KING'S College LONDON

RNCM

First encounters of the musical kind: Strategies for learning music

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Outline of talk

- Background
- Research questions
- Method (questionnaire survey)
- Results
- Conclusions

Background

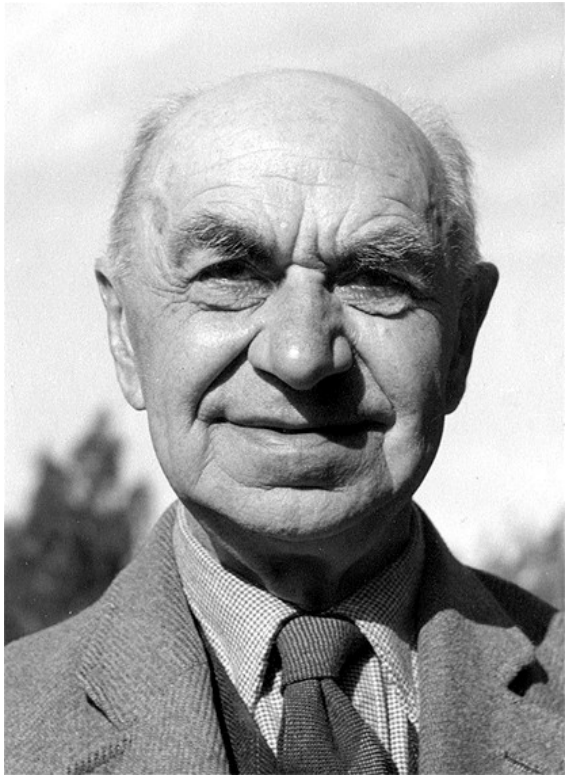
- Schemata as a means of viewing listeners' understandings of a piece of music
- Understanding performance preparation in detail
- Variation in performers' approaches to learning
- Learning styles
- Learning styles in music performance

Musicians are listeners

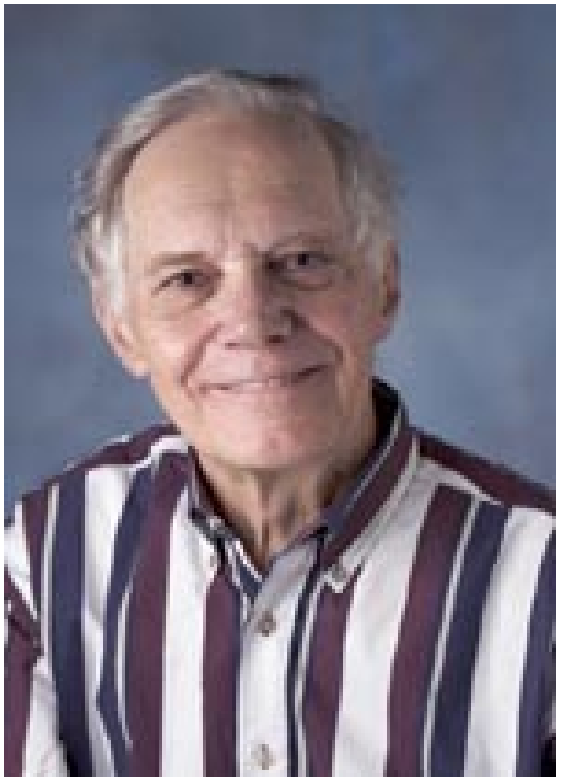
- Complex, multi-faceted engagement with music – understanding for

1. Recognition on subsequent hearing
2. Linking with already-known pieces (similar or same genre, melody, emotion, instrument, performer etc.

