching from their tutors. I was surprised that there was no website for *FSC*, although they did post a promotional video on YouTube in 2015. They did not make any studio recordings and did not refer to recording in any of the interviews that they gave me, either individually or as a group.

## **7. Conclusion**

I would suggest that the experiences of the members of *FSC* demonstrate that the wider pedagogical context of their undergraduate studies on the performance courses may have had a positive effect on their ability to collaborate effectively. They related in their reflective essays and in interview that they worked both formally and informally according to context, which concurs with many aspects of the research projects conducted by Folkestad (2006), Welch et al., (2008), Mak (2009), McPhail (2013) and Slater (2016).

This is a single case study. In order to draw reliable conclusions about the influence — direct or indirect — of reflection on formal and informal learning practices, more research would need to be conducted with similar groups over a longer timescale. Five out of the eight members of the band are now, as I write in 2017, either performing in function bands and pop groups, or pursuing master level studies in performance. One member has been commissioned as an Army musician. *Funk Soul Continuum* was an important part of the Liverpool music scene from 2013–2015 and I am pleased to see that the majority of its members are still making music.

# The Sneaky Nixons

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## Introduction

What makes a successful rock band? As Smith (2013a) asserts, it is notoriously difficult to define success in the context of popular musicians. In view of students' mixed experiences of the tutor-assigned bands in the first year, I thought it would be worthwhile to conduct an in-depth ethnographic study of a band which was formed at the end of 2012 by four members of the Popular Music Performance course who started in 2012. This case study documents the development and progress of a band in the style of Cohen (1991), although as a part-time researcher based in London, my access to the band was limited to the weeks I spent on campus through the four years of my research and subsequent meetings with band members in Liverpool and London.

What makes this group of undergraduate popular musicians unusual is that they were obliged to reflect on their musical development as part of their performance course. I am grateful to *The Sneaky Nixons* for allowing me to share at least part of their continuing journey as described in their reflective essays and interviews. There were other bands — *Fog* and *Fizzy Blood* — which were formed at the same time, but their members were not based in Liverpool. I thought it would be interesting to see whether Liverpool, a city with a thriving musical scene, could still act as a catalyst for emerging bands.

## 1. Data sources

I am basing this narrative and discussion upon the reflective essays submitted by five musicians in the 2012–2015 cohort, namely David Manning, aka Charlie Daniels, Lisa Fawcett and Jamie Gosling, all of whom have given me permission to use their real names. Two other guitarists/vocalists were also involved in the early stages, namely

P25G and P18G. There were several changes of guitarist. P37G joined from 2013 cohort and took part in one interview and completed the Background Questionnaire. A trumpeter on the Classical Performance course from 2013 cohort CL16 has been since 2015. I had access to all the reflective essays written by these six musicians. The most recent guitarist to join the band, DLH, arrived in autumn 2015. As he was not a student of the university, there is no written data available.

**Table A2: Written data sources for *The Sneaky Nixons***

Musician	Reflective Essay	Reflective Essay	Reflective Essay	Background Questionnaire
David Manning Guitar, vocals	2013	2014	2015	BQ
Lisa Fawcett Drums	2013	2014	2015	BQ
Jamie Gosling Bass	2013	2014	2015	BQ
P25G Guitar, vocals	2013	2014	2015	
P18G Guitar, vocals	2013	2014		
P37G Guitar				BQ
CL16 Trumpet		2014	2015	BQ

In addition, I conducted individual and group interviews which are shown in Table A3 below:

**Table A3: Interviews with *The Sneaky Nixons***

Date of Interview	Personnel present	Interview Reference
30.10.2014	DM, LF, JG, P18G	SN 1
18.02.2015/18.3.2015	DM, LF, JG	SN 2
30.04.2016	CL16	CL16, 2016
28.07.2016	DM	DM, 2016
19.10.2016	DM, LF, Carlo Variola (Promotions agent)	SN 3

## **2. Research questions**

What I am seeking to understand here is whether it was feasible that students on the Popular Music Performance Module could be commercially successful in a rock band either during or after their studies. The research questions for this case study are:

How did the musicians develop their band skills?

What role did reflective practice play in their musical development?

What are the key factors contributing to the commercial success of the band?

What follows is an attempt at an objective account of the trials and tribulations of a group of musicians, three of whom have been in the band for the last five years. In addition to the above sources, I have also included reviews from online media of concerts and track releases.

## **3. Musical background of the band**

I will start with the musical background of the members of the band based on their responses to the background questionnaire. David Manning went to a comprehensive school in Essex with a strong reputation for music and had learnt to read music, including gaining a qualification in Grade V theory. He took BTEC Music Level 3 at KS5. The drummer, Lisa Fawcett, is Anglo-Vietnamese. She attended a British International school, qualifying with the International Baccalaureate. She had been academically well-trained, but had made her own way as a drummer, joining in with ensembles at school to develop her skills. She had not had any drum lessons at school. Jamie Gosling, like David Manning, had attended a comprehensive school, had BTEC Level 3 in Music and was self-taught. These three core members of the band shared the experience of being self-taught. In the Background Questionnaire, they revealed that they thought that practice entailed playing through a song or having to work on scales

and there was no evidence which pointed towards deliberate practice. Lisa explained in interview that she selected songs that had good drum parts and tried to copy them aurally; Jamie associated scales with practice. He played both electric bass and double bass in the school orchestra, so he may have been exposed to more formal approaches to practice and rehearsals.

David took a different view of practice, as he explained to me in interview:

That's what I consider practice, when you have a set to practise, or a song to nail down, but to me individually it doesn't really exist. It's something that you do when you play. It's in my bloodstream, there's no such thing as practice, it just comes out, I just have to. I can't imagine what I'd do without it, it's a necessity like water, it has to come out. It isn't practice, it's just an articulation. It's who you are. It's part of me, I can't take it away. Practice sounds boring, like you rehearse, (DM, SN1).

David did not distinguish between playing, practising and performing. It was all what he termed 'playing'. His comments illustrate his identification with his role as a musician and his passion for playing.

#### **4. Band formation**

As the focus on the first-year tutor-assigned bands was on performing covers, the experience may have been frustrating for musicians who were seeking to express themselves as singer-songwriters and also play with a friendship group which, for many, was the model which symbolised musical success whilst they were at school. David described the difference between the tutor-assigned bands and working with the players in *The Sneaky Nixons* thus:

The difference with *The Sneaky Nixons* was that despite us all having slightly different music tastes, we still managed to write songs that all of us enjoyed.



P18G, P25G and myself are the songwriters, although some of the songs are written individually or created within a co-written partnership. What I respect about writing songs and using them with *The Sneaky Nixons* is that not only is everyone good at their instruments, but they also realise when to hold back and not play for the sake of playing, (DM, 2013).

In the academic year 2012–2013, *The Sneaky Nixons* rehearsed regularly in the music department and built up a set list of original songs. The line-up included three guitarists with vocal skills who were all songwriters. This required careful management:

We decided the best course of action was to take the best elements of the songs that we had already written and write a number of new songs from scratch with all three of the guitarists/singers having equal creative input towards the guitars and the vocals. This resulted in a much wider tonal and dynamic range and also allowed the first developments towards a recognisable overall sound for the band, (P25G, 2013).

David was forthright in his views and seemed to be searching for a band to establish himself as a 21<sup>st</sup> century punk rocker in the style suggested by Moran (2011). He had acquired, or had reinforced his ideal image of a rock musician from the persona of the Tutor for the Popular Music Performance Module, which he explained in interview in 2014:

He's been there though hasn't he, he's been in bands, he has some cultural capital. When he says something, you believe him. He's been there, taken the drugs, shagged the girls, played on TV with his bleached blonde hair; he's done it, (DM, SN 1).

This view was echoed by the bassist, Jamie, who described in interview how the Tutor for Popular Performance had given him advice about his bass lines in his first year:

I remember, he was always very beneficial for me, telling me what to do, because he was a bassist in his glory days, so I think he told me ‘stop being so complicated in certain parts’ and that helped me quite a lot. It took me quite a while to work it out, I thought playing complicated bass lines made me a good player, but they told me to rein it in, keep it solid with the drums and obviously I think that’s become a big thing now, (JG, SN 1).

Similarly, Lisa described her course tutor’s advice about the role of a drummer in her Background Questionnaire:

He has a big interest in drumming — plays a bit, himself — and has always provided tips and advice during band practices and assessments, which I usually take into account — e.g. less drum fills in certain songs — demonstrating that complex drumming isn’t always necessarily good drumming, (LF, BQ).

Lisa is, I would suggest, a very self-aware musician. She surmounted the challenge of being a female drummer and established herself as the drummer of choice in her cohort. As I will document below, perhaps the combination of being a very competent drummer, an Anglo-Asian female and knowing when to defer to a strong male lead enabled her to succeed. David had created what was, to all intents, a very macho post-punk band whose members probably spent more time drinking than rehearsing, reflecting the study by Cohen (1991, p.102) in which she describes two punk bands in Liverpool who used alcohol as a stimulus to prepare for being creative in rehearsal or performance. The lead singer David recognised at the end of his first year that perhaps more time should have been spent on rehearsals than drinking in The Pilgrim:

I believe that if we had invested half the time we spent in The Pilgrim on recording songs and finding gigs we would be in a far more solid and respectable place than we are currently. Having said that, it was in The Pilgrim where P18G and I came up with the solution to our ‘problem’ of slow progress. We both

agreed that next year we would play a gig and record a song once a month, (DM, 2013).

