

## Music and Empathy

In recent years, empathy has received considerable research attention as a means of understanding a range of psychological phenomena, and it is fast drawing attention within the fields of music psychology and music education. This volume seeks to promote and stimulate further research in music and empathy, with contributions from many of the leading scholars in the fields of music psychology, neuroscience, music philosophy and education. It exposes current developmental, cognitive, social and philosophical perspectives on research in music and empathy, and considers the notion in relation to our engagement with different types of music and media. Following a Prologue, the volume presents twelve chapters organised into two main areas of enquiry. The first section, entitled 'Empathy and Musical Engagement', explores empathy in music education and therapy settings, and provides social, cognitive and philosophical perspectives about empathy in relation to our interaction with music. The second section, entitled 'Empathy in Performing Together', provides insights into the role of empathy across non-Western, classical, jazz and popular performance domains. This book will be of interest to music educators, musicologists, performers and practitioners, as well as scholars from other disciplines with an interest in empathy research.

**Elaine King** is Senior Lecturer in Music at the University of Hull. She co-edited *Music and Gesture* (Ashgate 2006), *New Perspectives on Music and Gesture* (Ashgate 2011) and *Music and Familiarity* (Ashgate 2013), and has published book chapters and articles on aspects of ensemble rehearsal and performance. She is a member of the Royal Musical Association (Council, 2009–12) and Society for Education, Music and Psychology Research (Conference Secretary, 2006–12) as well as Associate Editor of *Psychology of Music*. She is an active cellist, pianist and conductor.

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# **Music and Empathy**

**Edited by Elaine King and  
Caroline Waddington**

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## Series editors' preface

The enormous growth of research that has been evidenced over the past three decades continues into the many different phenomena that are embraced under the psychology of music 'umbrella'. Growth is evidenced in new journals, books, media interest, an expansion of professional associations (regionally and nationally, such as in Southern Europe, Latin America, Asia), and with increasing and diverse opportunities for formal study, including within non-English-speaking countries. Such growth of interest is not only from psychologists and musicians, but also from colleagues working in the clinical sciences, neurosciences, therapies, in the lifelong health and well-being communities, philosophy, musicology, social psychology, ethnomusicology and education across the lifespan. As part of this global community, the Society for Education, Music and Psychology Research (SEMPRE) celebrated its 40th Anniversary in 2012 and continues to be one of the world's leading and longstanding professional associations in the field. SEMPRE is the only international society that embraces formally an interest in the psychology of music, research and education, seeking to promote knowledge at the interface between the twin social sciences of psychology and education with one of the world's most pervasive art forms, music. SEMPRE was founded in 1972 and has published the journals *Psychology of Music* since 1973 and *Research Studies in Music Education* since 2008, both now produced in partnership with SAGE (see [www.sempre.org.uk](http://www.sempre.org.uk)), and we continue to seek new ways to reach out globally, both in print and online. This includes the launch of a new online journal *Music and Science* in 2017. We recognise that there is an ongoing need to promote the latest research findings to the widest possible audience. Through more extended publication formats, especially books, we believe that we are more likely to fulfil a key component of our mission, which is to have a distinctive and positive impact on individual and collective understanding, as well as on policy and practice internationally, both within and across our disciplinary boundaries. Hence, we welcome the strong collaborative partnership between SEMPRE and Routledge (formerly Ashgate Publishing).

The *SEMPRE Studies in The Psychology of Music* series has been designed to address this international need since its inception in 2007. The theme for the series is the psychology of music, broadly defined. Topics include (amongst others): musical development and learning at different ages; musical cognition and

context; culture, mind and music; creativity, composition, and collaboration; micro to macro perspectives on the impact of music on the individual (from neurological studies through to social psychology); the development of advanced performance skills; musical behaviour and development in the context of special educational needs; and affective perspectives on musical learning. The series seeks to present the implications of research findings for a wide readership, including user-groups (music teachers, policy makers, parents and carers, music professionals working in a range of formal, non-formal and informal settings), as well as the international academic teaching and research communities and their students. A key distinguishing feature of the series is its broad focus that draws on basic and applied research from across the globe under the umbrella of SEMPRE's distinctive mission, which is to promote and ensure coherent and symbiotic links between education, music and psychology research.

We are very pleased to welcome this new text in the SEMPRE series, edited by Elaine King and Caroline Waddington, both from the University of Hull. *Music and Empathy* brings together an excellent international combination of relatively new and established authors who offer diverse yet complimentary insights into how we might make sense of the contested notion of empathy in the context of musical experience. The twelve chapters, organised into two groups, draw on current philosophical, developmental, cognitive, social, and educational perspectives on research about music and empathy. The opening cluster of chapters focuses on how to make sense of empathy in our individual engagement with music, whereas the second cluster focuses more on the nature of empathy when performing together, when we make music/experience music with others. This is an excellent and enriching addition to the SEMPRE series, not least because it seeks to get at the heart of why we are so emotionally engaged with music.

