

Rehearsal as Creative Process

Introduction

The subject of this research is Michael Finnissy's Third String Quartet written specifically for the Kreutzer Quartet in 2009. For those of you not familiar with the Kreutzers, this particular formation of the group has been established since 2005 and they are experienced in playing Finnissy's music. The Third Quartet lasts 36 minutes and its most unusual feature is over three minutes of recorded birdsong that is integrated into the playing towards the end of the piece, and continues after the musicians have stopped playing. Our presentation at the previous Performance Studies Network conference analysed the discourse between the players specifically during the second rehearsal of the piece. The aim of *this* paper is to contribute to an understanding of rehearsal as a process from the perspectives of the performers and composer by analysing the discourse between them and changes to their musical interpretation across four rehearsal sessions and in a reflective group interview. Combining the disciplines of musicology and anthropology brings a greater understanding to the rehearsal life of professional musicians than is possible from pursuing our separate research endeavours.

Context

Within the area of classical music, rehearsal analysis has tended to focus on student groups although more recent research by Jane Ginsborg and Elaine King considers the rehearsal process of professionals and students in singer-piano duos and analyses verbal discourse to determine styles of interaction and salient musical dimensions, as well as identifying a range of rehearsal strategies. In the context of string quartets, David Waterman offers a useful insider's perspective into the rehearsal process from his experience as a cellist in many different chamber music groups. Whether the focus is on professionals or students, behaviour is social and thereby learned. Our analysis takes the empirical material as its starting point which means it is grounded in the actions and communication that take place between the players and composer. A central part of anthropological fieldwork is listening to discourses and in this case the played music (Forsey 2010, Spradley 1980). Analytical inspiration is derived from social anthropology as an empirical and interpretative science (in the work of Clifford Geertz (1973) and Johannes Fabian (2011), and from phenomenological anthropology (Jackson 2003).

During the last four decades, the idea of what constitutes anthropological fieldwork has changed dramatically. From a tradition where anthropologists went 'out there' to encounter another culture and stayed for (ideally) several years, more fieldwork is now being conducted 'at home' turning the interests of anthropologists towards other kinds of cultures. This has made different types of fieldwork possible, as well as changing relationships with informants through shorter fieldwork periods. The duration of 'proper field work' has been debated by Marcus and Okely (2007). Another factor influencing fieldwork is the use of audio and video recording of empirical material. It is now easy to collect a vast amount of empirical material during a short time and to use more time away from the field analysing it. Recording data in this way makes collaboration across disciplines easier and is something that has grown over the last two decades.

Regardless of the field the aim of fieldwork is still the same: to understand another (and different) culture; in Bronislaw Malinowski's words, 'to grasp the native's point of view' (1922). The native's point of view can be understood a) from the action taken by the informants; b) from the words exchanged and explanations between informants (and observed/heard by the researcher); and c) from answers given to the anthropologist's questions. The process of inscription, transcription and description (Sanjek, 1990) remains unchanged.

Here, the field is the rehearsal which is very complex in relation to the flow of discussions as well as decisions. Its complexity is created through interaction in social relations, as well as through relations of power. At the same time a rehearsal – any rehearsal, will reflect a more general musical culture, open to challenges and changes, that is, a dynamic culture. Participants communicate their thoughts to each other through a 'vocabulary' and a 'grammar' within the models of expression and interpretation they share and which is defined through the collective set of 'ground rules' (Schutz, 1951: 77). Language is central because cultural meaning is expressed in language, According to Mary Douglas 'speech forms [are] transmitters of culture' (Douglas, 1970: 21).

The rehearsal process

The rehearsal period spanned 23 days. The timeframe is presented in slide 2 with the duration of each rehearsal underneath. Rehearsing a piece is a process that evolves from individual practice at home, to performance of the rehearsed piece before an audience.

Erving Goffman (1971) coins the phrases front-stage and back-stage in his reflections on the presentation of self in everyday life. His point is that if we are to understand the decisions taken in everyday life this means gaining access to – and understanding what goes on behind the facade – the back-stage. This is where all the important decisions are made – in this study while rehearsing the piece. What the audience is presented with is the rehearsed play with all the problems during rehearsal ironed out. Thus, the front-stage is not a mirror of the back-stage but rather the intended right way. Following a piece of music through rehearsal and at performance gives insight into the relationship between front- and back-stage and the way that back-stage shapes front-stage.

