

COLLABORATIVE AND DISTRIBUTED PROCESSES IN  
CONTEMPORARY MUSIC-MAKING  
OVERVIEW

RICHARD GLOVER AND LAUREN REDHEAD

This volume is the second proceedings of the Royal Musical Association's (RMA) Music and/as Process Study Group. Their first publication, *Music and/as Process* sought to define the field of the study of process in music, representing the range of musicological and research activities that are undertaken by members of the study group.<sup>1</sup> This present collection of essays focuses on an emergent theme in the study group's activities since 2014: processes in collaborative work and distributed creativity. These essays derive from work that has been presented to the study group during this period, in particular at their annual conferences at Canterbury Christ Church University (2014), Goldsmiths University of London (2015) and Bath Spa University (2016), and at the RMA's 52nd annual conference at the Guildhall School of Music and Drama (2016).

It is not surprising that a large number of the contributors to the Music and/as Process study group are active practitioners in the performance and composition of contemporary music. In recent years, musicology has undergone what Georgina Born has described as the "practice turn":<sup>2</sup> an acceptance that the practice of music (and what Christopher Small termed "musicking"<sup>3</sup>) is not only central to its understanding but, in fact, *is* its understanding as a result of its enactment. Similar moves have occurred across other performing arts, as new models for investigation of practice are pioneered. Born identifies three types of collaborations—integrative-synthesis, subordination-service, and agonistic-antagonistic—all of which are explored in this volume.<sup>4</sup> These represent the bringing together of disciplines, joint work between

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<sup>1</sup> Vanessa Hawes and Lauren Redhead., eds., *Music and/as Process* (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars, 2016).

<sup>2</sup> Georgina Born, 'For a Relational Musicology: Music and Interdisciplinary Beyond the Practice Turn: The 2007 Dent Medal Address', *Journal of the Royal Musical Association*, vol. 135, no. 2 (2010), pp205-243.

<sup>3</sup> Christopher Small, *Musicking: The Meanings of Performing and Listening* (Connecticut: Wesleyan University Press, 1998).

<sup>4</sup> Born (2010), p.211.

practitioners who contribute their own specific areas of expertise to a composite creative activity, and work that crosses disciplines in order to make a critical comment in each of them. As documented in this collection, these three types of collaborative work describe an increasing amount of contemporary music practice. There has been a shift from the assumption of a sole-author model of contemporary music, in which the performer takes a subservient role to the wishes of the composer, to one in where active exchange is involved and documented as part of the creation of new work. These types of collaboration also represent a general shift in contemporary musical practice from the model of the composer-as-authority: today's collaborative practices deal with authorship, interpretation, and the figure of the composer, as much as with musical practices and approaches.

In addition to the increasing involvement of practice in research, the understanding and prevalence of practice methodologies in the form of practice research has also increased in musicology. Robin Nelson has argued that the exegesis of practice research must involve documentation, communication and understanding of its processes as the site where the research occurs, describing the “clew” to such research projects as a thread that “weaves through the overall process”.<sup>5</sup> It is therefore not surprising that practitioner-researchers in contemporary music making often have a specific interest in musical processes. The link between practice and process is understood by Nelson as a specific dimension of the development of the research: he writes that “all forms of research and knowing involve a process” and that the processes of practice research are “multi-modal and dynamic”.<sup>6</sup> Research knowledge of and through process, Nelson claims, is “consonant with more modern conceptions of scientific knowing (such as complexity and emergence)”.<sup>7</sup> This book explores such knowledge as expressed as a part of the musical products that bear the traces of the research and collaborative processes that created them. Therefore, process is understood here not only as a part of the creation of musical works and performances but as part of their material.

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<sup>5</sup> Robin Nelson, *Practice as Research in the Arts: Principles, Protocols, Pedagogies, Resistances* (London: Palsgrave MacMillan, 2013), pp8-10.

<sup>6</sup> *ibid.*, p.46.

<sup>7</sup> *ibid.*, pp46-47.

As a result, this volume reflects these concerns through contributions from authors who are all active practitioners in their respective fields of music performance, composition, improvisation, and conducting. The diversity of these contributions shows the variety of processes and practices that are currently being undertaken by proponents of the field of contemporary music. They cover re-production of music in the contemporary orchestral setting, notated music, experimental music approaches, free improvisation, technologically mediated music, and multi-media performance practices. In each case, the potential for collaboration and/or distributed creativity can be identified on every level of the music-making, and aspects of practice from pre-compositional process, to rehearsal and development, to performance are all considered, giving the reader a clear idea of the multiple ways in which collaboration is undertaken in this music.