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## 12 The empathic nature of the piano accompanist

*Elaine King and Evgenia Roussou*

The ways in which humans interact in any society or culture have occupied the attention of researchers from different disciplinary backgrounds over centuries, including philosophers, psychologists, historians, sociologists, anthropologists and musicologists. Indeed, relationships among people are a constant source of fascination, not least because they are unique (based upon time, place and circumstance) and dynamic (subject to change over time), but because they are open to interpretation (that is, they may be understood in different ways both within and outside the relationship according to the varying perspectives of individuals). Over the past several decades there has been a growing preoccupation with the notion of empathy in human relationships, or, broadly (and perhaps somewhat crudely) speaking, ‘the ability to understand and share the feelings of another’ (*Oxford English Dictionary*).<sup>1</sup> For the purposes of this chapter, empathy will be regarded as an ‘intersubjectively motivated experience marked by affective, cognitive and motor attunement’ (after Doğanatan-Dack, 2015) that, in the context of music ensemble playing, is shaped primarily through ‘interpersonal awareness’, or acute listening and communication skills (after Myers & White, 2012). This definition makes three assumptions about empathy (Doğanatan-Dack, 2015): first, empathy is biologically and culturally embedded as a fundamental response to human interaction; second, empathy is a dynamic and emerging phenomenon that underpins creative collaborative processes; and third, empathy is a crucial factor in group music-making.<sup>2</sup> Indeed, in their study of empathy in musical performance, Sharon Myers and Catherine White (2012) claim that ‘being in a relationship where one is understood by another is something to which people respond and highly value’; moreover, in the case of music ensemble playing, they state that ‘interpersonal awareness dictates success’ (p. 255). This chapter will focus on further investigating empathic relationships in ensemble music performance by exploring the perspectives of professional performers working in the specialist context of the Western art solo–accompaniment duo chamber ensemble. The stereotypical myths of inferiority surrounding the pianist within this medium present a particularly interesting case for study, not least because the empathic nature of the piano accompanist might be seen to dictate the success of the soloist.

Existing research on ensemble music performance provides insight into the complex processes involved in group music-making that necessarily contribute towards an understanding of interpersonal awareness among co-performers. Peter Keller's (2008; Keller, Novembre, & Hove, 2014) theoretical framework highlights three core cognitive–motor skills that underpin joint action: anticipation (to plan the production of one's own sound and predict that of others); adaptation (to engage in mutual temporal adjustment; cf. the phenomenon of entrainment); and attention (prioritised towards one's own action over those of co-performers; see also Waterman, 1996). Keller posits that these core skills are influenced by four factors: knowledge (about the music and familiarity with co-performers; see also Davidson & Good, 2002; King & Ginsborg, 2011); goals (concerning the interaction); strategies (used to facilitate interaction); and social–psychological issues, including empathy. For instance, there is evidence to suggest that individuals with higher empathic predispositions (according to measurements on the 'perspective-taking' subscale of empathy questionnaires) are better able to anticipate micro-timings than those with lower empathic predispositions (Novembre, Ticini, Schütz-Bosbach, & Keller, 2012).

Whilst Keller's framework effectively explains the operational skills and contributory factors involved in group music-making, the ways in which chamber ensemble musicians experience their relationships with co-performers during performance is less well documented, although first-hand accounts by professional musicians provide valuable lenses into their work (for example, Blum, 1986). There are, however, three recent research projects that set out to expose systematically the views of musicians on their relationships with co-performers in small ensembles with an emphasis on exploring the notion of empathy that provide preliminary informed insight into this aspect of music-making: Myers and White's (2012) enquiry using self-reflective narratives by nine professional performers, including accompanists; Elizabeth Haddon and Mark Hutchinson's (2015) self-reflective diaries of working together in a piano duet; and Caroline Waddington's (2015) focus-group interview study with nineteen professional musicians from five established Western art chamber groups. The motivation for Myers and White's (2012) research was to seek parallels between empathy as experienced in musical relationships and those described in therapeutic encounters. They claim that empathy is 'mutually created in a relational context' (p. 255) and cite accounts by piano accompanists to contextualise their research, drawing upon Gerald Moore's books on piano accompaniment (1962, 1978) as well as a broadcast in 2008 with renowned accompanist Malcolm Martineau: they refer to Moore's belief about trying to be '*at one*' with a soloist, and Martineau's notion of the interaction between soloist and accompanist as a 'circle of energy'; that is, when one performer does something different, it brings about something different in the other (p. 259). They indicate (perhaps unintentionally) that the soloist–accompanist partnership specifically may resemble something of the client–therapist dyad.

