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The Marriage of Art and Academia - Challenges and opportunities for music research in practice-based environments

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The odd notion that an artist does not think and a scientific enquirer does nothing else is the result of converting a difference of tempo and emphasis into a difference in kind (John Dewey, 1934, p. 15)

Many would regard the union of conservatoires (or schools of music) and universities as a marriage of convenience: the bride beautiful, artistic, but without means; the groom perhaps a little dull, but a stable provider. The sacrifices within this arrangement are significant. There are considerable tensions between approaches to educating practicing artists and those appropriate to, say, nurturing the next generation of accountants. The demands on compliance to sets of rules based on science and technology rather than arts and humanities can be stifling and time-consuming. In addition, and perhaps even more challenging, there are the monumental efforts to justify and secure appropriate levels of funding to maintain quality teaching and learning which require a substantial component of one-on-one instruction.

However, bringing together high-level artistic practice and rigorous reflection in somewhat forced cohabitation for the first time since Von Humboldt separated them in the 1820s (Krebs, Siouti, Apitzsch & Wenk, 2005, p. 3) has also created new and exciting avenues, for example in the area of research. In Australia, where all conservatoires have amalgamated with universities during the past two decades, the desire to bring practice and research closer is evident in activities indicated by universities. In a 2004 survey of tertiary music education by the Australian Music Centre, 79% of universities indicated that they engaged in practice-based research, action research scored 46% in the university

sector, research into artistic practice 83%, and artistic practice as research 71% (Schippers, 2004).

This would appear to paint a picture of a uniquely forward-looking university practice in terms of music research. On critical reflection, however, the trends above are hardly reflected in the current academic output of music departments, the topics of presentations at major conferences, journal articles, and music projects funded by the Australian Research Council over the past eight years (Australian Research Council, 2006). In each of these, traditional musicological research dominates, focusing almost exclusively on analytical, social and historical aspects of music, rather than on contemporary practice.

One way of interpreting this is that we are dealing with a very recent development, of which we will only see evidence in the coming years. But perhaps there is also some confusion as to what constitutes each of the categories of research mentioned above. In Australia, Dennis Strand has made major inroads into this matter with his report *Research in the Creative Arts* (1998). More recently, the discussion has continued through the work of CHASS, the Council for the Humanities, Arts and social Sciences (2005).

A recurring issue in these discussions in Australia and overseas is the distinction (or continuum) between *research into practice* on one hand, which implies an outsider's perspective, and on the other *practice as research*, where a reflective artistic practice is explored as a process akin to experimental forms of research. Although much music making involves research, the latter does not necessarily qualify all music making as research. Not every rehearsal is a research project, and not all performances are research outcomes. If we follow the OECD definition that research and experimental development comprises "creative work undertaken on a systematic basis in order to increase the stock of knowledge, including the knowledge of man, culture and society, and the use of this stock of knowledge to devise new applications," (OECD Factbook, 2006, p. 42) then much of what musicians do may certainly be high-level professional practice, but all does not necessarily constitute research.

In this context, confusion arises on the relationship between artistic or aesthetic value and recognition as research. I would argue that this is quite loose. One can imagine a deeply moving rendition of a work from the classical canon or a brilliant jazz solo in a manner that would not require much research, and a very deeply conceived and well constructed new work that utterly fails to communicate with an audience. This is not very different from research in other areas. Many years of highly structured research has failed to date in finding cures for cancer and AIDS, while penicillin was discovered by chance after someone forgot to do the Petri dishes.

Having said that, we can easily identify research methods and patterns in almost any progression towards a performance, from defining the general idea or concept (this can be an individual or group process), to the initial choice of repertoire/material, to research into books, scores, records, or memory, to final choices on approach, repertoire, and material. In processes commonly identified as research, these stages would correspond to defining the research question, literature review, and choice of methodology.

Next, the musician typically moves to the studio. This is the lab or experimental phase of the research. Here, thousands of deeply considered and split-second decisions are made using music notation or memory; ideas from publications about music (structure, history); consulted or remembered recordings in private collection and libraries and performances; learned, acquired and developed values; experience and assessment of audience reactions; and probably most importantly an aural library, which, for a mature musician, would typically consist of 20,000 to 50,000 hours of listening, learning and playing. The research output often takes the form of a performance and/or recording.

Here arises a challenge in locating data: performances represent outcomes, but do not necessarily elucidate the process, which is widely seen as a major problem in recognising artistic processes as research (e.g. Arts and Humanities Research Board, 2003, p.3). However, there is much that can be learned from other settings during the process, such as rehearsals and practice sessions; biographies, interviews and reviews; historical sources, stories and myths about music; as well as settings for music transmission. Particularly master classes offer a rich source of insight in musical process.