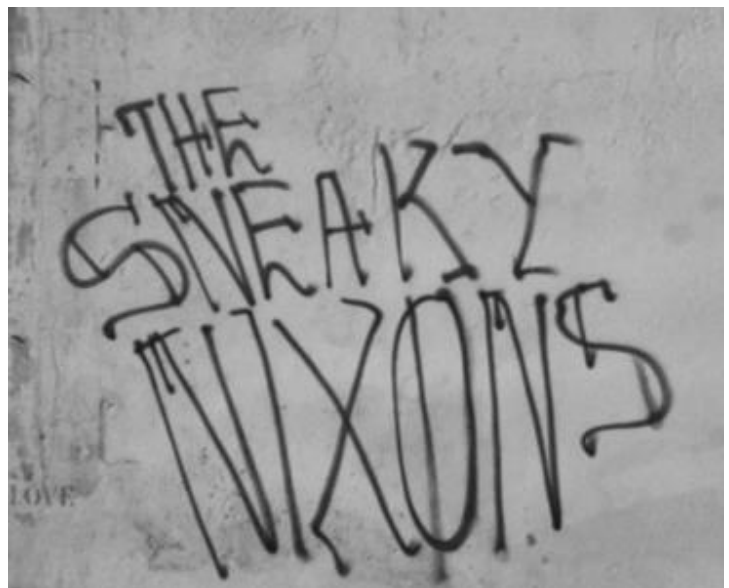
Lisa was perhaps not entirely convinced by David's authoritarian leadership, as she explained in her reflective essay at the end of her first year:

I feel that Charlie [DM] has hindered the development of this group. Not only has he made *The Sneaky Nixons* notorious months before performing for the first time, he also helps keep the band intact by convincing everyone to spend more time together after band practices, (LF, 2013).

Nevertheless, compared to the tutor-assigned bands which were formed in 2012–2013, *The Sneaky Nixons* had a strong identity and plans for the following year, as I relate below.

#### **4.1. Building the brand**

The notoriety relating to the band's name to which Lisa refers was another of David's ideas. A group of students who shall remain nameless sprayed *The Sneaky Nixons* on walls, buildings, garage doors and whatever else they could find during the summer months of 2013. The publicity stunt was mentioned by the Liverpool online publication *The Tab* in April 2014:



**Photo A3 (2014) The SneakyNixons graffito**

Chances are you've probably seen more than a few Sneaky Nixons tags around Liverpool, but have you got any idea who the hell they actually are? The Tab caught up with singer Jack Hardwells to get the inside story on one of Liverpool's best and most enigmatic student bands. "It's just boys behaving badly" says Jack of the graffiti. "It's good exposure whether you like it or not", (Clarke, 2014).

It is interesting that at this stage, David did not use his real name in the interview, nor his adopted name at university, Charlie Daniels, but the pseudonym 'Jack Hardwells'. This may have been to protect himself from possible prosecution for the graffiti around town. He understood intuitively that to make an impact on Liverpool's crowded music scene, he would need to build a brand, and he chose to make that brand as controversial as possible. He had been banned from most of Liverpool's night clubs and performance venues but, as he explained in interview, everyone had heard of the band:

You know, if there's a club that allows me to join, then it's not worth joining. There's cliques and clichés and I don't want to join them, I want to blow them all up, start my own thing. A boy like me from Essex, here for three years, has already created his own scene. *The Sneaky Nixons* aren't anything like that. They've got their own thing going on, everyone from here to Widnes has heard of them, I started that. It's fixing the brand, you know, (DM, SN1).

I remember David showing me a graffiti near his flat when I first met the band for interview in October 2014. He was inordinately proud of having publicised the band in this manner and created a reputation for the band as the bad guys in Liverpool. The images of the band were further complemented by a photo shoot in which David, Jamie, Lisa and P18G all wore black bandanas across their faces. There was at least one other precedent for this bad band image. David had gone to see *Fat White Family* in Manchester and had been given advice by one of the band members, as he related in his reflective essay:

*Fat White Family* may not have the hooks, the riffs, the choruses, or indeed the musicianship, but they had the shock factor and stage presence to create havoc. After the gig I met some of the band. The guitarist in particular, Saul, was very encouraging, he convinced me to drive forward with *The Sneaky Nixons*, not to let anyone get in the way and see them as the enemy if they do. He also told me to toughen up in terms of criticism, pointing out his band were loathed before they even had a song due to their political controversy, (DM, 2014).



**Photo A4 (2014a): The Sneaky Nixons**

How did the image of a band that had not yet given a public gig relate to their musical style? *The Sneaky Nixons* were variously described by online media as rock'n'roll, cheeky, punky and rough around the edges and a band guaranteed to draw an audience. The bassist Jamie described the band's sound thus in his reflective essay:

The band has a very simple direction in our musical ambitions, the whole rock and roll attitude is very much the band's image and the music is very loud and very catchy, (JG, 2013).

The group had written several songs and performed as *The Sneaky Nixons* for the end-of-year assessment as well as in their tutor-assigned bands as David related:

Far more smiles were shared at *The Sneaky Nixons* band practices than the previous band. For our end of year performance we had practised enough to be able to pick from a variety of our own material. [...] We have several completed songs – ‘Dietary Requirements’ (written by myself), ‘Money’ (song written by P25G), ‘She Let Me Go’ (P18G and myself), ‘Let’s Talk About Girls’ (myself) as well as three other songs with music but no lyrics, (DM, 2013).

A gig in December 2013 was nervy, given that David and P18G had taken P25G outside just before the gig, given him words to complete a song and then just walked in and performed. The co-lead vocalist and guitarist P25G left in December 2013 after a big argument with David after the assessment gig. That then left two vocalists/guitarists, David and P18G, who worked well together as song writers.

Since the shuffle in the line-up, only one song remained from the previous line-up, ‘Dietary Requirements’. All the other songs were scrapped or re-arranged, but most were simply replaced with quicker, better, more intelligent songs. From February to May [2014] P18G and I had written almost fourteen songs to pick from when recording and playing live, (DM, 2014).

P18G was acutely aware of the tensions in the band, which he had already mentioned in his reflective essay at the end of the first year. In the second year, he felt he could play a more central role in the band:

I went from being what felt like the ‘extra guitarist’ to joint front man and songwriter. Because of this, it meant that both me and Charlie enjoyed being in the band more, so we arranged more rehearsals and actually booked some gigs outside of university, (P18G, 2014).

When the band returned to Liverpool after the January semester break in 2014, there was a sudden flurry of activity, as David explained:

From February to Easter, *The Sneaky Nixons* were busy. We had spent two weeks in the studio recording four demo tracks, and had lots of gigs to rehearse for despite, it should be mentioned, certain individuals making life hard for *The Sneaky Nixons* by banning the band from certain events, venues and promoters. We have now played almost fifteen times as a band, (DM, 2014).

Another significant change was that the band hired rehearsal rooms off campus, as P18G related:

In around February or March [2014], we started practising in a room outside of uni. This opened doors for us because it meant we had our own equipment so we were able to get ourselves more gigs. It also meant we didn't have to always rely on there being available rooms at university. Although for financial reasons we no longer use that room, we were able to establish ourselves a bit more at venues and in the eyes of other Liverpool bands who we now have chances of playing with, (P18G, 2014).

The rehearsal room was seen by Lisa, the drummer, as an opportunity to develop a more professional attitude and make up for the slow start the band had experienced in the first year:

We hired out a room in the Elevator Studios on Dale Street earlier this year with another band called *The Grim Fandango*. We have discussed this proposition before Christmas and I personally thought it was a great and fun idea – this demonstrated that we wanted to get a bit more professional with the band. [...] There were some benefits to this room for the time that was spent using the room, such as being able to perform gigs because a drum kit was supplied in the room. We were able to play in Heebie Jeebies and The Pilgrim on open mic nights hosted by P37G, with the hurdle of transporting gear and the drum kit from the room in P18G's Ford Fiesta. It was really useful being able to have

more opportunities to play gigs, as it helped me develop more confidence in performing live, (LF, 2014).

#### **4.2. The breakthrough: October 2014**

The real breakthrough came in October 2014, when the bassist Jamie was approached by Carlo Variola, the owner of Ocean Waves Productions, a management and promotions company based in Liverpool.

After playing one of our more convincing gigs, I was approached by a man called Carlo. He mentioned that he enjoyed our set and that he was working on a project in Liverpool where he wanted to record local artists and put them on a compilation album. At the time, I didn't know quite how seriously to take the guy. I told him to message us on Facebook to discuss the idea further, so he did, (JG, 2015).

David was always, as he admitted, suspicious of new people, given the image that the band had built for itself in Liverpool. It took time for him to trust strangers, just as it was Lisa, Jamie and P18G who persuaded him to do the first interview for this study. His initial attitude to being produced was quite hostile, as he explained to me when I met the band the day before they signed with Carlo:

We'll see. I don't like being told what to do, so if he's going to be there shouting at me, telling me to do something, then I'm more than likely to do the complete opposite, that's the way I am wired. If he's going to tell me to put the chorus at the end of the song, then I'm going to tell him where to go, but if he's saying "this works", then I'm going to try it, I'd be stupid not to, (DM, SN1).

Jamie, on the other hand, recognised that they needed Carlo to move on, as they had previously only made rough demo recordings of their songs. It was important, as Jamie explained in interview, 'that he's all about retaining our sound, keeping what we're all about with the recordings', (JG, SN1).



Signing with a promotions agent changed the band's understanding of their own development, as David explained after they had been with Carlo for three months:

With Carlo, it's not like a normal deal. He owns the songs and recordings and he releases them and he gives you 50%, but in uni they teach you don't sell music anymore, you can only sell music through live performances. A lot of bands and record labels do this new thing, a 360 degree deal where they pump a lot of money into you, but they take a slice of everything. They do push you, the more money they put in, and obviously he's independent, (DM, SN2).

October 2014 also heralded the second interview with the band, for the online Liverpool music blog GetInToThis (GITT). Under the headline of 'Our tunes and infamy will last forever', David, speaking under his stage name Charlie Daniels, P18G, Lisa and Jamie positioned *The Sneaky Nixons* as a band to be remembered. The journalist built his story around the band's controversial reputation and wrote:

What's more, that reputation is proving itself a boon for the group, particularly when it comes to their increasingly prolific presence on the live circuit — that infamous name translating into quite the draw on an otherwise anonymous bill. "We can get better support slots because people think "I've heard of them" explains Charlie. (Clarke, 2014a).

Whilst the interview loosely covered the forthcoming recording session and blue-sky ideas for touring in Scandinavia, David also stated that his goal for the band was to release an album and then split up. The lasting legacy would be the graffiti in Liverpool! It was clear that the journalist was impressed by the image they had built up. He closed his report with these words:

What's most striking then about **The Sneaky Nixons** is the extraordinary way in which they've already begun to build their legacy; for such a swathe of the Merseyside scene to hold an opinion on a band with only two scrappy demos

online is, like it or not, something of a promotional masterstroke. What's more, it's worth noting that many of those opinions *are* indeed positive, and the hatred would seem to be water off a duck's back – it's a win-win situation for the group, (Clarke, 2014a).