Myers and White interpreted their data in three stages. The first, 'forming an empathic connection', reflected performers' views on the importance of

experiencing a ‘special connection’ when engaging in professional relationships with other musicians, fostering ‘interpersonal awareness’ through having well-developed skills in listening and communication, and approaching music with ‘respect and integrity’. In effect, the latter aspects reflect directly upon Keller’s core cognitive–motor skills and the importance of having shared goals. The second, likened to the ‘working relationship’, depicted how the performers endeavoured to create synchrony in their playing, such as through staying tuned to one another by listening to themselves and the other player (or by ‘attending’, to use Keller’s term), reported willingness to embark on emotional journeys together, displayed commitment and effort in their work, and acknowledged that there were sometimes ‘detours’ (problems and tensions in the process). The third, on ‘making music’, was likened to the therapeutic process and referred to ensemble playing as an ‘intense and specialized enterprise’ that might potentially lead to a ‘transformative connection’ among players. This was further depicted as a connection that was considered to be ‘beyond words’, ‘all about the relationship’, a ‘spiritual experience’ and a ‘circle of energy’.

Empathic connections were thus described positively, even idealistically, across Myers and White’s report, including ‘special’, ‘transformative’, ‘beyond words’, ‘ephemeral’, ‘spiritual’ and ‘magical’, with all of them based upon performers’ recollections of sharing and understanding the feelings of another in a musical relationship. Haddon and Hutchinson (2015) also draw parallels with therapist/counsellor–client relationships in their self-reflective study of working together in a musical partnership. They describe the ‘fluidity of roles’ between co-pianists and the establishment of the rehearsal environment as a ‘safe space’ for delineating empathic processes in their ensemble (pp. 148–149). Furthermore, they report that empathy facilitates different aspects of their duet work, including easing practical difficulties which can arise with two players at a single instrument, aiding the construction of shared musical concerns, enabling creative ‘flow’ via socio-emotional bonding, and helping negotiate and resolve possible areas of conflict. Their study portrays empathy in a similarly idealistic way, through enabling, facilitating and easing aspects of group music-making. It is plausible to suggest that a cyclical relationship between musicking (Small, 1998) and empathising could potentially lead to less positive encounters (see Laurence, 2009; see also Doğantan-Dack, 2015).

As part of a wider study on empathy in expert ensemble performance, Waddington (2015; see also Waddington, this volume) explored musicians’ optimal experiences of performance, their general experiences of working together and their views on co-performer empathy. She revealed that co-performer empathy was described by these performers as comprising three main components: ‘a “shared approach” to interpretation and to working together; a “special connection” between players; and an “intentional awareness” of how colleagues are operating on both a musical and a practical level’ (p. 64). Furthermore, she found that ‘whilst in empathy, players felt able to vary aspects of musical expression spontaneously’. This ‘spontaneous interpretative flexibility’ was considered to be a central feature of optimal performance, perhaps something that might enable

the ‘transformative’, ‘spiritual’ or ‘magical’ experiences alluded to by the performers in Myers and White’s enquiry. And, likewise, Waddington uses the term ‘special connection’ to capture the varying comments from the performers about how they experienced empathy between themselves, even though the term was not used directly by the performers themselves.

These accounts draw upon the views of a range of professional musicians about experiencing empathy in ensemble performance, although to date less specific attention has been given to the empathic nature of the piano accompanist. Arguably, piano accompanists present a special case within ensemble playing, for they are not always considered to be part of a specific chamber group; rather, they may be expected to work with different soloists (instrumentalists or vocalists), in different scenarios (for example, in auditions, as *répétiteurs*, in rehearsals and performances), and sometimes with little or no prior rehearsal time. Unlike other chamber performers, pianists, including accompanists, traditionally perform with the full score (for example, solo and piano parts) and, while this may be seen as advantageous for the purpose of navigating the ensemble, this, in turn, may place specific demands on them, such as to accommodate co-performers. An existing interview study by Dimitra Kokotsaki (2007) with twenty professional pianists from a range of chamber ensembles, including duos, trios, quartets and quintets, provides detailed insight into pianists’ perspectives on the achievement of high-quality ensemble playing and, of particular relevance to this research, uncovers critical points on piano accompanying and on empathy. References to empathy were made in the context of familiarity and time availability about performance preparation: ‘[pianists] expressed the desire to connect and empathize with one another for a musical performance of high quality. In turn, these feelings assisted them to perform at their best and achieve integration with the co-performers’ (p. 656). In Kokotsaki’s theoretical framework, empathy thus features as a contextual condition of time availability and is influenced by the partner’s involvement in achieving integration. It is unclear, however, what these ‘feelings’ of connection and empathy might entail and how they are established within the ensemble.

