

*Eight ways to play or sing a piece:*  
A workshop on the paths to creative  
performances among conservatoire  
music students

21 September 2011

# Outline

- 9.30: Introduction
- 9.35: Project reports
  - Questionnaire
  - ‘Inside the teaching studio’ workshop
  - ‘Inside the teaching studio’ lesson observations
- 10.50: Break
- 11.10-12.30: Plans for 2011/12



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# The project

## *Creative learning and 'original' musical performance*

- 2010-13
- Collaboration with Royal College of Music and Guildhall School of Music & Drama
- Largely (but not exclusively) Western classical music
- Investigating issues such as:
  - Notions of creativity and originality
  - Learning and teaching pathways towards creative and original performance

Project report 1

# QUESTIONNAIRE

# Questionnaire

- 415 students (UG and PG) at Guildhall School (67% kept in analysis)
- To investigate concepts of creativity/originality, possible components, and aspects of learning
- Quantitative questions based on 31 items: Creech et al. (2008) and new ones derived from creativity literature
- Looked at importance, learnability, situations for learning and perceived effectiveness of one-to-one lessons

# Questionnaire | results (1)

## Principal components analysis of 'importance' ratings

### 1. Creativity and individuality

- Ability to let go/be in the moment ('in the zone', 'flow')
- A personal artistic 'voice'
- Spontaneity in performance
- Ability to take expressive risks
- Deep emotional engagement with music
- Stage presence
- Ability to communicate musically with an audience

### 2. Craftsmanship and dedication

- Ability to learn new musical material/concepts quickly and easily
- Technical facility
- Motivation and drive to excel
- Level of perseverance
- Quality and control of tone
- Stage presence

### 3. Knowledge

- Skills in analysing music
- General musical knowledge (history, theory etc.)
- Quality of practice/effective practice strategies
- Sense of stylistic appropriateness

### 4. Coping with challenges

- Ability to manage stage fright
- Ability to resolve musical problems
- Ability to deal with mistakes while performing (made by oneself or others)
- Ability to adapt to performance situations (e.g. audiences, venues)
- Quality of practice/effective practice strategies

# Questionnaire | results (2)

- Many students think items in component 1 cannot be learned/developed (c. 32% to 59% depending on item)
- Students' reported contexts for learning component 1 items favour performance situations over practice and one-to-one lessons
- Exception: 'individual artistic voice' – practice and one-to-one lessons were more frequently indicated





# INSIDE THE TEACHING STUDIO



# Rationale

## Aims

- To begin to map beliefs and practices
- To trial different methods

## Questions

- How do staff and students construct notions of creativity and originality?
- What practices and experiences are identified by practitioners as 'creative' or important for developing creativity/originality in performance?

## Methods

- Introspection and observation

## Considerations

- Trust and ownership
- Participant-led
- Benefits of participation

# Structure

- Two main strands:
  - Focus groups
  - Observation of one-to-one lessons + video recall
- ‘Inside the teaching studio: A project to explore what makes great performances and how students learn to produce them’
- Promotion via Heads of Faculty and ‘ambassadors’

Project report 2

# INSIDE THE TEACHING STUDIO: FOCUS GROUP

# Focus Groups: Method

- ‘Workshop’ for teaching staff at each institution on creativity and creative development
- Three discussion points:
  - The skills you think are necessary in order for students to be creative or original as performers
  - Where creativity and originality stand in the hierarchy of performance goals
  - What you consider your role as a teacher to be in helping students achieve a creative or original ‘voice’ as a performer

# Focus Groups: Indicative Results (1)

- Analysis: Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (Smith, 2008)
- Constructs of creativity
  - Ambivalence around ‘originality’

# Focus Groups: Indicative Results (1)

## Originality

negative

‘change for change’s sake’  
‘bizarre’  
‘weird’  
‘barbaric’  
beyond ‘musical decency’

positive

with ideas of depth,  
authenticity and truth



# Focus Groups: Indicative Results (1)

- Analysis: Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (Smith, 2008)
- Constructs of creativity
  - Ambivalence around ‘originality’
  - Personality and the performer’s role
  - Freedom and constraint
- Experience of creativity in act of performance
  - Being ‘in the moment’
  - Notions of shared experience and meaning
- Constructs of development process: ‘toolbox’ and ‘flower bud’

# Focus Groups: Indicative Results (2)

## Toolbox

- Gathering, building, increasing possibilities
- Outside → in
- Teacher provides; student acquires

‘they need to have the technical toolkit’

‘we end up with this huge toolbox’

‘assembling the building blocks, putting down the foundations’

‘build up a repertoire of expressive devices ... possible ways of responding to something on the page or possible ways of retaining through an oral tradition this music and then using it in their performance. And in that sense it becomes a bit like jazz... Jazz musicians have a repertoire of solos that they started to build up and then they start to draw from that and then they ... fly with it, play with it and ... in a sense that can be a way that an individual voice is put together’

# Focus Groups: Indicative Results (3)

## Flower bud

- Emergence of innate qualities, self-discovery
- Inside → out
- Teacher encourages/removes barriers; student introspects

‘something special that is innate but needs nurturing, fertilising, drawing out’

‘bringing out the individual, the personal voice, which is partly quite introspective, it’s about the individual actually finding out who and what they are’

‘the truer you can become to who your voice is, the more chance you have of being original’



Project report 3

# INSIDE THE TEACHING STUDIO: LESSON OBSERVATIONS

# Observations and video-recall: Method (1)

- Two-stage recruitment (staff then students)
- Six teacher–student pairs
  - Violin: year 1 UG
  - Flute: year 2 UG
  - Piano: year 2 UG
  - Jazz Bass: year 3 UG
  - Piano: PG
  - Harpsichord: PG
- Two to five consecutive lessons
- Lessons filmed without researcher present
- Participants had power of veto

# Observations and video recall: Method (2)

- Video recall (Rowe, 2009)
- Participants chose excerpts to show and discuss in recall session
- *When you watch a video, please try to identify moments in the lesson, when:*

(Student version)

- you felt creative in your playing
- you understood something about the piece that you hadn't understood before
- something new emerged in your approach to the piece
- you learned something that will help you to be more creative or original in performance

In addition, for teachers:

- you felt especially creative in your teaching

# Observations and video recall: Results (1)

## Main types of excerpts

- Technical progress
  - Removing barriers to freedom
  - Key to understanding or interpretation of a piece
- Musical understanding
  - e.g. Harmony/structure → phrasing
- Toolbox (outside-in)
- Incremental gains



# Observations and video recall: Results (2)

## Key insights

- BUT student not passive
- Episodes only start of a longer process
- Toolbox → internalisation → emergence of individuality ('flower bud')

# Observations and video recall: Results (3)

## Other insights

- Importance of gesture
- Students' readiness
- Possible links between creativity and self-reflective abilities of the student
- Method allows important access to internal processes
- Participants found it enjoyable and useful

# Conclusions

- Outcomes
  - Insights into different components of creativity and creative processes with subtlety and detail
- Limitations
  - Self-selectivity of participants; issue of time
- Benefits
  - Useful and engaging for participants
  - Trust and access to protected worlds
  - Archiving and knowledge sharing

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