Schema theory



Frederick C. Bartlett
1886-1969



Ulric Neisser
b. 1928

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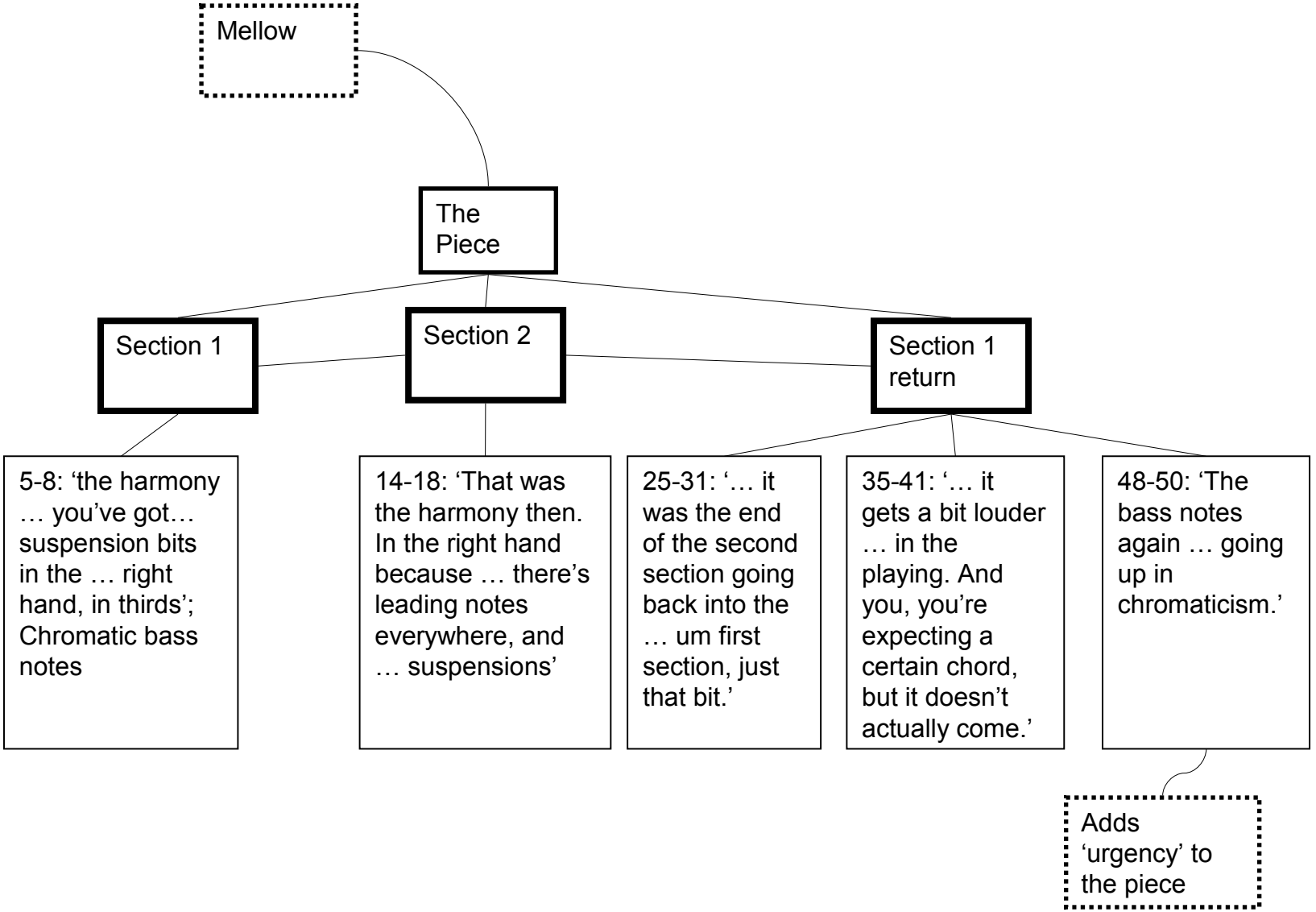
Definition of schema

- *A mental framework for representing knowledge, encompassing an array of interrelated concepts in a meaningful organisation* (Sternberg, 1996, p. 199)