Looking back at my field notes from a meeting in The Pilgrim in May 2015, I am still surprised that David was not particularly concerned by 'being nice' in interview. He had a clear vision of presenting the band as an edgy, disruptive group of individuals. When interviewed on BBC Radio Merseyside, he was equally dismissive of the presenter's questions. For me, as the observer, there were two main questions: how would *The Sneaky Nixons* rise to the challenge of professional recording? And what would Carlo, their producer, do to their sound – would it stay as rough as their live performances?

#### **4.3. The Motor Museum: Recording**

The band went into the Motor Museum at Easter 2015 to record tracks for an EP. It was clear that Carlo was heavily involved in the process and spent a considerable amount of time teaching the band how to get the best results. Rather than recording the band playing all together, Carlo asked Jamie and Lisa to work first to get the drum and bass parts really tight. They were, as their interview and reflective essays revealed, somewhat surprised at the amount of effort they had to put into this:

The studio days were brilliant. For the first time in my three years at university I felt like I was getting somewhere with a band. We recorded the bass and drums together live, this captured the raw rock and roll sound that attracted Carlo to *The Sneaky Nixons*. After a long day of three straight hours playing the same songs again and again, Lisa and I had finished the bass and drum tracks (JG, 2015).

Lisa found it hard to adapt to playing individual tracks, rather than with the whole band. Working on her own, she was more exposed and Carlo commented that she was speeding up

and suggested that she should use a click track. None of the *Sneaky Nixons* had used click tracks before, but Carlo was not insistent. Lisa explained the challenge thus:

He just told me to calm down and relax a bit and then play the song without the click track, because I think he knows that if I did play with the click track, then I'd just muck things up even more. Yes, he knows a lot, I didn't realise at first that he knows a lot about drums, he doesn't play, but for certain songs he would make me swap the sticks for the snare drum, he would want a bigger snare [sound] for the heavier song. It was cool, I would never have thought of that, (LF, SN2).

David had waited for Lisa and Jamie to complete the drum and bass lines before he recorded the vocals. He also found the prospect of working with a click track daunting, although he understood that they might have to learn to do this in the future. There was another hurdle to overcome. P18G had left the band, and the core members David, Jamie and Lisa had to persuade him to come and record the songs he had written. The outcome of the recording session, a CD — even without a release date — was an exciting prospect. David mused on the difference it would make to the band and its image:

A CD, a professional recording ... you know, when you talk to people, now we're on iTunes and we're going to be on Spotify and stuff, people recognise that as success. You're actually being sold through big institutions and I would never have been able to get a recording of that quality done on those platforms myself, (DM, SN2).

Meanwhile, it was time to find a new guitarist. David had set up his own promotion company in May 2014 with a student from Liverpool Community College. Rogue Gallery Productions was run from The Pilgrim pub, giving not only *The Sneaky Nixons* a home stage and a regular crowd of fans, but also generating income from charging other bands to hire the venue. Whilst this didn't produce large amounts of money, it did cover the cost of hiring vehicles to get to gigs outside Liverpool and raised David's status in the Liverpool music scene, even though he described his fame as a promoter as 'disgusting':

Originally Rogue Gallery started because *The Sneaky Nixons* were banned from most nights. After starting our own night however, we stumbled on something really incredible. The only downside I can draw is that at one stage people had more respect for me as a promoter than a guitarist or singer/songwriter. Since when were promoters and DJs the new rock stars? Disgusting! (DM, 2015).

David's business partner in Rogue Gallery, P37G, was a guitarist who was persuaded to join the band after P18G left. Despite some less than totally confident performances in Liverpool that spring, P37G quickly learnt *The Sneaky Nixons* set list and performed live with the band in summer 2015.

#### **4.4. The shoe-string tour: Berlin**

David and P37G decided to tour in Berlin, and Lisa joined them at the last minute. As David subsequently explained to me in 2016, the art of touring by plane was all about not paying excess baggage charges and working out how to take the minimum necessary equipment:

On a shoe-string budget, depends how many you are. If Lisa is going to go the full way, or some of the way, we'll take the big gig bag, a tiny little amp, right, couple of pedals, megaphone, maybe the floor tom and a snare. Now that will be a heavy bag. And then you've got an acoustic and an electric [guitar], we'll carry one of them each, and Jamie just takes his bass, plugs straight in, (DM, 2016).

The tour was financed by the sale of CDs, T-shirts and fur coats. Their enthusiasm was clear, as David described in his practice diary:

We played everywhere — bars, clubs, venues, train platforms, train carriages, trams, city centre squares — everywhere. Armed with two acoustics and a tambourine we tore Berlin a new one. It was a messy trip that toughened us up, (DM, 2015).

This description of an impromptu gig in a jazz club described to me in interview was the highlight of their tour, including the enthusiastic response from the audience:

DM: 2 am in this jazz club with virtuoso musicians, we had no right to play, we just got up there and started smashing stuff.

LF: They weren't even bothered, they were just jamming about and stuff.

DM: Yeah, 40 year old jazz musicians. They were all sitting down to start with and when we left, they were all up and half the people at the back were disgusted that they were enjoying this, (SN 2).

Lisa thoroughly enjoyed playing on a full jazz drum kit, P37G broke a string, David complained that the manager wouldn't lend him a guitar, but the feedback at the end was positive, 'Hey, man, that was really cool!' The band was proud that they had played everywhere and anywhere for free drinks. What they had learnt was that if they timed it right, they could excite an audience and bring them into their vibe. This style of touring continued in 2015 and 2016, with David doing a solo tour to the US and the band going to Hamburg, Berlin and Amsterdam. Whilst some of the stories are somewhat hair-raising, it was clear that David in particular loved the challenge and risk of playing in front of new audiences abroad.

#### **4.5. A pause for thought**

In February 2015 I asked the group to reflect on what they had learnt from playing together as *The Sneaky Nixons*, at a time when there was clearly enthusiasm for the band to continue after David, Jamie and Lisa had graduated. P37B was in the year below, so was likely to be around in Liverpool to play with them.

I wanted to say it's been very disjointed. Uni has taught me a lot that I'll put into practice outside, but I would say it's not helped *The Sneaky Nixons* directly whatsoever. You have to push individually. On my own, outside of uni, rather than

anyone saying “This is a nice place to play. I know someone down here, etc.” (DM, SN 2).

I asked David what working with Ocean Waves and Carlo would mean long-term. Would he be selling out for commercial gain and losing his creative control?

Time’s almost running out now to have all this creative freedom. If I carry on the way I do, I’m going to have to work because it won’t be able to support itself day to day, which hurts me the most, (DM, SN 2).

His third-year reflective essay, written in May 2015, summarised the band’s progress including releasing two singles, an EP with three more tracks and having a second EP in the pipeline. The songs were available on iTunes and Spotify. He claimed that he was still in full artistic and creative control, despite the promotion contract with Carlo. David was a shrewd observer of the music industry and understood that success was based on more than ability, reflecting his personal punk and anarchic leanings:

For me, ability simply isn’t enough to succeed any more. There are lots of great musicians and there are lots of great bands but in a post-internet generation, where anyone can record, film, shoot or design anything the world has become saturated in amateurism. To offer something else aside from the music: the image, the mentality, the back-story and so on, is vital in the contemporary rock’n’roll musical climate, (DM, 2015).

David, I would suggest, despite his quirky persona and love of provocation, is a thoughtful and reflective musician. He considered carefully how to position his band right from the start with the guerrilla graffiti campaign and whilst they did not have a website – and still do not have one now – he understood how to create curiosity, outrage and excitement for *The Sneaky Nixons*. He also recognised that PR was going to be a necessity in future and wrote in his reflective essay:

The main issue for me concerning *The Sneaky Nixons*, upon reflection, is the press release strategy. I hate strategic promotion; when involving commoditised music releases. However, it is essential to have a strong and vast international network connection across all media forms. This is something that we severely lack. In the country of the blind, the one-eyed man is king, (DM, 2015).

Perhaps inevitably, the band signed over control of PR to Ocean Waves later that year. Overall, David's third-year reflection was more of a conversation with his tutor than an analytical report. But it offered insights into his attitude towards the music scene on campus and in Liverpool:

Having a thick skin is important. It is no accident that we were hated and now we are well respected amongst students and locals alike. The same lame band society members who banned me and wouldn't let me join in their club, are the same people who are either scared to talk to me, kissing my arse or begging me for a support slot. I haven't changed — I have the same bad attitude, self-belief and ability — it's them who've changed. Losers! (DM, 2015).

Having created such a vibrant image for the band, it was now necessary to play live to reinforce the band's reputation as exciting performers.

#### **4.6. Performing is practice**

In the academic year 2014–2015, when David, Lisa and Jamie were in their final year of studies, *The Sneaky Nixons* had their strongest and most consistent live presence. They performed regularly at The Pilgrim. They played in London, Brighton and Manchester and were learning fast how to deal with different audiences and locations, which sometimes led to arguments, fuelled by alcohol and drugs. Nevertheless, these performances — good, bad or indifferent — were all considered to be part of the learning process. David explained the difference between a gig in Manchester and a gig in Liverpool:

The away days in Manchester where you play in front of twenty people are tough trips. Especially compared to the previous night in Liverpool where the venue was twice as big, the crowd hit one hundred and pretty girls all come running to offer congratulations after the show. You need to rally the gang and lead them through sticky patches in every set — no matter how well drilled, professional and rehearsed you are — something can, and usually does go wrong. When fronting a band, you need to be prepared for that, (DM, 2015).

Things did not always go so well. There were gigs with shouting during the set, arguments back stage and a bad gig in Manchester when they lost all of their usually unstoppable energy and attitude on stage. Despite the band's low opinion of their university peers, they were popular as performers in the weekly Popular Performance workshops. One experienced guitarist wrote about a workshop performance by *The Sneaky Nixons* in his third-year reflective essay:

A band named *The Sneaky Nixons* is a favourite of mine for many reasons, the main reason being the attitude behind the music. They come across as confident, some say arrogant, but no matter what it is, it makes them stand out. Their lead singer projects all of this to the audience and the other musicians also stand their ground and it is clear that they are one collective. When the audience sees confidence in the band, they enjoy the performance more, (P16G, 2015).