These essays provide a snapshot of the current collaborative and distributed processes that are employed by today's contemporary music practitioners. While some descriptions of Western Art Music present its creation and performance as a linear progression from a solitary act of composition to individual acts of interpretation in performance, mediated by the score, this is rarely the case in musical practice. The chapters contained in this volume reveal the varied nature of the approaches to creativity in music making, and the ways that these are distributed across its practitioners during each stage of the development of musical works.

This book also contributes to the understanding of the type of musical processes categorized by Michael Nyman as "people processes".<sup>8</sup> He defines these as "processes which allow the performers to move through given or suggested material, each at his own speed."<sup>9</sup> Whilst this definition is most readily applied to certain types of musical works, as Nyman does in his book, it could also be understood as a metaphor for collaborative processes. The different speeds of "working through" material, understood as overlapping approaches to the same work, can be identified in the different individuals as they collaborate and develop the music. Born recognizes this in her description of multiple and concurrent temporalities within a musical

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<sup>8</sup> Michael Nyman, *Experimental Music: Cage and Beyond*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), p.6.

<sup>9</sup> *ibid.*

work.<sup>10</sup> Such “people processes”, then, describe not only the process of musical collaboration but the music’s temporal processes too.

A further topic explored in research into collaborative practice is that of ownership and authorship. Both the traditional presentation of Western Art Music, and the UK practice research context, favour work that has a recognisable sole author to whom the ownership of creative ideas and intellectual property can be ascribed. However, each of the authors who contribute to this collection demonstrate how such a model of authorship denies the reality of the work and practice of contemporary music. The “authorship” of musical performances, in terms of an expanded consideration of the role of the performer, has been of recent interest to musicology, in particular in the area of historical performance practice. For example, Daniel Leech-Wilkinson,<sup>11</sup> John Butt,<sup>12</sup> and Nicholas Cook,<sup>13</sup> have outlined the creative contribution of performers in shaping the music of the past in the present. In contemporary music, the documentation of collaboration has also sought to open up its processes in the creation of music. For example, the work of Michael Hooper<sup>14</sup> and Amanda Bayley<sup>15</sup> has documented and reflected not only on collaborative processes between musicians, but the way that these relationships can be read in the musical works and performances that arise from them. This book furthers this area of enquiry by documenting the way that practitioners themselves conceive of their relationship of co-authorship in their musical works, performances and approaches.

A third topic that links the contributions to this book is that of shared or distributed creativity. Distributed creativity has been specifically investigated in music with respect to networked systems, and this area of enquiry is represented here

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<sup>10</sup> Born (2010), pp238-239.

<sup>11</sup> Daniel Leech-Wilkinson, *The Modern Invention of Medieval Music: Scholarship, Ideology, Performance* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002).

<sup>12</sup> John Butt, *Playing With History: The Historical Approach to Music Performance* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002).

<sup>13</sup> Nicholas Cook, *Beyond the Score: Music as Performance* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013).

<sup>14</sup> Michael Hooper, ‘The Start of Performance, or, Does Collaboration Matter?’, *Tempo*, vol. 66, no. 261 (July 2012), pp26-36 and Michael Hooper, ‘Confusion in the Service of Discovery’, *Tempo*, vol. 69, no. 272 (April, 2015), pp12-23.

<sup>15</sup> Amanda Bayley, *Evolution and collaboration: the composition, rehearsal and performance of Finnissy’s Second String Quartet* (n.p.: PALATINE, 2011).

through an investigation into networked scores for improvising performers. However, it is now recognized that technologically mediated environments are not the only ones in which distributed creativity is modelled. James Saunders's recent work series *group behaviours* (2009 - ) and *things to do* (2012 - ) demonstrate how such models are relevant to performers working on musical problems as a group.<sup>16</sup> Here, the mediated environment of the contemporary orchestra is considered, as well as situations where mediation is present across time and geography, and where a model of distributed creativity represents the creation of music, knowledge, and an understanding of collaboration that does not require physical and temporary co-working to enable an equal exchange.

Research in this area has frequently sought to model creative processes in order to understand the expression and management of their distribution. Franziska Schroeder, as a part of the Sonic Art Research Centre at Queen's University, Belfast, has conceived of distributed creativity as networked listening within musical processes.<sup>17</sup> Her understanding places listening at the heart of a multi-modal musical discourse that is mediated by technology, social situations, and other musicians. Schroeder's conception of distributed creativity extends its role in music scholarship from a consideration of the role of technology in bringing musicians together in space and across geographical locations, to one that considers how their working together is different than their working apart. Such a conception speaks to many of the situations described in this book: particularly, but not exclusively, those which involve group music-making. The idea that working together creates a new situation rather than a meeting of individuals is at the heart of many of the collaborative situations described here.