Another way of demonstrating the research process is to strive for specific formats of presenting research that do not only highlight the outcomes, but also elucidate the processes leading to these results. These can be presented in traditional, linear, written formats, but non-linear, multidisciplinary formats may be more appropriate in many cases. A DVD-ROM, for example, can represent and almost reproduce the research trajectory of a musician, with all the cross references that typically characterise the artistic process. This will work equally well for processes leading to new creative work, and for interpretation, where the ‘new knowledge’ component of research is under greater scrutiny (cf. UK Council for Graduate Education, 2001, p. 17).

Various DVDs and DVD-ROMs that highlight aspects of such artistic processes have been published over the past decade, including Duchable’s interpretations of Beethoven’s Piano Concertos (2002). Probably the most advanced example of such an approach to date has recently been realised by pianist Stephen Emmerson (2006). With research assistant Angela Turner, he spent three years dissecting his approaches and motivations for choices in interpreting Mozarts *Rondo in a minor (KV 511)*, including an extensive literature review, comparisons with close to 100 years of other recordings, analytical and technical considerations, and a personal log. On the DVD-ROM, this is presented in a manner where the artistic process can be followed in the inevitably non-linear manner it progresses, clicking from technical challenges to aesthetic deliberations based on contemporary sources, and references of recent sources of inspiration. *Around a Rondo – The art of interpretation* contains a dozen video and audio recordings, scores, facsimiles, images, and some 50,000 words of text in over 5,000 interconnected files. It meets all demands of academic rigour, but remains true to the essence of the artistic process.

Although some (e.g. Candlin, 2000, pppp. 99-101) will argue against the need to elucidate artistic process with the help of words (and who indeed would deny J.S. Bach a doctorate purely on the basis of the score of *Die Kunst der Fuge?*), it is expected that the format developed for *Around a Rondo* will serve as a model for alternative submissions for professional doctorates that have emerged at various Australian universities (as Doctor of Musical Arts, Doctor of Creative Arts, or Doctor of Creative Industries – see

list at the end of his article). While it has been possible for several decades to obtain a PhD in Australia through submitting a portfolio of compositions with an exegesis, the professional doctorate is widely considered the most appropriate pathway to apply practical artistic experience to doctoral work, and create ample room for alternative submissions with significant artistic components. These degrees are already drawing substantial numbers of high level student, no doubt partly fuelled by increasing pressure from universities to only employ teaching staff with doctoral qualifications.

Quite oddly, research projects such as *Around a Rondo*, which very clearly meet the criteria of “creative work undertaken on a systematic basis in order to increase the stock of knowledge” do not ‘score’ on current Australian government criteria for research output. In that context, these are interesting times for Australian conservatoires. From 2008, university-based research will be judged by a new Research Quality Framework (RQF; similar to the British Research Assessment Exercise and its New Zealand counterpart), which has a chance of broadening the definitions of research quality (beyond journal articles and other conventional outputs), and will look at research impact as well. As a sector, the arts have much to gain from an RQF. It will enable it to make the case for academic excellence on its own terms, recognising diverse outputs instead of measuring research quality by the number of papers and citations and associated metrics.

At the same time, music has much to bring to research in other disciplines, which increasingly acknowledge creativity as a key force, and often find contemporary, digital or web-based research outputs more appropriate than paper-based ones. Integration of image, sound and text is becoming the norm in an increasing number of innovative research projects and doctoral submissions, and not only in the arts: research outputs on DVD-ROMs or WIKIs are rapidly gaining ground. At worst, these new formats take advantage of a lack of an established tradition of academic rigour. At best, they integrate image, sound and words into inspiring narratives and convincing arguments, leading to significant insights into creative processes and their relationship to the outside world.

It is perhaps in this relationship with the outside world that the creative and performing arts have the greatest potential to shine in the RQF. The arts offer back a great deal to the

community in return for its investment. These dividends (or ‘payback’ as RAND Europe calls them) can take many forms. They can contribute to the academic discipline in the form of journal articles, to the profession in creative product and ideas, to education in inspiring new material for learning and teaching, to policy by forging new insights and ways to implement these, to communities by contributing to social cohesion, or to the economy by increasing employment or sales. Various forms of ‘payback’ more often than not represent different stages of impact realised by research in the arts (as it does in many other disciplines), and can be spread out over years or even decades. Consequently, capturing these effects in their considerable diversity is a major challenge, but one that should not be avoided when striving for a stimulating and equitable system, which also does justice to collaborative efforts and interdisciplinary teams.