This observer was one of the most experienced and thoughtful guitarists on the Popular Performance Module, see Chapter 6 and his comments demonstrate that even when performing in a lecture theatre, *The Sneaky Nixons* could command their audience.

#### **4.7. Moving on**

Due to my own full time job in London, I followed the band's progress from social media and SoundCloud during 2015–2016. The raw recordings of tracks which David played me compared with the mixed versions suggested that their rough sound was being polished for



commercial release. One particularly striking track, ‘Sex’, which they performed in their final university assessed gig in May 2015, was transformed in the studio. I talked both to David and the trumpeter about how they had come to work together in interview in 2016. The trumpeter was asked to play in the first Motor Museum recording session, as he related:

He sent me a small audio file of ‘Sex’, ‘cos he saw me play with the *FSC*. I’ve known him for years, we were at school together. I think he wanted a layer on that tune. I think I was the only trumpet player he kind of knew, so I’d see if I could learn it, (CL16, 2016).

CL16 started on the Classical Performance course in 2013 and had been recruited into a funk-soul function band, the *Funk Soul Continuum*, see Appendix 1 and asked to play trumpet, although his principal study was the French horn. He adapted well to playing without music and began to master the art of improvising in rehearsals. However, he felt a bit of an outsider with *The Sneaky Nixons* as he was not playing on all the tracks:

As it went on, he [David] said at one gig, “That’s our new *Snixon*” and then I went down with them to London and stuff. I felt like I am the one that tags on, I’m not really in it yet and I guess that’s why he gave me another tune to learn, (CL16, 2016).

David, however, knew exactly why he had extended his arrangements to include a trumpet. As he played me the original version of ‘Sex’ and the final mix, he described the sound as more developed; there were still riffs, it was rock’n’roll, but the trumpet offered a different timbre. It was also apparent that the new guitarist who joined in 2016 offered more possibilities. He could span styles from *Pink Floyd* to rock, which gave David more scope to write in a range of genres and to broaden the band’s appeal.

When I met David in July 2016, he was working in London and not expecting to go back to Liverpool to re-join Lisa, Jamie and DLH until the autumn. Another single was released at the beginning of August, ‘Schadenfreude’. The band were not involved in PR — Ocean

Waves and their appointed PR agency managed the promotion with UK and overseas radio stations, including the BBC, resulting in a new clutch of reviews from the Merseyside online media community.

David's shrewd understanding of the music industry was revealed in his hopes for the coming months:

I only really wanted this to be the biggest band at uni. I wanted it to be bigger than *The Roscoes*, that was my only aim. Thinking about it like, I don't know what I'm aiming for. Obviously launch the album, do the tour, I really want that to happen. After that, I'd like the tunes in films and adverts. People are against that. But I'm not. Get it out there. Imagine being able to like dominate a whole soundscape, just like people recognise it in an advert. Another thing, at Anfield, we've been added to their podcast. So at half time, after he blows the whistle, it's like ... [sings the opening to 'Sex'], that will be good. 50,000 Scousers, (DM, 2016).

'Sex' was indeed played to the crowd at Anfield, Liverpool United Football club's home ground on September 10<sup>th</sup> 2016.

The album, 'The Barbie Syndrome', was previewed with a five date UK tour in October 2016, including gigs in Liverpool, Cumbernauld, Glasgow, London and Manchester. I went to the London gig at the Luna Lounge and recorded in my field notes that the sound was much tighter. Whilst David's singing was still rough and energetic, the band was slick on stage and demonstrated that they had not only learnt a great deal about stagecraft in small venues, but also took performance in front of a largely unknown audience in their stride. Their set up was efficient; they played fluently for an hour and then retired to the bar.

Whilst Lisa and Jamie both confided in me that they did not know how the band would progress from this point on, it was clear from their new Facebook band site that the Ocean Waves management team had organised merchandise and links to streaming

services like iTunes, SoundCloud and Spotify to maximise sales of their new tracks. The album launch had been tentatively set for 2017, dependent on the time that the Ocean Waves team could devote to editing and mastering the CD.

Meanwhile, Jamie, Lisa and David were working in a variety of jobs in Liverpool. Lisa was still performing and recording with an all-girl band, *Indigo Moon* and Jamie was looking for another band to join to explore his love of Metallica. The other guitarist, DLH, was studying at Liverpool Community College.

## **5. Discussion**

It is timely to consider the questions I posed at the beginning of this case study, namely

How did the musicians develop their band skills?

What role did reflective practice play in their musical development?

What are the key factors contributing to the commercial success of the band?

The musical journey described by *The Sneaky Nixons* in their reflective essays and interviews illustrates the ups and downs experienced by many bands in their early years. All three students had one-to-one lessons whilst they were students and were coached by the Tutor for Popular Music in their rehearsals in the first year and in performance workshops in the second and third years. It was significant that they felt that they were getting advice and support from professionals who knew about the popular music industry. Notwithstanding the possible influence of the more experienced musicians around them on campus, I would suggest that David, Lisa and Jamie all developed self-critical reflective skills as individual musicians, as they described in their reflective essays and interviews. Lisa made this explicit in her final reflective essay, describing how the band's meetings with me had prompted them to ponder over the change of personnel:

Monica Esslin-Peard approached us through Facebook late October 2014, and came down to see one of our gigs. She wanted to use *The Sneaky Nixons* as a case study for her research in performance and practising with University of Liverpool undergraduates. [...] We've had several meet ups — one in October, February, and in May. All very casual interviews about practice and the development of *The Sneaky Nixons* — it was very weird for us to let Monica know how we felt about P18G leaving and P37G joining, but it helped our reflections on the band. It felt really professional, (LF, 2014).

David has recounted in interview (DM, 2016) how his song-writing skills have developed, including a real interest in word play and internal rhymes. He admits that it might have helped if the university had offered a song-writing class, but acknowledged that the process of creating original material was a very personal thing and couldn't be forced into a schedule dictated by a university course.

I have documented elsewhere in Chapter 6 how Jamie and Lisa adopted a range of metacognitive practice strategies to improve their playing. Whilst neither gave any indication in their reflective essays of the time spent in individual practice, Jamie focused on developing his technique through practising jazz modes and simplifying bass lines. Lisa learnt to work with a metronome and overcame her reluctance to have individual lessons in her final year. David acknowledged that the focus on technique was necessary, but did not describe in any detail how he had practised difficult passages.

It is perhaps fair to say that with the exception of Lisa, David and Jamie, the other members of *The Sneaky Nixons* may not have spent much time asking themselves how they were rehearsing or performing, since playing in a band is so much about being in 'the moment' and reacting to the audience as Sawyer (2006) and Johansen (2016) report. However as individuals, they are all conscious of the band's goals and are particularly aware of how to adapt to the rigours of studio recording or performing in unfamiliar venues. Nonetheless, David is keenly aware of the relationship between live

performance and the sound of the band in the EPs recorded with Carlo, as they discussed in interview.

Thirdly, what are the key factors which seem to have led to the success — or even notoriety — of the band in the last four years? David, Jamie and Lisa all got firsts for their Popular Performance Module in the final year, which I have already discussed in Chapter 7. From my perspective, the key differentiator for successful bands was playing off-campus. Given that the university is so close to the city centre, the *Sneaky Nixons* performed frequently in local rock venues and created an edgy, confrontational image which was well understood by local e-zines and online media commentators. David had a strong vision for what the band represented and kept the others together, despite three changes of lead guitarist over four years.

It is somewhat paradoxical to an outsider, or perhaps typical of pop culture, that the core members of the band were adamant in interview that the university did nothing to help their careers with *The Sneaky Nixons*, despite having acknowledged the support from staff at the university in their reflective essays. Perhaps the band members were trying to reconcile their own experiences with the notion that if each had paid £27,000 in tuition fees for a three year course, it might be reasonable to expect a university offering a Popular Music BMus to offer modules which might prepare students for a portfolio career upon graduation. These sentiments echo the findings of Teague and Smith (2015) and Smilde (2012), amongst others, pleading for higher education institutions to prepare student musicians leaving university for portfolio careers and point to the urgent need for curriculum development in this area.

Another critical factor in the success of *The Sneaky Nixons* was their determination to carry on, despite financial difficulties. There was a growing understanding that touring with the band did not make money: the first gig of the album launch tour in Liverpool in October 2016 generated enough revenue to hire a van and a driver to reach venues in Scotland, London and Manchester, but did not make a surplus to pay the musicians. Perhaps the driving desire to succeed was slightly dampened by the influence of Carlo

Variola and Ocean Waves Productions, as David and the other band members were not actively involved in creating PR campaigns for their EP and album release. On the other hand, the involvement of a promotions manager, I would suggest, improved the band's musicianship and built their reputation locally, nationally and internationally. My field notes from a meeting with Carlo in The Pilgrim in October 2016 reveal that Carlo valued the band's work ethic. He noted wryly that David had matured, but was still looking for more excitement in live performance. Carlo's presence and commercial nous caused the band to think more about the relationship between live performance and their recorded sound.

As I write in 2017, Lisa is also playing with *Indigo Moon*, an all-female band which launched their first EP in April. Jamie does some studio recording for other bands in Liverpool, but has not yet generated enough income to feel comfortable describing himself as a session musician and wants to build his reputation further afield. A second 'Barbie Syndrome' album launch tour took place in February 2017, including gigs in Liverpool, Dublin and London. This is how the Liverpool e-zine *Sound and Vision* described the progress made by *The Sneaky Nixons* in February 2017:

Formed nearly two years ago, The Sneaky Nixons' line up of Charlie Manning (voice /guitar), Lisa Fawcett (drums), Jamie Gosling (bass) and David Lloyd (guitar) set about crafting their very own angry, yet melodic steam train guitar music. They've since shaped a reputation locally for their volatile, arrogant behavior and riotous live performances where literally anything can happen and usually does. This has unsurprisingly seen them split opinions, but each show sees them play to an ever increasing and enthusiastic fan base and they can also count the likes of Louder Than War, GetInToThis and B.B.C. Introducing's Dave Monks among their many admirers, (Hall, 2017).