A final strand involves the investigation of embodied knowledge through collaborative practice research processes. Musical research in practice Embodied knowledge has frequently been examined by research in music as performative. The theatre practitioner Ben Spatz has investigated the transmission of knowledge through

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<sup>16</sup> James Saunders, 'compositions', [james-saunders.com](http://www.james-saunders.com/composing-2/) (2017) <<http://www.james-saunders.com/composing-2/>> [accessed 10 March 2017].

<sup>17</sup> Franziska Schroeder, 'Network(ed) Listening—Towards a De-centering of Beings', *Contemporary Music Review*, vol. 22, no. 2-3, Resistant Materials in Musical Creativity (May, 2013) pp215-229.

the transmission of technique.<sup>18</sup> This transference allows for the comprehension of practice research knowledge in such cases where the research output is ephemeral (for example, a performance) or only a transcription or representation that serves as a mnemonic (for example, a score). The work in this volume shows how transference of technique from composer to performer, performer to composer, performer to performer, composer to composer, or director/facilitator to participants also allows for the transmission of embodied knowledge. This makes a specific contribution to the documentation of the embodied knowledge of practice research in contemporary music and will serve as particular examples of its expression.

The study of musical collaboration has concerned the ways that musicians work together, the strategies that they employ to realize and co-create music, and the ways that their creative practices influence each other. Amanda Bayley and Michael Clarke's work on the collaboration between the Arditti String Quartet and the composer Michael Finnissy on his second and third string quartets represents an innovation in this area: this project documented every stage of the collaborative process, and the use of the non-textual presentation of the research to explore multiple threads across the work's processes and practices.<sup>19</sup> This project revealed the multiple, layered and differentiated ways of working within a single project. Bayley's and Clarke's reflection on their methodology includes a representation of knowledge flows between composition, rehearsal, performance, and reflection: these are not linear but understood as multiple, interlocking stages.<sup>20</sup> They note that composition, performance and analysis can be brought together to inform a single, rich, musicological investigation rather than be considered as separate modes of enquiry.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Ben Spatz, *What a Body Can Do: Technique as Knowledge, Practice as Research* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2015).

<sup>19</sup> Amanda Bayley and Michael Clarke, *Evolution and collaboration: the composition, rehearsal and performance of Finnissy's Second String Quartet*. (PALATINE, 2011). [Software DVD].

<sup>20</sup> Amanda Bayley and Michael Clarke, 'Analytical Representations of Creative Processes in Michael Finnissy's Second String Quartet', *Journal of Interdisciplinary Music Studies*, vol. 3, nos. 1-2 (2009), pp139-157; p.140 (figure 1).

<sup>21</sup> *ibid.*, p.142.

Luke Windsor and Sam Hayden suggest three types of working relationships in their study of twentieth century music: directive, interactive and collaborative.<sup>22</sup> These three modes of working represent the modes of authorship in each scenario, moving from composer-led decision making to shared decision making. Alan Taylor has recently sought to extend this model, suggesting four modes of working: hierarchical, consultative, co-operative and collaborative.<sup>23</sup> Taylor's categories are based on the degree to which decision making *and* labour is shared in the production of a work.

What neither Hayden and Windsor, or Taylor, explore are the embodied experiences that are shared in collaborative processes. Recent performer-led investigations into these experiences, for example by Heather Roche<sup>24</sup> and Zubin Kanga,<sup>25</sup> have highlighted the subtle ways in which composer-performer interactions influence musical and performative outcomes beyond the score, to include the development of technique and technology. These studies demonstrate how collaboration might be understood beyond co-authorship as a unique and distributed approach to creative innovation. Such studies also allow for the consideration of the human in otherwise post-human environments. Rob Casey's recent consideration of Cage and Tudor as collaborators emphasizes how composer-performer interaction can shape not only musical outcomes, but aesthetics as well. He writes that, "[i]n contradistinction to the view propagated by critics of the Darmstadt school, that musical process is inherently inhuman, it is the very fact of Tudor's human-ness that permits Cage's music to fulfil the requirements of process".<sup>26</sup> Casey's descriptions of Tudor's "methodical, focused and creative responses"<sup>27</sup> to Cage's musical challenges

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<sup>22</sup> Sam Hayden and Luke Windsor, 'Collaboration and the Composer: Case Studies from the End of the 20th Century', *Tempo*, vol. 61, no. 240 (2007), pp28-39; p33.

<sup>23</sup> Alan Taylor, "'Collaboration" in Contemporary Music: A Theoretical View', *Contemporary Music Review*, vol. 35, no. 6 (2016), pp562-578; p.570 (table 1).