Kokotsaki referred to the accompanist as a ‘guide’ or ‘facilitator’ when considering the pianist’s regulating role in an ensemble. Various strategies were identified for ‘bringing out potential’ within a group, notably through offering moral support and musical support, being alert, showing musical adaptation and, when working with singers, providing ‘vocal coaching’ (p. 653). Similar points are made in earlier accounts of piano accompanists who have been under the scrutiny of musicians and audiences alike for decades (Adami, 1952; Brown, 1917; Lyle, 1923; Moore, 1943; Zeckendorf, 1953). Over the last century, the piano accompanist’s role has been criticised and challenged (Butler, 1940; Cecil, 1907; Cranmer, 1970; Foss, 1924; Hoblit, 1963; Moore, 1962; Tomes, 2004). Recently, the term ‘piano collaborator’ (Katz, 2009) has been suggested as an alternative to the term ‘piano accompanist’, for it implies equality between two performers in a duo context, although there is still widespread usage of the term accompanist.

The word ‘accompany’ has its roots in the old French *compaignon*, meaning companion and, later, *accompagner*, to go along with or keep someone company. This might involve guiding, leading, following, helping or assisting a fellow individual. By definition, therefore, in keeping someone company, one may or may not be responsible for their actions. In the context of music-making, the accompanist is an individual who ‘plays with’ or ‘plays for’ another musician, hence keeping them company. Yet, the piano accompanist seems to have assumed the latter meaning of ‘playing for’ rather than ‘with’ another musician in certain areas of Western music culture through and beyond the twentieth century, implying that they occupy a supporting or following role within a partnership. The pianists in Kokotsaki’s study alluded to the ‘derogatory attitude’ of some audience members regarding the subordinate and inferior role of the accompanist, or the ‘derogatory behaviour and exaggerated expectations’ of some singers evidenced by a ‘lack of appreciation towards the accompanist’ (p. 659). There are numerous explanations for these attitudes, including socio-cultural and musical pressures, such as the expectation upon solo musicians to take the so-called limelight on stage and to lead in the delivery of musical material.

To this end, it is plausible to suggest that in ‘playing for’ a soloist, the piano accompanist might be seen to act as an empathiser, while the soloist is an empathisee; in other words, the pianist is responsible for connecting with the soloist by understanding and sharing their feelings even if this connection is not reciprocated. Furthermore, as Felicity Laurence explains in phenomenological terms according to a Steinian perspective, ‘the empathised experience “appears differently” for the person directly experiencing it from how it appears for the empathiser’ ... so they do not have the same quality of “givenness” or reality’ (Laurence, this volume). The aim of this interview study was to probe the perspectives of professional piano accompanists and instrumental soloists about their understandings and experiences of empathy in the solo–accompaniment duo chamber context with a view to exploring more specifically the empathic nature of the piano accompanist.

### **Interview study with piano accompanists and instrumental soloists**

Following ethical approval from the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences Ethics Committee at the University of Hull, fourteen professional performers were interviewed about their views on empathy in the Western art solo–accompaniment duo chamber ensemble context. The sample included seven experienced piano accompanists (mean age 53.9 years) and seven instrumental soloists (mean age 35.7 years). The accompanists’ experiences varied between working evenly across four instrumental categories, namely voice, strings, woodwind and brass, whilst at the same time specialising in one or two of them. The seven soloists represented the same four instrumental categories: voice (two singers), strings (one violinist and one cellist), wind (one flautist and one clarinetist) and brass (one French horn player). All of the accompanists regularly worked

with instrumentalists of different levels and abilities, from beginner, intermediate and advanced students, to amateur, semi-professional and professional musicians. All participants were European with the majority being British, and others recruited from Bulgaria, Cyprus, Greece, France and Poland. All participants were known personally to either both researchers or the second researcher only and were approached independently. Discriminate sampling (Strauss & Corbin, 1990) was used as the primary selection criterion to ensure that participants displayed individuality in the specialised field of solo–accompaniment duo ensemble performance and could offer a wealth of experiences in order to contribute to the research. The participants signed consent forms prior to interview. In order to preserve anonymity, pianists and soloists will be identified with letters and numbers in this chapter: pianists as P1, P2 and so on; soloists as S1, S2 and so on.

Interviews were carried out as part of a larger-scale study to explore the attributes of experienced piano accompanists. All interviews were undertaken by the second researcher and audio-recorded, transcribed and coded into themes (Arksey & Knight, 1999; Tracy, 2013). The interview questions were devised specifically to explore how empathy is perceived and experienced between pianist and soloist within the solo–accompaniment duo ensemble, ultimately to expose and subsequently understand the empathic nature of a piano accompanist within this context. There were four key areas of discussion: (a) defining empathy: to explore participants’ understandings of the term empathy and how they would define it within the solo–accompaniment duo context; (b) presence of empathy: to ascertain their views on whether or not empathy should exist between soloist and accompanist; (c) functions of empathy: to find out whether or not the participants personally experienced empathy in this context and, if so, how; and (d) alternatives to empathy: to explore which other words might be used to describe the relationship between soloist and piano accompanist.