Whilst local media follow the band with enthusiasm, perhaps the album launch will provide an answer to the underlying question: is this the end of a story – or just the beginning?



**Photo A5 (2017): The Sneaky Nixons**

## **6. Conclusion**

This case study about *The Sneaky Nixons* in some way mirrors the narratives in Cohen's (1991) study of punk bands in Liverpool. Whilst there are many parallels in terms of musical development, inter-personal issues, booking venues, financial hardship and the challenges of performing live, the principal difference is in the change in digital recording techniques, distribution and promotion channels in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

What does it mean to be successful as a popular musician? Smith (2013a) writes of the difficulties inherent in trying to come up with a definition. One paradox, in his view, is that success does not necessarily imply commercialisation or attention from mainstream media, despite the influence of television programmes like *The X Factor*. In fact, many students graduating from the ICMP where he teaches do not play in bands that are household names, but still see themselves as musicians with portfolio careers, which is perhaps the situation in which the members of *The Sneaky Nixons* find themselves now.

The experiences of the members of *The Sneaky Nixons* point towards the precarious and sometimes chaotic journey from a band formed by friends at university to a group with a well-defined presence in Liverpool and aspirations to be successful in the long-term. Important questions are raised about what it means to be a portfolio musician in the 21<sup>st</sup> century and whether higher education institutions offering undergraduate courses in Popular Music should take a more active role in preparing their students for life after graduation, as Teague and Smith (2015) suggest.



## Appendix 3

# Cross-Genre Musicking

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## 1. Introduction

One of the unexpected findings of this research project was that some students on the Classical Performance course were involved in folk, function and indie rock bands. The examples I give below are drawn not only from the 2012–2015 core cohort of students, but also include one violinist from the 2011–2014 cohort and a trumpeter from the 2013–2016 cohort, who played in *The Funk Soul Continuum*, *The Sneaky Nixons* and the Eurovision band.

What is cross-genre musicking? Small (1998, p. 209) offers the following definition:

Our exploration, affirmation and celebration of relationships does not end with those of a single performance, but can expand to the relationships between one performance and another, and, for those who are prepared to explore farther afield, to the relationships between performances in different styles, genres and even whole musical traditions and cultures.

It is not immediately apparent that classically-trained musicians should want to move away from their prior musical experiences. However, as I discuss below, the students who explored other musical genres built new musical relationships and experienced unfamiliar aspects of musical learning, both formal and informal.

## 2. Data sources

In examining the cross-genre musicking experiences of the classical students, I have drawn from all their reflective essays submitted for the Classical Performance course, as well as including comments from other musicians on the Popular Performance course who were in *Funk Soul Continuum*. In addition, I have utilised material from seven

interviews which I conducted in 2014, 2015, 2016 and 2017. I did not interview the lead singer of the Eurovision band whilst he was still on campus, so asked him to answer some questions by email in September 2016. These sources are shown below in Table A4:

**Table A4. Data sources**

Student	Entry year	Entry year	Entry year	Band/ensemble	Interview
	2011	2012	2013		
CL17	Violin			<i>Johnny Panic and the Fever</i>	21.2.2014 13.2.2017
P35D	Drums			<i>FSC, Johnny Panic and the Fever</i>	29.10.2014
CL8		Cello		<i>Albion</i>	20.2.2015
CL4		Violin		<i>Albion</i>	20.2.2015
CL6		Voice		<i>Paddy and the Nortiboiz</i>	Email 3.9.2016
CL5		Voice		<i>University Singers</i>	20.2.2015
CL16			Trumpet	<i>The Sneaky Nixons, Paddy and the Nortiboiz, FSC</i>	30.5.2016

For each musician or group of musicians, I present a description of their experiences before discussing the wider context of cross-genre musicking in my findings.

### 3. Background to the students

It is important to remember that there was no expectation that classically-trained students should rehearse or perform in other genres and, for the four string players, this was the first time that they had experimented with unfamiliar styles of music making — although it would be ridiculous to assume that they were not listening to many genres of music for pleasure. All the students joined bands which had been formed by university undergraduates and made a conscious choice to play with musicians whom they already knew. The singer-songwriter who led the folk band played bass guitar and cello in the Liverpool University Symphony Orchestra, where he met string players CL8 and CL4.

A violinist/viola player, CL13, was invited to play in a band by peers on the Popular Performance Module. CL6 had deliberately chosen to study Classical Performance, although he had been the lead singer/guitarist in a band formed in his home town in 2009. He was still playing with this band, *Small Words*, throughout his time at university, which he explained to me by email thus:

The reason I decided to do classical at university over pop was that I knew I could keep both aspects going this way. I think it would have been much harder to have specialised in pop and kept my classical singing going on the side, (CL6, 2016).

This comment reflects the perceived divide between classical and popular musicians, which, as both the Tutor for Admissions and the Head of Performance related by email, is typical of the mind set of students when they apply to the university. On the other hand, as I have already discussed in Chapter 4, irrespective of whether students apply for the Classical Music, Popular Music or the Classical *and* Popular Music BMus, once they are enrolled, they can choose modules related to either musical genre. By offering such a wide choice of modules without prejudice, it could be argued that the institution does not reinforce any divide — real or imagined — between popular and classical music.

The student reports below throw light upon formal, non-formal and informal learning practices, the importance of friendship in band formation, shared aspirations for the success of the ensemble and, in one case, a radical change of beliefs about her experiences in an indie rock band and her own identity and aspirations as a musician.

#### 4.1. The acoustic folk band



**Photo A6 (2015): Albion**

The first violin, viola and cellist from the Schubert Quartet (see Chapter 5) were invited by a music student in the year above to play with him in an acoustic folk band, *Albion*. The viola player dropped out after a few rehearsals, but I invited the two other string players to take part in an interview and went to watch them winning a regional heat of an open mic night. This experience proved to be a challenge in the beginning for two students who had only had classical training, as the cellist explained:

I found it very scary at the beginning, knowing that I was going into something that wasn't typically classical and I didn't really know what he expected, especially when he said that we were going to start doing gigs. That was quite scary, (CL8, Interview, 2015).

The lead singer/songwriter/guitarist knew the two girls from the University Symphony Orchestra, in which he played cello. He made the string arrangements for his own compositions in Sibelius and gave both girls music. He had experienced the formal rehearsal process in the orchestra and therefore made it easier for them to make their first forays into popular music by offering notated parts. Nevertheless, the cellist was

acutely aware from going to the gigs of her popular musician peers that the inclusion of strings with written music might create an odd impression:

I thought the people wouldn't really get it, because it's quite an odd mix. The gigs that we were doing were acoustic stuff, three guitars and a cajon and a tambourine or whatever, and then we'd pitch up with a huge cello and a violin and written music. [...] We did discuss a few times the idea of learning all our music off by heart, but for me that was something that I'd never done and it was going to be a big problem, (CL8, Interview, 2015).

Another challenge was improvisation. Both string players reported that they wouldn't have known how to tackle this, although the violinist was more positive as their final gigs approached:

It would have been cool to do, but when we started I don't think I would have been able to do improv [improvisation]. Now I think I could give it a go, (CL4, Interview, 2015).

The circumstances of playing in a club were quite different from classical performance. This is how the string players described the differences:

CL8: At a lot of pop gigs it's completely different when you're there on stage than it is in rehearsal. I mean the whole atmosphere is completely different. You can turn up and as soon as you're on the stage you realise 'Oh, actually this layout is such that we can't see each other at all. We can barely hear each other either'. You just have to deal with it as best you can.

CL4: And also people weren't really listening to us...

CL8: Which you're so used to in a classical concert.

CL4: I enjoyed it, but I didn't enjoy that people weren't listening to us and appreciating it, (CL8/CL4, Interview, 2015).

These two students revealed in their interview that they had adapted to working within the band, although their use of music stands was surprising, given that popular musicians who used aides-memoires like P3D, the female drummer who played in four bands in her first year, had a few notes or a lead sheet on a scrap of paper. I would suggest that as the band's leader was prepared to give them notation, he was also prepared to take the artistic risk of performing with musicians using music stands. In essence, the string players seem to have convinced their popular musician peer to accommodate their formal approach to rehearsal and performance, rather than embracing the informal rehearsal styles which would be more typical of popular musicians.

#### 4.2. The Eurovision band



**Photo A7 (2014): Paddi and the Nortiboiz**

A singer on the Classical Performance Module decided to form a band to enter the selection rounds for the Eurovision Song Contest in autumn 2014. He recognised that the band he led in his home town — a rock band with metal influences — would not be

the appropriate musical vehicle. This offered him a very different opportunity to form a band for a specific purpose, as he related to me by email:

The main appeal for me (and I think for a lot of the band as well) was that doing a music degree in a way can sometimes seem to take the fun out of making music. When you're putting bands together specifically to get grades, it puts a lot of pressure on the music making process, so the idea of having a group that was totally off the wall and for no reason other than making people — primarily ourselves — laugh, was very appealing to me, (CL6, 2016).

He went on to explain how he chose musicians for the band:

At the point of picking band members, the song 'Now I'm In Love' was already coming together. I knew it was going to be brass heavy with ska themes and Eurovision rules dictated that the band could have a maximum of 6 members. I established that the best way to utilise these limits would be to have a singer/acoustic guitarist (myself), plus electric guitar, drums, bass and two trumpets. It was obvious to me from the get go that the instrumentalists would have to be as interested in making a fool of themselves as I was, so I chose five performers that I considered to be both technically proficient, whilst having over-the-top and bold on-stage personas (a hugely important aspect of the band), (CL6, 2016).

I was interested to hear how they conducted rehearsals. The members of *Paddy and the Nortiboiz* were all heavily involved in other bands at the university. CL6 expected the band members to practise individually before rehearsals, giving them audio files which he had recorded on his phone. He recognised that the trumpeter, CL16, could help to develop the song, as he told me:

The main trumpet motif was written by me as a vocal line which I then gave to CL16 to pad out as a brass part. This was perhaps the most *classical* element of

rehearsal and was the only part of the song that was notated ahead of time.

Otherwise, we worked independently to nail our individual parts and then came together whenever we could to ensure they gelled, (CL6, 2016).