Individual practice, group rehearsal and performance

Ethnographic analysis reveals how rehearsing towards a performance is one of several processes with distinct parts. For example, the role of individual preparation outside the rehearsal room emerges as a significant contribution to the rehearsal process, identifying the quality the individual sets up in relation to his/her own work. For this group of musicians, the preparation is not generally evident or discussed during rehearsal but emerges from conversation during the group interview where the players themselves distinguish between individual practice, group rehearsal and performance.

Practising as individuals the players are concerned with technique rather than speed. According to them individual practice is very different from group rehearsal. The 1st violinist explains that his practice 'involves basically no sound whatsoever, nothing being put together'(Group Interview (GI)). The 2nd violinist says that he 'never practices in tempo, always slower'. A statement, to which the 1st violinist comments, 'I know that if it works, if it works slowly I don't need to test it fast' (GI). As explained by the 2nd violinist: 'What you can't test in the practice room is the extremes because you never reach the extremes [...] until you have it in the concert hall [...] you can't practice it, because you never know, you think that you will reach the extremes' (GI).

According to these players, rehearsing as a quartet is something special: four players will rehearse together with much more conversation than when there are only two; a quintet will have a director and will split into subgroups (GI). The musical instruments take on conversational roles. The 1st violinist explains: 'we talk to each other musically with the instruments in our hand. It doesn't feel that different when we have a conversation without instruments, so actually we have never talked this much in a rehearsal'. To which the 2nd violinist adds: 'some things arise from just playing without the conversation' (GI).

Differences between rehearsals

Common to each rehearsal are three distinct activities: talking - which relates to the discourses of small talk (in other words, talk unrelated to the piece), playing, and discussion - which is defined in terms of what they have just played (see slide 3). These activities are apportioned differently in each rehearsal (see slide 4). The first rehearsal is the longest of all with a duration of 2 hours and 57 minutes, excluding a 16-minute break which was not recorded. 23% of the time is spent talking. 47% of the time is spent playing the piece and 30% discussing the playing. This indicates that the players have a need to discuss the play, and tune it in, in relation to each other. Considering this is the first encounter the musicians have with this particular piece it is perhaps not surprising that the first rehearsal has the most sequences of playing and discussion which are all short. In this rehearsal there are 5 slots of talk, and 43 sequences of playing followed by discussion. Compared with subsequent rehearsals, here there are more short instances of play with interruptions, rather than longer uninterrupted ones. There are many stops in the play; they play small bits and have much to discuss between them, although discussions are kept short.

The presence of the composer changes the emphasis of the second rehearsal but this only makes a small difference to the proportions of time devoted to talk, playing and discussion of the play. The flow of the second rehearsal resembles the first with many interruptions and discussion.

The third rehearsal takes place 19 days after the second and the playing time significantly increases to 72%, with 15% of the time spent discussing the play and 13% on ordinary talk, which is related to musical work and culture. The piece is played twice all the way through. The first time they stop and discuss 19 times, the second they only stop once at Fig. 22. By the fourth rehearsal, which is in the afternoon of the concert, discussion of playing is reduced to just 2%, with 81% playing and 17% talking. There are only three instances of discussion each of which is extremely short, lasting less than a minute. This rehearsal is focused on playing and the birdsong. Analysing the material makes it possible to see that each rehearsal exhibits a specific aim, expressed through practice.

Rehearsal 1 – tuning in

The musicians themselves distinguish between first and later rehearsals. The cellist explains that

[...] Of course, as we work together longer, partly if you are having a first rehearsal and you are around, we'll end up talking more than we would if we were working by ourselves. And these days, I mean, there is an awful lot of talking while you manage when we start and stop, but I think we talk much less than we used to (GI).

Understanding the notated music is important for the players at the first rehearsal. Not having the composer present they debate his intentions within the piece regarding character, tempo, dynamics, etc. The relationship between the score and individual parts is an important topic, central to their work together, even though they all play from scores (rather than parts) – so they already know what each other is doing. The first things they establish are the coordination and cues, the most obvious starting point for an ensemble interpreting any music composed in a linear fashion where meeting points are scarce. It falls to the 1st violinist to organize all their scores and he says:

So, all I've done with this [the composer's score] is I have organised, basically (actually because I photocopied my part)[...] I've got, basically, the cue system worked out for the whole thing, which is not actually as complex as it looks. Although one thing that we do need to think about is where...I need to ask Michael [Finnissy] on Friday, is for the sections where [...] with the birdsong [...] whether he'd like us to have a stopwatch in front of us, so we can do the timings; because he's got [...] these sections which have to be 3 minutes, 27 seconds long (Rehearsal 1 (R1)).