### ***Defining empathy***

To start with, the participants were asked to explain their understanding of the word empathy and how they would define it in the solo–accompaniment duo chamber ensemble context. The data revealed general, rather than specific, understandings of the term that could be applied within and beyond the duo medium. Empathy was defined in four ways. First, it was regarded in terms of the *relationship with a co-performer*, such as when an accompanist was being understanding, instinctively aware and sensitive towards a partner’s feelings, both musically and emotionally. It was described as the ability ‘to sense the soloist’s intentions’ (P4), as an ‘unspoken kind of awareness and understanding of what someone else is feeling or thinking’ (P5), or, similarly, ‘picking up what the person’s sensitivities might be at the particular point’ (P7). Second, it was perceived according to *actions towards co-performers*, notably as being flexible and prepared to compromise. Indeed, according to some of the pianists, empathy was about ‘being open for other people’s feelings or emotions or reactions to certain

things' (P6) or 'being prepared to compromise' (P1). One of the soloists commented that empathy is about

flexibility, sensitivity, listening, sharing; just being at one ... Sometimes it's just something you both express while playing, sometimes you have to discuss it, sometimes you've got to talk it through to come to an agreement, just like friendship or a relationship (S3).

Third, empathy was defined according to *character traits*, such as being supportive, friendly, kind and easy going. One of the soloists remarked that one had to be 'emotionally compatible with the feelings of the other musician' (S7). Finally, empathy was seen to be related to the *working ethos* of the performers, that is being able to work together towards a common goal: 'two people having an equal goal in mind' (S3); or 'having the same understanding of the music' (S6); or 'being mentally, psychologically and emotionally on the same road' (S4). One of the soloists described this ethos more carefully as being able 'to work together in a way that you are kinder to them, you are sensitive to their needs, you are ready to help them if needed at any point, not to make them feel at any point unsupported' (S2). The distinctive empathic nature of a piano accompanist is not immediately clear from these data. What is apparent is that all of the participants provided general ideas of what empathy might (or might not) be in the context of ensemble playing more broadly, and that these chimed with previous accounts discussed above (Myers & White, 2012; Waddington, 2015).

### ***Presence of empathy***

The majority of participants indicated that empathy should be present between a soloist and a pianist: eight of the fourteen performers (four pianists and four soloists) responded that it existed, whilst five performers (three pianists and two soloists) were indifferent and one soloist remarked that it was not needed. Positive responses sometimes left no room for dispute, such as 'definitely' (S2), 'absolutely' (S3), 'there has to be empathy' (P2) and 'of course it is always present' (P6), whilst others offered explanations, including that it is required 'so as to perform a piece of music as the composer wanted' (P2) and 'without it, it is impossible to do anything' (P3). Some of the performers' responses promoted empathy as a prerequisite for success: 'it benefits the music and the performance' (S6) and '[it has to be present] so the work would not fall apart' (P6). Saying this, one of the soloists made the point that the existence of empathy between soloist and accompanist 'depends on how you cultivate it' (S1). Another commented that it can exist 'only up to a certain point' (S4) and that it 'depends on the person you are working with' (P5). One of the pianists offered that 'sometimes musical material sets up a competition between soloist and accompanist ... there are some contemporary works where the two musicians are set up to be at odds with one another' (P1). Interestingly, a similar viewpoint was shared by another pianist who remarked that 'being empathic will not necessarily be reciprocated

or bring about the desirable results' (P5), and another who claimed that 'it could be boring to be completely empathic all the time as sometimes you need to spar against each other' (P7). This point was also reinforced by the pianist who commented that 'great performances can be achieved by having two contrasting minds at work which are not necessarily in empathy' (P4). The one participant who indicated that empathy should not be present between soloist and accompanist made the point that it was not necessary if the musicians 'already accepted each other' (S5).

The presence of empathy therefore reflects something about the nature of the relationship between soloist and accompanist. The participants' responses determined that empathy is present, must be present, may be present, is not present, or that empathy can be cultivated, depending on the specific relationship between the two performers as well as the kind of musical repertoire being performed. To this end, performers might consider themselves to be 'in empathy' or 'out of empathy' during performance activity, although there could be times when they are working towards achieving these experiences. The specific empathic nature of the piano accompanist is, once again, blurred in these data with the potential experiences of ensemble players in general, although contrary to previous studies (Haddon & Hutchinson, 2015; Myers & White, 2012), these participants do not assume that empathy is always a positive phenomenon (cf. Laurence, 2009; see also Laurence, this volume). Furthermore, while it was assumed at the outset that empathy is both dynamic and emergent, and that it underpins collaborative creative music-making, these participants suggested that it is not always desirable or indeed necessary in the achievement of ensemble playing. Rather, empathy may be perceived to be a divergent and unwanted phenomenon in group music-making.