I asked CL6 how they ran rehearsals. He had written most of the song, but allowed other members to contribute to the development of the track. With two classical musicians and four popular musicians, were these rehearsals tightly controlled or informal? He explained the rehearsal process to me by email:

Rehearsals were very much a case of running through the track as many times as possible, getting the hooks stuck in our heads and identifying potential issues. It is a fairly simple song so this didn't throw up too many issues and the relaxed practice style suited the casual nature of the band, (CL6, 2016).

What is perhaps significant is that CL6 had chosen experienced and technically competent musicians for the band, relying on their individual motivation to practise before rehearsals. Of the six members of the band, five were awarded firsts for the Performance Module (classical or popular) in their third year of study. Perhaps the real attraction of playing with *Paddy and the Nortiboiz* was that it offered a light-hearted release from assessed performance, as he explained by email:

We wore costumes and developed on-stage personas for our shows and this all fed back into the notion of creating an alternative option to the deadly serious bands we were also in at the time. Eurovision seemed to be a good catalyst for this as it is in many ways it is the total opposite of what most degree level musicians want to achieve. When you spend a lot of time trying to create artistic new music, it can be quite refreshing to dismiss originality and authenticity for a little while and concentrate on just making something funny, (CL6, 2016).

At least as far as can be ascertained from his commentary, the Eurovision band provided a welcome distraction for its members, who found time in their busy schedules to



rehearse, record and perform together, even if they were not selected for the next round of the competition. What is important here is the coming together of six able musicians who thoroughly enjoyed making music with each other, ‘just for fun’. Their different musical backgrounds did not impact negatively on their ability to rehearse and perform, perhaps because their friendship enabled them to co-operate effectively.

### 4.3. Conducting the University Singers



**Photo A8 (2015): University Singers**

One of the two classical singers, CL5, was approached to become the conductor of the University Singers, a large student choir. Singers were not selected by audition and covered a mix of classical, jazz, gospel and popular music. This gave CL5 an opportunity to apply what he had learnt about individual practice in what Mak (2009) would term a non-formal learning situation, in which he was working with singers of mixed abilities and backgrounds, some of whom could read notation and others who worked aurally. Mok (2011) has described informal learning as learning in the community, which is apt for a university-wide ensemble. In the beginning, CL5 found this challenging, as he explained in his reflective essay:

Originally, I found leading rehearsals extremely nerve-wracking, especially as the choir was unexpectedly a lot larger than the previous year; as a result, I began to apply some of the skills I had learned for dealing with nerves in performance to running rehearsals. This included the idea of acknowledging the fact that stress alters our perception of time, compensating for this by taking control and shaping time while leading and instructing the group as well as employing a slightly altered personality so as to be less affected by any mistakes I made, (CL5, Interview, 2015).

He adapted what he had learnt in his individual singing lessons to lead warm-ups for the choir:

I also warmed up the group before each session as well as giving some basic vocal coaching to the group as a whole, both of which helped with my own understanding of my own technique and practice. Another useful part of running the choir was deciding on musical intentions of pieces and getting the choir to realise my interpretation, which has helped me become more confident with the musical interpretation of my own solo pieces, (CL5, Interview, 2015).

This demonstrates that he was not only thinking about the vocal techniques which he needed to teach the choir in order to improve the overall sound, but he also had to communicate his desired interpretation of the repertoire in a way which the choir would understand, echoing the advice given by Durrant, (2003, pp. 91–104). In his third year, he had made considerable progress with the choir, allowing him to use some singers to take sectionals:

I also continued to teach vocal lines aurally, but this year I utilised the more confident singers by having them help in teaching their sections their parts, which both helped speed up the learning of parts and made the more musical members feel fundamental to the group without wasting their time, (CL5, Interview, 2015).

He also found that his heightened awareness of intonation helped with the choir:

My work with the choir has also greatly helped my intonation as listening to and correcting the choir allowed me to apply my heightened awareness of tuning to their sound, (CL5, Interview, 2015).

Finally, assuming the role of conductor enabled him to get better control of his nerves:

The constant nature of being on show when leading a rehearsal or conducting a concert has continued to be incredibly useful in getting used to dealing with nerves, especially in regards to taking control of delivery and tempo, (CL5, Interview, 2015).

This student demonstrated considerable levels of insight into his own development as a performer in all three years of his study, which is reflected in marks of 73%, 74% and 70% for his reflective essays. He had, I would suggest, gone beyond what could have been expected for a musician who was classically-trained and adapted his experiences of the Classical Performance Module to share his knowledge with others in the University Singers and embraced a non-formal learning situation, drawing on his own reflective practice.

#### 4.4. Playing violin in the indie rock band



**Photo A9 (2015): Johnny Panic and the Fever**

A classical violinist/viola player from the 2011 intake was invited to play with *Johnny Panic and the Fever*, an indie rock band. She said yes and then discovered that she was entering a different world, as she related in her reflective essay:

Originally it was impossible because I didn't realise they were two such different disciplines and I didn't have any respect for the pop discipline and it drove me mad. People would arrive half an hour late, and then start plugging everything in for the rehearsal. So starting the rehearsal an hour after you meant to. There is no kind of understanding of tuning — the sort of disciplined stuff that is so essential in classical music just wasn't there and I found that impossible to deal with, (CL17, 2014)

However, despite her initial misgivings, she realised that there were other aspects of performance about which she knew very little:

Since then, I've realised that it is not wrong that it is not there. There are so many disciplines that they have that I struggle with — all the electrical stuff, the sound stuff. You need to have such a deep understanding of how far away you need to be from your monitor, before the whole place goes eeeeeh [makes sound of feedback in speakers] which I don't have, (CL17, 2014).

She related that it took quite some time to recognise that playing with a pick-up on her violin would also amplify her jewellery rattling and her breathing, which she found frustrating. She wrote about the musical styles of the members of the eight-piece band. Four came from the Classical Performance Module; four came from the Popular Music Module. She described the rehearsal process, comparing her experiences of playing in a string quartet:

At the beginning we were just sat there asking why are we playing through the set again and again and again without making anything better. And then asking us why are you stopping every 30 seconds to change this? The processes are so different — and it works with a pop band, just playing the songs over and over, it makes them tighter, it makes them better. You can't do that in a string quartet. You can't just play through and hack at it. It would sound awful at the end, (CL17, 2014).

Nevertheless, she realised that the process of musical communication between band members was the same, whatever the genre:

You learn the songs so well that you know where you need to be, you know when the trumpet is going to come in, you know you've got to be really tight, even more, perhaps, as you are allowed to booze when you are at a pop gig, You've normally had a couple of pints, so it's all lots of fun. The communication while performing is very, very similar, that is the one discipline which is universal in music if you are playing with more than one person, I think, (CL17, Interview, 2014).

I asked her what she had learnt by being in *Johnny Panic and the Fever*:

I've definitely gained a lot of respect for pop. I really was a huge snob before. I thought it was absurd that you could even do it at university. I just couldn't believe it. And maybe some of those thoughts are still lingering. But I have gained a lot of respect for the discipline of performing because it is difficult, it is really difficult. It's almost like there is more pressure, because a group of drunk people in a bar are more likely to heckle rather than a group of people who are very civilised and are clapping in the concert hall. And there sometimes is a lot more pressure, gigs are built up a lot more than concerts, which I don't think is right, I don't think they should be, but they are. I have gained a lot of respect for pop musicians. The music isn't necessarily a Schubert quintet, but in places it is just as difficult to pull off, (CL17, Interview, 2014).

This recognition that performing as a popular musician was just as difficult as playing viola or violin in a classical concert was described in her third-year reflective essay:

Learning to approach projects with an understanding of other players has enabled me to open my mind to all sorts of opportunities I would never have dreamed of otherwise. If that is the only thing I can take away from my degree however, I will feel like I have achieved something. [...]. It is because of this passion and respect that I have developed for other genres that once I have graduated, I would like start putting on workshops in and around schools to teach young people to be *musicians* rather than say, a violinist, or an electric guitarist, (CL17, 2014).

Unlike the viola player, CL2 from the 2012–2015 cohort, who left *Albion* after a couple of rehearsals, CL17 was determined to stay with *Johnny Panic and the Fever*. As she described above, she became open to new musical genres and passionate about passing on that open attitude to different musical genres in her future career. Her change in attitude was described by the Head of Performance in interview:

I think the point about her was that actually having to write it down in the reflective element surprised her. I remember her coming in after she had spent an evening writing it down and she was astonished at what she had written. Without the demands of being made to reflect, I think she would have stayed always in her hierarchical nature as leader or whatever, but actually she has changed, (TS, 2015).

When I met CL17 in February 2017, she was working for a private company, Musical Minds, offering instrumental tuition to primary schools in Liverpool. She was ecstatic about starting to play with a new eight-piece indie band, *Elijah James and the Nightmares*, having been invited by fellow peripatetic music teachers working for the company. She described this in interview as ‘playing with real musicians, for the sake of the music.’ She was also about to audition for the deputy list as a viola player with the Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra and explained how she was using what she had learnt in her undergraduate course about metacognitive practice strategies to prepare. Whilst she was less enthusiastic about her role managing and teaching for Musical Minds, she was clearly still passionate about being a cross-genre musician and seemed to understand that she could draw on her reflective practice when necessary to meet musical challenges.

## **5. Discussion**

The student descriptions above highlight formal, informal and non-formal learning practices, the importance of friendship in band formation, a deeper awareness of musical communication, shared aspirations for the success of the ensemble and, in one case, a radical change of beliefs about the process of making popular music in a band.

So to what extent were the classical musicians prepared to step outside their comfort zones? As CL8 and CL4 related in interview, they worked formally from scores to learn their parts. They continued to play with music stands in their gigs, even though they recognised that this might look odd in a club. Perhaps if the band had stayed together

longer they would have abandoned their music, or adopted less visually obtrusive aides-memoires. On the other hand, as the band's leader had provided them with notated parts, he had not only acknowledged their classical training, but also did not challenge them to explore different ways of remembering their parts. They were regional finalists in an open mic competition, notwithstanding their use of music, so perhaps even for audiences at popular music venues such as The Cavern, music stands and sheet music didn't present a huge barrier to musical communication.