It is the first violinist who decides how the rehearsal is to proceed:

1st violinist: So my suggestion is we go through in, kind of, doing each block as we normally would do [...] first of all from the beginning to figure 6, that's all in a slow four. Okay so we'll just go up to figure 6.

Cellist: Corporately? because we are going to have to move corporately, aren't we?

1st violinist: [...] it's going to be easier if it comes from one person actually [...] what I'll really show is basically barlines (R1).

For quartets that Waterman has played in, he identifies that, generally, 'Whether the group is thinking in large or small beats is one vital corollary to the speed'. This rehearsal of Finnissy's piece exemplifies Waterman's observation that 'sometimes it can be helpful to think in beats each lasting a bar or even two bars' (2003: 118). At the outset, the first violinist indicates more than just the barlines; he uses his violin to conduct the individual beats. As we would expect this is especially pronounced in the first rehearsal, less so by the fourth:

Later, after playing the section into Fig. 6, the players discuss their coordination. The first violinist has already explained the one-in-a-bar feel but the players get out of synchrony:

Cellist: We're a bar adrift.

1st violinist: Yeah. What people occasionally allow two beats to group into one bar.

Viola player: Where did we just get up to?

2nd violinist: We've just gone past the [inaudible]...

1st violinist: We've just done the repeat...yes, exactly. I would, for now, give away the entire shop for the beat. So basically all we are doing at the moment is trying to get to the bar.

2nd violinist: Yeah, yeah, yeah.

1st violinist: Then gradually we'll find a way of giving the moves into the bar. Because my feeling is that when he's actually asked...the title of it being 'one in a bar', calling it *Eintaktig*, that's it. Fast waltz (R1).

Central to the first rehearsal is the concept of tuning in. This applies to the literal tuning of the instruments as well as, metaphorically, for the players. It relates to how the seating and the music stands are placed as well as how the score – or individual parts – are to be played. For example, the cellist asks: 'Actually, can I mark up a couple of things that I hadn't realised I was going to need in?' (R1).

By putting marks into the score, the score is 'tuned in', to paraphrase Alfred Schutz (1951). But the pencils have a rubber and markings may be rubbed out and new ones made. They are guidelines that may be changed. Tuning in is about creating a shared understanding of the score, but it is also about how the players like the piece:

Cellist: ... I love the later bits, where you've got all of these repeats and thing, and units, and it's really light [...] All the double stoppings make sense, though"

1st violinist: Mine are incredible, lovely, beautiful (R1).

Schutz's concept of tuning in is one he considers to be central to all social relations in everyday life. According to him tuning in signifies a mutual social situation in which, due to this tuning in, the participants will experience the 'I' and the 'you' as a living 'we' in an experienced present (1951, 79). A 'we' that is the basis for all communication. Using this concept the first rehearsal is used to tune in in relation to the score, the group, and the composer *in absentia*.

Rehearsal 2 – working with the composer

In the second rehearsal the composer focuses the conversation on the music by asking:

Composer: So, what does this sound like?

Viola player: Great!

Cellist: It sounds fantastic! We've been really enjoying this.

2nd violinist: Sounds like your music (R2).

From this the conversation narrows down to specifics in the score. The composer initiates the rehearsal saying:

Composer: Yes, well, wherever you'd like to go from

Viola player: So, start on the *forte*, yeah?

Composer: Yes (R2).

Again the first violinist decides on how to proceed: 'We'll do it section by section, see how we're getting on' (R2). Playing is interspersed with conversations where the players and the composer discuss the music. Sometimes all the musicians participate, other times the discussion is only between some of the players. Most discussions are initiated by the 1st violinist. They talk about the appearance of the score and how it is possible to make it easier to work with. The composer makes it clear that for him composing is about finding inspiration from other composers' works:

Composer: Fluffy. Mozart, that is.
 Cellist: Oh, it is Mozart, is it? We were saying it's a little bit your Haydn...material
 Composer: Yeah, kind of, yeah. They're Mozart Divertimenti.
 Cellist: Okay
 Viola player: Ah.
 Cellist: So *actual* Mozart Divertimento material in there?
 Composer: Yes.
 Cellist: I didn't spot any of those. Or any of the Bruckner (R2).