### ***Functions of empathy***

Most of the participants reported that they had experienced empathy with their duo partners and could identify specific scenarios based upon either personal incidents or hypothetical situations whereby an accompanist might demonstrate empathy towards a soloist. Three functions of empathy were described, reflecting both musical and socio-emotional aspects of the relationship between co-performers: dealing with interpersonal dynamics; offering support and reassurance; and experiencing a connection. With regard to *dealing with interpersonal dynamics*, performers commented on the communication between soloist and accompanist as empathic when one is on the same wavelength, whether this involves agreeing or being in conflict with one other. On the one hand, this communication might be essentially non-verbal: it is 'when you share an almost telepathic communication' (P3); 'when you communicate musically without words' (S7). On the other, verbal communication might underpin the interpersonal dynamic: it is 'when you arrive at an accumulative decision about the interpretation' (P1); or 'when you have different opinions about interpretation and discuss alternatives' (P6).

In the second function, *offering support and reassurance*, performers expressed understanding and discretion towards their partner, such as through knowing when to keep a distance ('when you are aware of the soloists' behaviour pattern before a performance and letting them be, allowing them to deal with it as they feel, rather than well-intentionally interfering which could result in making matters worse' (P3)) and when to offer direct support ('when your partner takes on board your technical difficulties adjusting their performance in order to accommodate you' (P1); or 'when you or your partner make a mistake and they feel really bad about it, and the other reassures them that it is okay' (S3)). Similarly, performers described situations of this kind which involved coping with nerves and diffusing tense situations: 'when the accompanist takes the upper hand to help with the soloist's tempo fluctuations due to stress during a performance' (S4); 'when the pianist is not affected by the soloist's nervousness, and manages to calm them down by being supportive and solid' (S6); 'when the accompanist has been very calm and relaxing during a soloist's stressful situation, such as an audition' (S3); 'when the accompanist helps in regaining the performance flow after a soloist's memory lapse' (S2), or 'when the soloist is made to feel comfortable during a very important performance in their life' (S3). Crucially, in the majority of these examples given, emphasis was largely placed upon the accompanist to morally and musically support and reassure the soloist rather than vice versa.

The third function, *experiencing a connection*, included incidents whereby the two performers experienced a notable bond, whether musically, emotionally and/or socially. Examples included moments when a pianist was described as 'knowing and anticipating correctly what your soloist is going to do' (P7), or 'when you enjoy performing with your partner' (P2), or 'when both experience a difficult situation during a performance where they are both affected, ultimately resulting in increasing the bond between them' (S3). Outside of the rehearsal and performance arena, one soloist remarked that an empathic connection could be made 'when the two performers make time to socialise and become friends' (S4).

As distinct from other ensemble players, then, the piano accompanist was described as offering high levels of moral and musical support and reassurance. The examples provided by these participants reflected the specific actions of accompanists towards soloists in accommodating partnerships, indicating that the empathic nature of the piano accompanist is more one-sided than that of soloists (and potentially other ensemble players). Even though empathy may still be regarded as intersubjectively motivated and shaped by interpersonal awareness, that motivation and awareness may be fundamentally skewed towards the piano accompanist in this context.

### ***Influences on empathy***

Other issues arose through discussion of certain scenarios that highlighted a range of influences on empathy in the solo–accompaniment context: liking, familiarity, friendship and experience. In one scenario, empathy was related to either liking

or disliking a co-performer. Interestingly, this issue was raised by pianists only. P2 and P6 underlined the importance of liking a partner whereas P3 emphasised that it may be necessary to empathise with a co-performer that one dislikes but has to work with, thus retaining a professional stance by overriding personal feelings (see also Gritten, this volume). Another scenario raised the question of whether differences in personal opinion and musical backgrounds could lead to a breakdown of empathy (P1 and S1). To avoid this breakdown, P1 expressed the view that empathy should be more like a 'compromise than a dictatorship' with 'overtones of kindness' and consideration towards a partner. S2 believed that empathy is about having a good working relationship and musical chemistry with a partner, whereas S4 considered that two people should be able to create musical synergy despite differences in character. Negativity through disliking, therefore, was put across as something to be dealt with so as to be avoided.