The leader of the Eurovision band, CL6, had already written the song when rehearsals started, drawing upon his five years of experience with his own band outside the university. He deliberately chose students to play in the band who he thought would embrace the ethos of Eurovision, were both competent musicians and part of his wider friendship group. His reflective essays revealed deep insights into the process of rehearsal which suggests that this group may all have adopted formal approaches to learning the song, even though most of the band members were on the Popular Music Performance course. His enthusiasm and focus seemed to inspire others and the video (see References to musical sources) shows them clearly enjoying making music together, underlining the importance not only of a charismatic leader, but also a shared goal and the mutual enjoyment of playing together, which all the members of *Paddy and the Nortiboiz* shared.

The classical singer, CL5, who took over as conductor of the University Singers, a non-auditioned choir which mainly performed popular music, found himself in a non-formal learning situation. As he recounted in interview, his reflective skills enabled him to find ways to bridge the formal-informal or aural-notated learning styles of the choir members in rehearsals. What makes him unusual is that he thought critically about what he had learnt about his own singing technique and how he learnt songs and then adapted his personal approach to instruct choir members.

The final reports came from the violinist CL17 in the 2011 cohort who joined *Johnny Panic and the Fever*. Her interview and reflective essay from her final year illustrated a



major change in her thinking about popular musicians and how they rehearsed and performed. Whilst she was initially, as a classically-trained musician, hugely frustrated by the apparent chaos in rehearsals and did not understand the role that microphones and amps played – or the time it could take to set them up – she had changed her opinion radically by the end of her third year. She had recognised that a self-critical, self-aware musician could learn a great deal from playing in a different genre and came to value the different challenges of live performance in a night club.

## **6. Conclusion**

The key element which unifies these students who explored new genres is their willingness to extend their musical horizons. It would appear that these undergraduates were prepared to take risks, demonstrated flexibility regarding different learning styles and reflected about their personal experiences. Thus cross-genre musicking was one of perhaps many stimuli which contributed to the evolution of their beliefs about themselves as musicians.

It would perhaps be premature, without further longitudinal research, to concur with Mak (2009), who suggests that the unifying element in musical learning in all genres is reflection. Nevertheless, the students in this study were exposed not only to reflective practice in their performance courses, but also found themselves learning within the framework of an institution in which tutors and faculty staff were also able to reflect and, importantly believed in embracing multiple musical genres without divisions. Given that in some cases it took considerable courage to explore new musical genres which required an unfamiliar approach to musical rehearsal and performance, perhaps the students were better able to make sense of their new experiences through the media of their reflective essays and the interviews they gave me.

Clearly there is more research here to be done in order to confirm the possible pedagogical benefits of embedding reflection in undergraduate Performance Modules – not only to foster critical self-awareness of individual and group practice, but also to

support journeys into new musical genres and discover whether transfers between musicking in different genres can be supported by reflective practice in the short, medium and long-term.

**Appendix 4 Ethics approval documentation**

# **The Art of Practice    Doctoral Research Project**

## **Participant Information Sheet**

3<sup>rd</sup> October 2013

Dear Undergraduate Music Student,

You are being invited to participate in a research study. Before you decide whether to participate, it is important for you to understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. Please take time to read the following information carefully and feel free to ask us if you would like more information or if there is anything you do not understand. You are welcome to discuss this with your peers, friends and relatives if you so desire. We would like to stress that you do not have to accept this invitation and should only agree to take part if you want to.

### **The purpose of this study**

My name is Monica Esslin-Peard and I am a part-time doctoral research student in Performance at the University of Liverpool, School of Music. My supervisor is Tony Shorrocks, Head of Performance. In my day job, I am Director of Music at a school in Sussex and I am passionate about all genres of music and about helping students to develop as performers. Below you can read about the scope of the proposed research project.

### **‘The Art of Practice’**

How music undergraduates reflect on their instrumental and vocal practice to understand how to become better performers.

### **Why are you being asked to take part in this research?**

As a music undergraduate opting for the Performance Module as part of your studies, you are being invited to take part in this project because I am seeking to discover how music undergraduates like you develop your practising skills (whether as an individual,

or in groups/bands) and how what you do in practising contributes to your progress as a performer. To this end, I would like to be able to explore the relationship between your experience of practising and your end-of-year recitals.

Undergraduates who take the Performance Module in the academic years 2012–2013, 2013–2014, 2014–2015 and 2015–2016 will be invited to take part. This means that we may collect as many as 300 different sets of data relating to individual musicians over three years, which will allow us to conduct statistical analyses of the data and see whether we can establish a connection between reflection on practice and performance in end-of-year recitals. In other words, we want to understand how you learn to practice your instrument and how, by writing about your practice in a reflective essay at the end of the year, you recognise the times when you changed your practice habits, or noticed that you had made a breakthrough or overcame a particular challenge.

### **What will it involve for you?**

Participation in this study will not change your experience of the Performance Module as part of your undergraduate study in any way. All I am seeking is your permission to do the following:

- Read your end-of-year reflective essay based on your practice diary
- Gain access to your grades for your reflective essay and your end-of-year recital
- Possibly invite you to take part in a semi-structured, informal interview which will be audio-recorded, so that you can tell me more about what you have learned

I would like to stress that I am not here to judge how much you practise, or what you are practising. As an external researcher, I have no influence over your grades, and will not be able to access your reflective essays and performance grades until these have been awarded and moderated within the School of Music and communicated to you. My supervisor, Tony Shorrocks, Head of Performance, will continue to teach the Performance Module in the same way as it has been taught in previous years.

### **Wider benefits for you, and Music Education**

By allowing me access to this information, you will be contributing to the first research project in the UK which compares the practice behaviours of classical and popular musicians at undergraduate level. Your experiences and views are not only valuable to this research project, but will also be of benefit to the School of Music and your tutors in enabling them to evaluate the performance courses and address themes which arise from the research which are important to you, the students. You will have access to the final thesis which will be written based on this research, and you will hear about the progress of the research through the Performance Module seminars when findings emerge which are relevant and helpful to your learning and development as musicians.

The benefits are likely not only to be apparent to you, as members of the department, but also to students and staff at other university music departments and conservatoires in the UK and further afield.

### **Confidentiality**

All the data which will be used in this research will be handled in the strictest confidence. None of you will be named in the research and you will be free to withdraw from the research at any time without giving a reason.

Results from the reflective essay on practice and the end-of-year performance are held in a locked office in the School of Music. Data from these results which are passed on to me each academic year will be held securely on the University M drive. The analytical data arising from the project will be held securely in the School of Music for a period of three years after the conclusion of the project.

### **Expenses/Payments**

There are no expenses or payments to be made to you for your participation.

### **Personal Risks**

There are no personal risks involved in this research, as I am seeking your permission for access to academic records based on course work and performance assessments which are already part of the undergraduate Performance Module.

### **Complaints Procedure**

If you are unhappy, or there is a problem with your participation in this research, please feel free to let us know by contacting Tony Shorrocks 0151 794 3097 and we will try to help. If you remain unhappy or have a complaint which you feel you cannot come to us with, then you should contact the Research Governance Officer on 0151 794 8290 ([ethics@liv.ac.uk](mailto:ethics@liv.ac.uk)) When contacting the Research Governance Officer, please provide details of the name of the research project, the researchers involved and the details of the complaint you wish to make.

I very much hope that you will agree to let me have access to your Performance Module reflective practice essay and recital grades after the end of this academic year. Many thanks for giving me, and the School of Music, your support.

If you have further questions, please do not hesitate to contact me:  
Email: [mep1961@liv.ac.uk](mailto:mep1961@liv.ac.uk) or text me on my mobile: 07976 761142

You can also talk to Tony Shorrocks about this research project in person – or contact him on 0151 794 3097; Email [shorroa@liv.ac.uk](mailto:shorroa@liv.ac.uk)

## **Next Steps**

When you have had time to think about whether you would like to accept our invitation to take part in this research, we will arrange a one-to-one meeting in which we will explain the Participant Consent Form and ask you to sign to indicate your willingness to participate.

**Committee on Research Ethics**

**PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM**

**Title of Research Project:** "The Art of Practice" How music undergraduates reflect on their instrumental and vocal practice to understand how to become better performers

**Researcher(s):** Tony Shorrocks, Monica Esslin-Peard

**Please  
initial box**

1. I confirm that I have read and have understood the information sheet dated 20.10.2015 for the above study. I have had the opportunity to consider the information, ask questions and have had these answered satisfactorily.
2. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time without giving any reason, without my rights being affected. In addition, should I not wish to answer any particular question or questions, I am free to decline.
3. I understand and agree that I may be invited to take part in an interview to discuss my experiences of music practice which will be audio recorded and I am aware of and consent to your use of these recordings for the following purposes: for transcription and use of comments made by me in the final report
4. I understand that my responses will be kept strictly confidential. I give permission for members of the research team to have access to my anonymised responses. I understand that my name will not be linked with the research materials, and I will not be identified or identifiable in the report or reports that result from the research.
5. I understand that, under the Data Protection Act, I can at any time ask for access to the information I provide and I can also request the destruction of that information if I wish.
6. I agree to take part in the above study.

Participant Name	Date	Signature
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Name of Person taking consent	Date	Signature
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Researcher	Date	Signature
------------	------	-----------

**Principal Investigator:**  
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# The Art of Practice

## Background Questionnaire for Performance Students

Name (optional)

Age:

Year of Study (required)

Principal instrument/voice (required)

Secondary instruments/voice (useful)

Performance course          Popular                  Classical                  Both  
(underline as appropriate)

As many of you are aware, I am tracking the 2012 entry group of musicians choosing popular and/or classical performance for my PhD research, which seeks to understand how you as musicians mature in your practice and performance habits during your period of study. In addition, I am gathering data from other year groups and from individuals/bands in one-to-one semi-structured interviews. If you were at the presentation I gave last semester, you will recognise the “Spirals of Reflection” model below. The questions below are designed to help me to understand whether that model fits your experiences, or needs to be changed.

As always, your participation is entirely voluntary. If you want to add more, or give an interview, please contact me direct on [mep1961@liv.ac.uk](mailto:mep1961@liv.ac.uk) or via 07976 761142.

Many thanks to all of you for your help!