The composer challenges the players to see whether they have spotted this. Referencing of other composers' works thus becomes a form of guesswork, as when the composer says: 'You didn't spot the Bruckner? Because Bruckner [...] it's loaded with Bruckner. Mind you, I did recompose it' (R2).

During the second rehearsal, the following discussion shows how ideas about tempo arise from discussions about articulation, style and character:

1st violinist: Let's stop there to see how we are
 Composer: Yep, good, fine. Ermm....I...the idea was that it's like really glutinous *legato*...
 1st violinist: Right, okay.
 Composer:...at the beginning. And, ermm...
 viola player: Around [fig.] 3, actually, it should have been really, glutinous there
 Composer: Yeah, like, very sticky there. And then at [fig.] 3, the semiquavers, as you were doing them, possibly even...maybe even more exaggerated, a kind of 'ping' on the...
 1st violinist: Even more slightly, almost 'Baroque-y' ...'ding...'
 Composer: Yeah, kind of, really lift it.
 1st violinist: Yeah.
 Composer: And try not to speed up
 1st violinist: Oh! Try *not* to speed up?
 Composer: Try not to speed up
 1st violinist: It's just, we...we were wondering whether it should flow. The tendency is for us to flow forwards a bit with...
 Composer: Um. I wouldn't...I'd prefer you didn't
 Cellist: And...we...got slightly louder at [fig.] 6, and you want us to repress that, do you?
 Composer: Um...in [fig.] 6?
 1st violinist: Into [fig.] 6.
 Composer: Into [fig.] 6....no...not particularly, no, I thought that worked really well.
 Cellist: Okay
 Composer: I was going to put it in as a kind of crescendo from [fig.] 5.
 Cellist: Okay, that's what we thought. It felt like that (R2).

Tempo is not specifically discussed in either of the first two rehearsals until this point, a fact that corresponds with Waterman's insights into string quartet rehearsal: that 'Tempo [...] is not a starting point. It is a culmination, or function, of [...] details of phrase-length, articulation, rubato, colour, texture, rhythm, and, above all, the overall mood' (Waterman, 2003: 119).

The next time the Kreutzers play the section from Fig. 3 the following dialogue between the first violinist and the composer reveals that Finnissy actually changes his mind about not speeding up:

1st violinist: How did that one seem?
 Composer: That was lovely, except I think I like it with the *poco a poco accelerando*
 1st violinist: Okay, so starting where?
 Composer: About [fig.] 5...And then drop at [fig.] 6.
 1st violinist: Okay. [R2]

Finnissy's change of heart reveals how the collaboration between these musicians works as a two-way process. In this second rehearsal the composer is central to the decisions taken in relation to the piece but is nevertheless open to the Quartet's comments and experiences. If the first rehearsal was the Quartet's tuning in on the piece and each other, the second rehearsal is all about the composer tuning in with the musicians, a process aided by the fact that they have previously worked together.

Rehearsal 3 – getting there (preferably) together

At the third rehearsal the concern is getting it right or getting there, preferably together. This involves playing and discussing the individual parts and how they interrelate, for example between the cellist and viola player:

Cellist: "So, seven before [fig] 8, if we, when we're back there for the second time, if we confirm.

Viola player: Is that definitely in the same place?

Cellist: Yeah. These ones are. Well you've got one seven before [fig] 8.

Viola player: The repeat going back for, is that the same with you?

Cellist: Yeah. This is the weird one because it's the only time I can think where Michael writes out an exact repeat.

Viola player: Yeah. Okay.

1st violinist: It must be an accident!" (R3).

Entries into the parts are checked, compared and resolved. Without the composer present, the players return to some of the concerns from the first rehearsal, for example playing together as a team and not getting out of synch with each other. This is achieved through marking the score, agreeing on cues, etc. The conversation is directed towards a communal project. But the players also discuss the quality of the music, and the different instruments' sound vis-a-vis each other and their playing together.