Issues of liking were often related to the notion of familiarity in developing empathy (see King & Prior, 2013; Waddington, 2015). Specifically, S1 commented that the presence of empathy depends on how one cultivates it. P1 suggested that it is possible that empathy has a timescale, nurturing an empathic relationship with someone over a period of time. Further, this relationship could be long term or short term depending on the nature of the partnership, the empathy present over one single performance being different to the empathy blossoming over a longer collaboration. P2 claimed that 'empathy can grow the more you perform together' (P2), thus allowing a piano accompanist to get to know their soloist's musical and technical trends. P3 emphasised the importance of being able to be completely open with their partner to the extent that it feels like 'going to a psychiatrist'; the reason behind this view was that soloists and accompanists should be able to talk about absolutely anything within the boundaries of the rehearsal room, provided that it would help the music. The importance of trust is implicit in these remarks (see also Gritten, this volume).

Friendship was also associated with familiarity. Participants separated friendship from empathy, one not necessarily being the prerequisite of the other. For example, P5 and S3 reported that developing empathy with an individual that one is regularly working with and building a long-term relationship with them does not necessarily lead to friendship; instead, they implied that it could lead to an empathic understanding shared on professional grounds for the sake of the music. This point resonates with aspects of Laurence's (2009; see also Laurence, this volume) work on musical empathy and, in particular, the relationship between musicking (Small, 1998) and empathising. Laurence finds that empathy does not always transcend shared musical experiences. On the other hand, according to S4, becoming friends with your partner has other advantages to the music as 'the closer you become to your partner the more comfortable you feel during a performance'.

Finally, the pianists talked about demonstrating empathy towards their soloist through offering practical help as if assuming the role of a coach. In such cases, experience in working with soloists as well as with different repertoire was considered to be fundamental. P1 suggested that 'empathy can have a technical

dimension' where, for instance, the pianist could offer technical solutions to issues raised during the rehearsals, such as repeatedly rehearsing a passage where the breathing is difficult for the soloist (P1), or offering advice on alternative fingering to a wind player for a note which is not quite in tune with the piano (P7). Knowledge of repertoire could also assist accompanists in recognising potential danger areas within certain pieces. P5 commented that they would normally like to establish what the soloists' difficulties are so they can adjust their playing to accommodate them, such as by playing a chordal passage in a way that allows the soloist more space to breathe. Moreover, analytical expertise could be applied in helping a soloist to understand why a breathing issue arises and guidance could be offered in assisting the soloist to analyse the situation in order to discover what they need to do to make sure they do not run out of breath.

To this end, all of the pianists were asked whether or not they can detect and consequently attempt to prevent technical, musical or other issues that may arise either in rehearsal or in performance. P1 mentioned that there are certain clues concerning imminent mishaps, such as the soloist altering their articulation in order to compensate for running out of breath, while P5 stated that the pianist instinctively senses the soloist's intentions by being 'attuned' to what is happening. There was a common belief amongst the pianists that the rehearsals are about minimising such risks (P1), by setting the expectations and the boundaries of flexibility (P1), and being prepared about what could happen in the real performance (P2). The actual performance is less predictable as there are many factors which could derail the preparation (P1), therefore the pianists indicated that they would apply techniques which would help in rectifying a possible error, such as skipping a passage or shaping a phrase in a different way (P2). P3 insisted that 'in performance, you simply cover, always cover, you must never ever allow an audience to feel that the other person has gone wrong, ever'. If part of the empathic process involves identifying and responding to the intentions of co-performers (see Waddington, 2015; see also Waddington, this volume), this further implies that for piano accompanists, the empathic process is rather one-sided as levels of identification and response may be greater than for soloists.

### *Alternatives to empathy*

The final part of the interview provided performers with the opportunity to identify other words or terms that might be used to describe the relationship between soloists and accompanists in the duo ensemble. Table 12.1 summarises the data. Some of the participants' responses overlapped with elements of their definitions of empathy that emerged earlier on in their interviews, notably through describing the relationship itself (marriage, collaboration, interaction, friendship, equality), actions towards their co-performers (support, flexibility, sensitivity, responsiveness) and character traits (open, honest, reliable, sympathetic, trusting). It is interesting to note that one pianist used the word 'sympathetic' having spoken previously about empathic aspects of accompanying. These two terms, as discussed elsewhere in this volume, have a shared history (for example, see

*Table 12.1* Alternative words used by participants to describe the relationship between soloists and accompanists.

<i>Pianists' Responses</i>	<i>Common Responses</i>	<i>Soloists' Responses</i>
Dynamism	Collaboration	Bonding
Exploration	Connection	Familiarity
Marriage	Creativity	Friendship
Open	Equality	Honesty
Partner	Flexibility	Other-half
Respect	Interaction	Reliability
Responsiveness	Sensitivity	Support
Sympathetic	Understanding	Trust

Laurence, this volume). Indeed, it was noted by these participants that some of their suggested terms could be used interchangeably to describe similar aspects of relationships among co-performers in ensemble playing, both within and beyond the solo–accompaniment duo context, indicating that empathy is one of many facets of group activity, all of which are potentially interlinked.