Monica Esslin-Peard  
Doctoral Research Student, University of Liverpool, School of Music

1. What kind of school did you attend for your last 2 years of secondary education?

Private                      Comprehensive                      Secondary Modern                      Grammar  
Sixth Form College                      Other:.....

2. Indicate which of the following KS5 (16–18 year old) qualifications you have:

A Level Music Technology AS – A2                      A Level Music AS – A2  
BTEC Music Level 3                      BTEC Music Level 2                      Other:.....

3. What kind of music tuition did you have whilst at school? (multiple answers OK)

**PRIMARY**

Class music  
Individual tuition in school  
Individual tuition outside school  
Ensemble/band inside school  
Ensemble/band outside school  
No class music  
Self-taught as instrumentalist/vocalist  
Other: .....  
.....

**SECONDARY**

Class music  
Individual tuition in school  
Individual tuition outside school  
Ensemble/band inside school  
Ensemble/band outside school  
No class music  
Self-taught instrumentalist/vocalist  
Other:

Space here for any other qualifying comments:

4. Who helped you in your musical development at school?

Parents      Music staff      Instrumental/vocal tutor      Admired musician      Peers  
Other:.....

5. a) What did you think the term “practice” meant while you were at school?

5. b) What did you do when you were “practising” during your time at school, as an individual or in a group?

6. How do the people around you affect your development as a musician? Please describe what has happened, or is happening with peers .....

*Both positive and negative answers are welcome in all the answers which follow.*

7. a) How does the environment around you affect your development as a musician?

7 b) Can you comment on being at the University of Liverpool, or in the city of Liverpool or the surroundings and explain how that links to your musical development?

8. a) How have instrumental/vocal tutors affected your musical development during your time at Liverpool?

8 b) Can you give examples of any breakthroughs or insights into your own practice and performance behaviours?

9 a) How have School of Music faculty staff (in the widest sense) affected your musical development?

9 b) Can you give any examples of how you have developed under their tutelage?

10 If you consider your musical development like a journey, can you indicate on the road map below key events in your musical development. These might relate to practice, to performance, to the involvement of third parties or whatever seems most important to you. Your future is where the road goes into the horizon. Please give your age where relevant in the journey.



## Appendix 6

## Glossary

*arTre Trio:* An Italian professional piano trio formed in 2012 which has visited the University of Liverpool annually, coaching students in chamber music, giving individual lessons and masterclasses and performing on campus. For more information see <https://www.facebook.com/artretrio/> and <https://www.cultura.trentino.it/eng/Events/Trio-arTre>

*Aural musicians:* Students who learn by ear and have no or little experience of music notation, or classical music. The music that they perform directly reflects their personal musical tastes and may include popular music, rock, and folk.

*Classical musicians:* Students who have had formal musical education starting in primary school, either in class or from one-to-one state-funded or private tuition. These students can read the treble clef and some can read the bass clef and other clefs. They play classical music in the local youth orchestra and identify their primary musical interest as classical music.

*ABRSM:* The Associated Board of the Royal Schools of Music: an examining body which offers qualifications to external candidates of all ages in eight stages (Grades 1 – 8) in practical musicianship and music theory. Grade VIII in voice or an instrument is regarded as an indicator of musical ability and potential to study music at a higher level. Diploma level qualifications are equivalent to part of a three year undergraduate course of study at one of the Royal Colleges of Music, and are aimed at instrumental and vocal specialists seeking a career as a performer.

*BTEC First National Diploma in Music:* A vocational qualification offered to students in Years 10 and 11 at KS4 which offers a wide range of modules based on different roles in the music industry. Students taking BTEC are not required to have an ability to read music notation, or a particular level of expertise in singing or instrumental skills. BTEC qualifications are considered to be equivalent to GCSE exams.

*BTEC National Diploma in Music:* A vocational qualification offered to students in Years 12 and 13 at KS5 which offers a wide range of modules based on different roles in the music industry. Students taking BTEC at KS5 will have either completed BTEC courses at KS4, will have taken GCSE music or will be active as aural musicians in a band, or demonstrate other skills related to the music industry such as DJ-ing, music technology or sound production. BTEC qualifications are considered to be equivalent to GCE qualifications.

*GCE Music: (A Level)* A qualification which is gained at the end of Year 13. Students study three areas: performance, composition and listening and critical analysis. The course requires assessment at the end of Year 12 (AS Music) and at the end of Year 13 (A2 Music). Students opting for GCE music have usually taken GCSE Music and have proven expertise as instrumentalists or vocalists and can read music notation fluently in at least two clefs.

*GCSE Music:* A qualification which is gained at the end of Year 11. Students study three areas: performance, composition and listening and critical analysis. Typically, students studying GCSE music have established instrumental or vocal skills and can read music notation.

*KS3:* Key Stage 3 – students in Years 7–9, aged between 11 and 13 years old in state and private education in England, usually in secondary schools, which cater for children aged 11 to 18.

*KS4:* Key Stage 4 – students in Years 10–11, aged between 14 and 16 years old in state and private education. These students are preparing for GCSE exams, which are taken in the summer of Year 11.

*KS5:* Key Stage 5 – students in Years 12–13, aged between 16 and 18 years old in state and private education. These students are preparing for GCE exams, also known as A Levels, which are taken partly at the end of Year 12 and at the end of Year 13, depending on the subject studied.

*ICMP* The Institute of Contemporary Music Performance in London was one of the first providers of specialist musical training for musicians and technicians in popular music. It offers a wide range of performance and music industry related undergraduate degrees.

*LIPA* The Liverpool Institute for the Performing Arts is a specialist university-level provider of learning for performers, including musicians, music technicians, actors, dancers and those wishing to pursue media and television studies. Its programmes of study include undergraduate degrees and foundation certificates.

*Popular musicians* ‘Popular’ is used to describe musicians who are largely self-taught and show a preference for popular music, jazz and folk genres. These musicians may learn from peers or musicians whom they admire and develop their musical skills aurally as individuals and/or within a band.

*Other-than-classical musicians* Musicians who may learn formally, informally or with a mix of both approaches, including those working in world music, folk and jazz.

*Royal Academy of Music* The Royal Academy of Music has been training musicians to the highest professional standards since its foundation in 1822. It is now part of the University of London and offers a wide range of specialist conservatoire music courses at undergraduate and post-graduate level in classical music including voice, opera, classical instruments, historical performance, composition, conducting and jazz.

*Royal College of Music* The Royal College of Music is a conservatoire established by royal charter in 1882, located in London. It offers a wide range of



undergraduate and masters courses in music and related disciplines and also offers research degrees.

*Royal Northern College of Music* The Royal Northern College of Music is a conservatoire located in Manchester in North West England which was established in 1973. Its 300 teachers provide specialist music education for over 800 students at undergraduate, graduate and post-graduate levels.

*Secondary school:* A school offering education to local children aged between 11 and 18. Secondary schools cover Key Stage 3 (Years 7–9); Key Stage 4 (Years 10 and 11) and Key Stage 5 (Years 12 and 13).

*UCAS* The Universities and Colleges Admission Services, a charity which coordinates applications to UK universities, higher education institutions and conservatoires. Students usually apply for places in higher education through their secondary schools or sixth form colleges, but individual applications are also possible, for example for mature students.

**Appendix 7: Assessment Criteria for Reflective Essay for Performance Modules (Years 1, 2 & 3)**

<b>F Fail 0–39%</b>	<b>E Pass 40–44%</b>	<b>Class 3 45–49%</b>	<b>Class 2.2 50–59%</b>	<b>Class 2.1 60–69%</b>	<b>Class 1 70%–100</b>
<b>GRASP OF FIELD OF STUDY</b>					
Inadequate understanding of issues and insights into the field of study	Very limited understanding of issues and insights into the field of study	Basic understanding of issues and insights into the field of study	Clear understanding of issues and some insights into field of study	Clear understanding of issues and good level of insights into field of study	Outstanding grasp of issues and high level of critical insights into field of study
No review or reference to literature	Inaccurate and/or scant review of literature	Unfocused review of literature	Basic critical competence in reviewing literature	Wide ranging, coherent and critical review of literature	Extensive, insightful and critical review of literature
No reference to lecture material, content or activities	Inaccurate reference to lecture material, content or activities	Unfocused review of lecture material, content or activities	Basic critical competence in reviewing lecture material, content or activities	Wide ranging coherent and critical review of lecture material, content or activities	Extensive, insightful and critical review of lecture material, content or activities
Confusion in the application of knowledge	Little development of ideas in the application of knowledge	Limited development of ideas in the application of knowledge	Elements of independent thought in the application of knowledge	Elements of creative thought in the application of knowledge	High levels of creativity and independence of thought in the application of knowledge
<b>UNDERSTANDING AND EVALUATING RESEARCH AND METHODOLOGIES</b>					
Lack of understanding of how established techniques of research and enquiry are used to create and interpret knowledge and how these apply to students' own research and/or practice	Scant understanding of how research and enquiry are used to create and interpret knowledge, skills and creativity and how these apply to students' own practice	Basic understanding of how research and enquiry are used to create and interpret knowledge, skills and creativity and how these apply to students' own practice	Some understanding of how research and enquiry are used to create and interpret knowledge, skills and creativity and how these apply to students' own practice	Good understanding of how research and enquiry are used to create and interpret knowledge, skills and creativity and how these apply to students' own practice	Outstanding understanding of how established techniques of research and enquiry are used to create and interpret knowledge, skills and creativity and how these apply to students' own practice
No handling, presenting and inferring from external data	Inadequate or confused handling, presenting and inferring from external data	Some evidence of an attempt at creative and critical handling, presenting and inferring from external data	Some evidence of creative and critical handling, presenting and inferring from external data	Creative and critical handling, presenting and inferring from external data	Convincing creative and critical handling, presenting and inferring from external data
<b>STRUCTURE, COMMUNICATION &amp; PRESENTATION</b>					
Disorganised and unfocused presentation of arguments and conclusion	Basic competence in organisation and presentation of arguments and conclusions	Some clarity and focus in organisation and presentation of arguments and conclusions	Some evidence of fluency in organisation and presentation of arguments and conclusions	Fluency in organisation and presentation of arguments and conclusions	Exceptional clarity, focus and cogency in organisation and presentation of arguments and conclusions