Compared with the previous rehearsals, the third focuses more on birdsong which has been 'created', i.e. recorded, by the composer and is carefully structured within the piece. It functions as a fifth instrument that intersects with the rest of the quartet. Slide 5 shows how the score is presented to the players where the birdsong first enters. They then each have their individual parts to follow from Fig. 22 (see slide 6 where the individual parts are aligned). First violin and viola parts are marked *Meno mosso: Andante* and second violin and cello are marked *Poco meno, allegretto sostenuto*. Each part lasts for the specified duration of 3 minutes 27 seconds.

In rehearsal the quality of the birdsong is discussed in relation to dynamic (or volume), its duration, and placement: the way it functions with, and relates to, the playing. Two further aspects concern the technical (who and how is it to be controlled); and the way it comes across to the audience in the upcoming performance.

Cellist: That's what we have got to choreograph, isn't it? [...]

1st violin: no, the birdsong just goes on throughout.

Cellist: No, I know, but [...] if ever there were a danger that everyone would sit there thinking [...] "what [...]"

1st violinist: It has got to be choreographed how that comes off at the end.

Cellist: I think we need to still look like we might play.

1st violin: I think we actually should[...] you need to actually move your instruments up

Cellist: My solo

Viola player: or you could hold it up for three minutes at the end

1st violinist: Or you could mime. You could make announcements...

2nd violinist: that's right you could go [...] (R3).

This is the only place in the rehearsals that they mention the audience. The problem is that the birdsong continues after the instruments have stopped, and they want to communicate to the

audience, when the music (with the birdsong) ends. They want to handle their instruments in a way that will make the audience know when the piece is finished.

In this rehearsal, it is about getting there together – and this includes the audience.

Rehearsal 4 – the birdsong

In the fourth rehearsal, the second violinist comments not on the sound the birds make but their 'quality' thus making them almost 'human', when he says about the birds within the piece: 'They're nice birds' (R4). At the same time, he evaluates the relation between the quartet and the birdsong saying: 'Yeah, it just completely hangs together, and the birdsong is absolutely essential, because there's such an incredible question at the end now'. The rest of the quartet agree and make their evaluation of the birdsong:

Cellist: the birdsong totally transforms it [...]

Viola player: It's incredibly rich

1st violin: you find yourself in the position where you are playing the violin with the birdsong, then thinking, well, I can't do it that way.

Composer: But it is also the thing, that the quartet becomes like a birdsong, because it starts off on a completely different structure, and along comes the birdsong [...] it's not [...] then at the end (R4).

Bruno Latour (2005) and others work with understanding organisational practice which incorporates materiality. They think about documents or physical surroundings (Jensen et al. 2007: 9). In music, incorporation of materiality could cover the score, the instruments and the birdsong. They may all function as 'the glue that binds together localities, people, systems and interests across conventional divides' (2007:11). Latour uses the concept 'actant' instead of agent to refer to a person or an artefact. To Latour the artefact has a great an agency as the person. The birdsong has as much agency in the final performance as the other quartet members and the composer, something that is expressed when they evaluate the piece. It is clear that this rehearsal has its own goal and functions as a passage to the concert performance.

Conclusion

To conclude, the process of the Kreutzer Quartet rehearsing Finnissy's Third String Quartet demonstrates distinct phases that can best be represented as a series of building blocks which summarize the points made above (see slide 7). To Finnissy, the composition is all about context, flow and process, an ideology that would seem equally suited to the rehearsal process. He explains his method of getting an idea and transcribing it, where the transcription in itself is a process. According to him, transcription is a very powerful word, which includes transition. 'It is always in motion, the player transcribes the score, the audience transcribes the performance, and the composer is transcribing the idea... and everybody shares' [the music] (GI). For the players, however, arriving at that shared moment involves the processes we've identified and many more. As well as studying what the notation represents, analysing rehearsal as a creative process has also revealed the significance of layers of interpretative detail surrounding what is *not* in the notation. Approaches to timing and synchronisation, for example, are described and experienced in similar ways by Waterman and by the Kreutzer Quartet. Interactional synchrony has occupied cognitive psychologists for the last fifty years but it is only in the last twenty years or so that this has been applied to a range of music genres. A useful summary and application of this research has been provided by Keith Sawyer in his 2005 article on 'Music and Conversation' to help explain musical communication and creativity. From his observations of jazz performers who are not reliant on notation he concludes that 'to understand musical communication, we need a theory of communication as a fundamentally social and collaborative activity' (Sawyer 2007: 57). We would argue that such a theory of communication is also a fundamental social and collaborative activity that is needed for notated genres.

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