## Conclusions

To summarise, the data acquired from current professional practitioners indicate that empathy is likely to be present among soloists and accompanists working together in the Western art duo chamber context. Even though there are differing opinions about the sustainability and even desirability of its presence – one may be ‘in’ or ‘out’ of empathy at any one time during rehearsal and/or performance subject to the nature of the repertoire and individual performers – there was a sense that empathy could and should be cultivated. Nevertheless, at times, empathy could be regarded as a divergent, rather than emergent, phenomenon. According to these performers, empathy is defined by the character traits and working ethos of the performers in a partnership, similar to the ‘shared approach’ identified by the participants in Waddington’s (2015) research. Moreover, these performers considered empathy to be portrayed through the relationship between co-performers and one’s actions towards co-performers, hence it is dependent upon the ‘partner’s involvement’ (Kokotsaki, 2007) and is shaped by ‘interpersonal awareness’ (Myers & White, 2012) as well as ‘intentional awareness’ (Waddington, 2015). The functions of empathy described by these performers further reflect upon the nature of this interpersonal awareness: empathy exists when performers deal with interpersonal dynamics, offer moral and/or musical support and reassurance to one another, and experience a particular bond, or, to use Waddington’s term, a ‘special connection’. Factors influencing the experience of empathy – including degrees of liking and familiarity among players as well as levels of friendship and performance experience – were considered to impact upon the nature of that empathic interpersonal awareness and connection. Kokotsaki’s (2007) pianists referred to familiarity in the context of time

availability in performance preparation and these pianists similarly explained that empathy might grow across short- and long-term collaborations. Likewise, there are allusions to the importance of trust in group music-making, which resonate with ideas put forward by Anthony Gritten (see Gritten, this volume)

Similar perspectives, therefore, were ascertained from these performers compared with those in previous studies exploring the notion of empathy in ensemble playing. What is interesting, however, is that in the context of the solo–accompanist partnership, empathic interpersonal awareness involving support and reassurance among players was only described from the direction of accompanists towards soloists, whilst other scenarios referred to mutual experiences. This suggests that there could be a prevalent expectation for this particular kind of empathy to be more one-sided than evident in other Western art chamber music ensembles: the accompanist, rather than the soloist, is normally expected to cushion the partnership through offering support and reassurance to the soloist, thus acting in the majority of instances as the assumed empathiser (or even therapist). It is perhaps mostly in this regard then – through offering levels of (moral and musical) support and reassurance – that an accompanist may be seen to determine or at least strongly contribute towards the success of a soloist, for this kind of empathic interpersonal awareness may distinguish one accompanist from another and from other co-performers working in chamber groups. If socio-cultural and musical expectations of Western art performers have contributed towards determining the empathic nature of the piano accompanist, one must also consider whether or not the conditions of the partnership are influenced in any way by related circumstantial factors, such as the physical presence or absence of scores during performances. For instance, if the soloist performs from memory, or if the pianist works from a piano part only (without sight of the full score), the empathic relationship between the performers may be affected. Further research is necessary to fully investigate these claims.

The alternative words used to describe the relationship between soloists and accompanists reflected similar attitudes among the performers about the nature of the duo partnership as well as the possibility that empathy could be explained in other terms. The performers' perspectives pointed towards the fact that the general opinion about the piano accompanist is changing among contemporary practitioners: the stereotypical and mythical perception of the pianist as inferior to the soloist was not reinforced. These soloists regarded the accompanist as 'playing with' rather than 'playing for' them, or, in the words of one soloist, as their 'other half'. A sense of equality was expressed via references to collaboration, connection, interaction, flexibility, trust and understanding. Even though, as Katz (2009) and others imply, there is still a need to increase awareness about the contribution of piano accompanists in duo chamber ensemble performance, these performers underlined their significance within this context through discussion of empathy. And, while the data indicated that there may be unevenness in the empathic relationship in terms of the levels of support and reassurance operating between soloist and accompanist, this was not portrayed via allusions to musical or social supremacy within partnerships. Evidently, empathy in this context and

other ensemble music domains needs to be explored further so that the experiential aspects of co-performer relationships continue to be scrutinised and more fully understood.

## Notes

- 1 Other definitions and conceptualisations of empathy are presented throughout this volume: for a preliminary account, see the Introduction (King & Waddington, this volume); for an extended critique, see the Prologue (Laurence, this volume).
- 2 There is sometimes an assumed innateness about empathy as well as in related discussions about theory of mind and the mirror neuron system. According to Cecilia Heyes (2010), it is plausible that such skills are learned rather than innate (as explained according to the ‘associative’ and ‘adaptation’ hypotheses respectively).

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