<sup>24</sup> Heather Roche, 'Dialogue and Collaboration in the Creation of New Works for Clarinet' (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Huddersfield, 2012).

<sup>25</sup> Zubin Kanga, 'Inside the Collaborative Process: Realising New Works for Solo Piano' (unpublished doctoral thesis, Royal Academy of Music, 2014).

<sup>26</sup> Rob Casey, 'Cage and Tudor as Process', *Contemporary Music Review*, vol. 35, no. 6 (2016), pp670-685; p.684.

<sup>27</sup> *ibid.*, p.679.

might well be recognized as an instance of collaborative practice research today, and this historical example highlights the way that the collaborative research presented in this volume contributes to a tradition of practitioner-led musical enquiry in this area.

Finally, existing research has considered interdisciplinarity as a collaborative approach within and between disciplines. The recent AHRC network led by Tom Armstrong describes such interdisciplinarity as, “an approach to creative practice and inquiry in which disciplinary boundaries become permeable and associated working habits, training, individual knowledge, skills and assumptions are challenged”.<sup>28</sup> This description also fits many of the collaborative circumstances presented in this book: in each case the practitioners involved do not simply bring their existing knowledge into creative situations or impart their existing expertise, but they develop new techniques and approaches within their existing range of skills as a result of their creative enquiries with others.

Three broad themes can be identified in this work, all of which involve a degree of personal reflection, auto-ethnography or action research. These themes can broadly be seen to represent broad areas of collaboration in contemporary music practice as a whole, and can also be understood as examples of Born’s three categories of collaboration.

The first is represented by composers addressing aspects of collaboration in different areas of musical projects. Louis d’Heudieres, Richard Glover, and Lauren Redhead all address the field of experimental music, broadly defined. These contributions show how composers may have the ideas and music-making of others at the forefront of their minds when composing: the collaborative aspects of their work are an essential part of music that is never realized before performance, but that also invites the perspectives and approaches of other artists and art forms. In these chapters, the composer as the facilitator of a musical experience, as opposed to the author of a concept or musical text, is foregrounded, and so the collaborative experience of the composer is that of working with the performer to shape and realize the music. In the cases of Richard Glover and Louis d’Heudieres, the notation itself is

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<sup>28</sup> Department of Music and Media, University of Surrey, *Music Composition as Interdisciplinary Practice* (Surrey, 2017), <<http://www.surrey.ac.uk/departments/music-media/research-department/music-composition-interdisciplinary-practice>> [accessed 30 March 2017].

conceived as an active collaborator in the musical process: this is similar to the way that a technological node can be considered as an actor in Bruno Latour's Actor Network Theory.<sup>29</sup> Lauren Redhead's chapter further considers how different stages of a project might involve different collaborative relationships that nevertheless contribute to shared aesthetics that emerge from the project.

The second topic of the book features collective and distributed music-making in groups. Ponchione-Bailey's contribution focuses on the orchestra: perhaps the largest music-making context within Western Art Music. Stefano Kalonaris and Rogério Costa, et al, take in improvisatory practices in medium to large groups, and the range of possible strategies to manage these in the short and long term. This section covers the range of practices from performance of fully notated music, to working with notational performance stimuli, to fully devised performances that serve as examples of group authorship that is archived in the bodies of the performers. It deals with the issues of the negotiation, management, and sharing of information in groups, and the ways that collaborative creativity is employed towards the realisation of specific shared goals.

In the penultimate section of the book, composers and performers reflect on their own collaborations and the various ways that they have worked together to develop and realize music. In each case, the performer is seen not only as a source of expertise about their instrument but as an individual whose performance practices might directly influence the musical outcome of the collaboration. In the cases of Panos Ghikas, and Adam de la Cour and Zubin Kanga, technological issues also mediate the collaborative process, requiring specific technological knowledge beyond the compositional and instrumental that are worked through by both parties in the creative process. In the case of Catherine Laws, the performer contributes more than her expertise, developing and creating a part of the work itself. Thus, in each case, composite collaborative situations are conceived as unique performance situations.

The final chapter of the book contains a score for musical performance. Maya Verlaak's work invites the reader to become a collaborator in the realisation of the piece, thus inviting them into the direct experience of the collaboration beyond its

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<sup>29</sup> Bruno Latour, *Reassembling the Social: An Introduction to Actor-Network Theory* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005).

description. This further demonstrates how a practice-research methodology might incorporate reflection on an artist's process as a further performative element of the work. Each of these authors presents a unique perspective, and privileges the opinions and experiences of the artists who create and realize music in the present day. Thus, whilst many theorisations of collaboration might already be found, this volume aims to present it as a contemporary reality in music-making today.