The basic model proposed under the Australian RQF, based on cases made by research groupings which are subsequently peer reviewed, will be labour-intensive, but probably as close to fair as it is ever going to get. A key question in these cases is the role of metrics. Some aspects of quality and impact are easily counted and expressed in terms of numbers, while others are more elusive. Various aspects should be interpreted carefully: fabulous ticket sales for an event or circulation of a film may not be evidence of its research quality (it would probably make Kylie Minogue the greatest musicologist in Australia), while presentations in prestigious venues or by prestigious organisations are already a little more dependable, as they suggest some form of peer review.

Several universities have started developing frameworks to consider what aspects can usefully be quantified, and are beginning to exchange ideas and experiences. For now, they are carefully open to the changes of the research landscape that are being suggested. Some university have adopted research indicators for creative output as equivalent to traditional research in principle. However, in attributing prestige and funding, there remains a strong sense of “All research is equal, but some is more equal.” Hopefully, however, the current efforts will lead to considerable self-imposed rigour in reporting by artist-researchers within universities, which will be crucial to the success of the exercise.

Looking at the dynamics in the field, there are several options for conservatoires (all of which occur in Australia): they can continue to conform optimally to science-based research-output criteria in order to demonstrate validity of music research; they can keep claiming defiantly “We are artists, and what artists do is research without any need to prove it”; or they can define their own agenda, and develop strategies that convince in academic rigour while retaining artistic integrity. Such an agenda can take the form of a research menu, which may consist of any variation of mixes of traditional musicological research; research into teaching and learning; professional survival and well-being; research *into* practice (outsider’s perspective); and practice *as* research (insider’s perspective).

Exploring the depths of musical creativity by mapping out the tangible and intangible elements of various musical practices is a very profound and specific pursuit. It is difficult, exciting, relevant, and long overdue. By making strategic choices of research foci with regards to this area, it is possible to set up research programmes within the context of higher music education that are not at the margin, but at the core of musical life in an academic context, with pro-active links to students, staff, management, other faculties and the outside world through curriculum development, creative practice, community activities and performance.

In this context, a conservatoire is one of the greatest resources for research in music. Musicians in the process of learning, teaching, performing and creating music provide a unique opportunity to study the essence of the art. That which flashes before our ears in performance as the end-result of complex physiological, technical, conceptual, aesthetic and social processes is laid out in all of its component parts in the learning process at a conservatoire, as *musical practice in slow-motion*. That is a promising basis for renewed dialogues on widening perceptions and formats of academic rigour and artistic practice.

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Examples of arts/music-focussed professional doctorates at Australian Universities:

Doctor of Fine Arts, RMIT

<http://www.rmit.edu.au/browse/>

Doctor of Musical Arts, University of Melbourne

<https://psc.unimelb.edu.au/view/2006/courseStream/170ab.html>

Doctor of Musical Arts, Queensland Conservatorium, Griffith University

http://www17.griffith.edu.au/cis/p_cat/require.asp?ProgCode=6017&Type=requirestructure

Doctor of Philosophy (specialisation in performance), Elder Conservatorium, University of Adelaide

<http://www.adelaide.edu.au/programs/pg/prog/music/>

Doctorate of Creative Arts (Communication and Cultural Studies), Curtin University of Technology

<http://handbook.curtin.edu.au/courses/30/300891.html>

Doctor of Creative Arts, Wollongong University

<http://www.uow.edu.au/handbook/yr2006/cour202.html>

Doctor of Creative Arts, University of Western Sydney

www.uws.edu.au/download.php?file_id=10547&filename=DCA_Guidelines.doc&mimetype=application/msword

Doctor of Creative Arts, University of Technology, Sydney

<http://www.handbook.uts.edu.au/hss/pg/c02020.html>

Doctor of Creative Arts, University of the Sunshine Coast

<http://www.usc.edu.au/Students/Handbook/Postgrad/HDR/ArtsSocSc/DCA/>

Doctor of Creative Industries, QUT

www.international.qut.edu.au/documents/Course%20Guides/cipostgrad.pdf

Doctor of Arts, University of Sydney

http://www.arts.usyd.edu.au/current_students/PGresearch/courseinfo/profdoc.shtml

Doctor of Visual and Performing Arts, Charles Sturt University

http://www.csu.edu.au/handbook/handbook06/pg/P1_8.htm

Professional Doctorate (Transdisciplinary Studies), Central Queensland University

http://www.profdoc.cqu.edu.au/what_structure.htm and

http://www.profdoc.cqu.edu.au/rulesprofdoc_v5.doc

Doctor of Contemporary Arts, Edith Cowan University

<http://www.ecugreatcareers.com/postgrads/applying.htm>

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