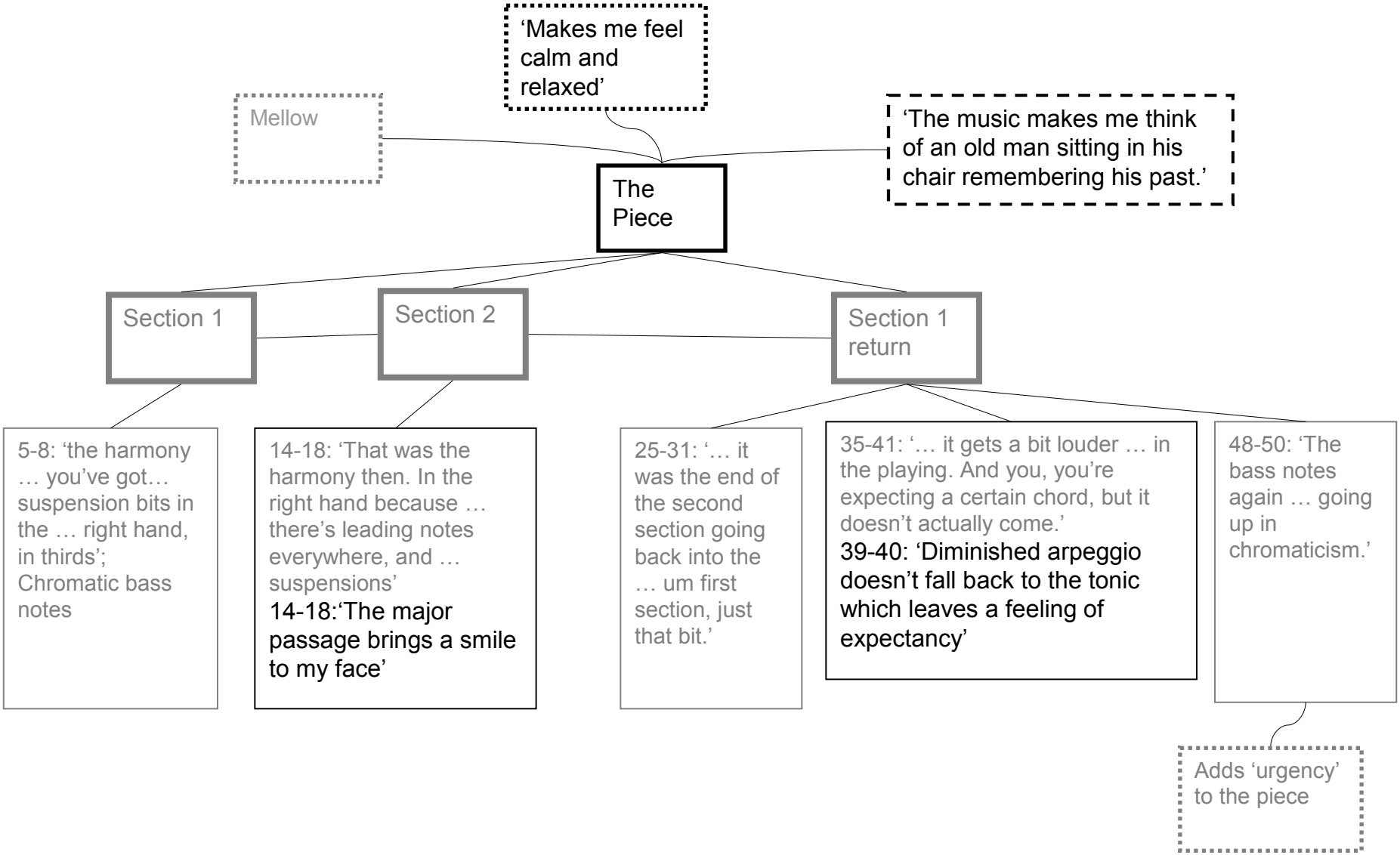
Schema theory and music

- Liking (Gaver & Mandler, 1987)
- Genre (Pascall, 1989)
- Cue abstraction (Deliège, 1996; Deliège & El Ahmadi, 1990; Deliège & Mélèn, 1997; Deliège et al., 1996)
- Expectations (Ockelford, 2006; Huron, 2007)
- Structure (Zbikowski, 2002)
- Familiarity (Prior, forthcoming)

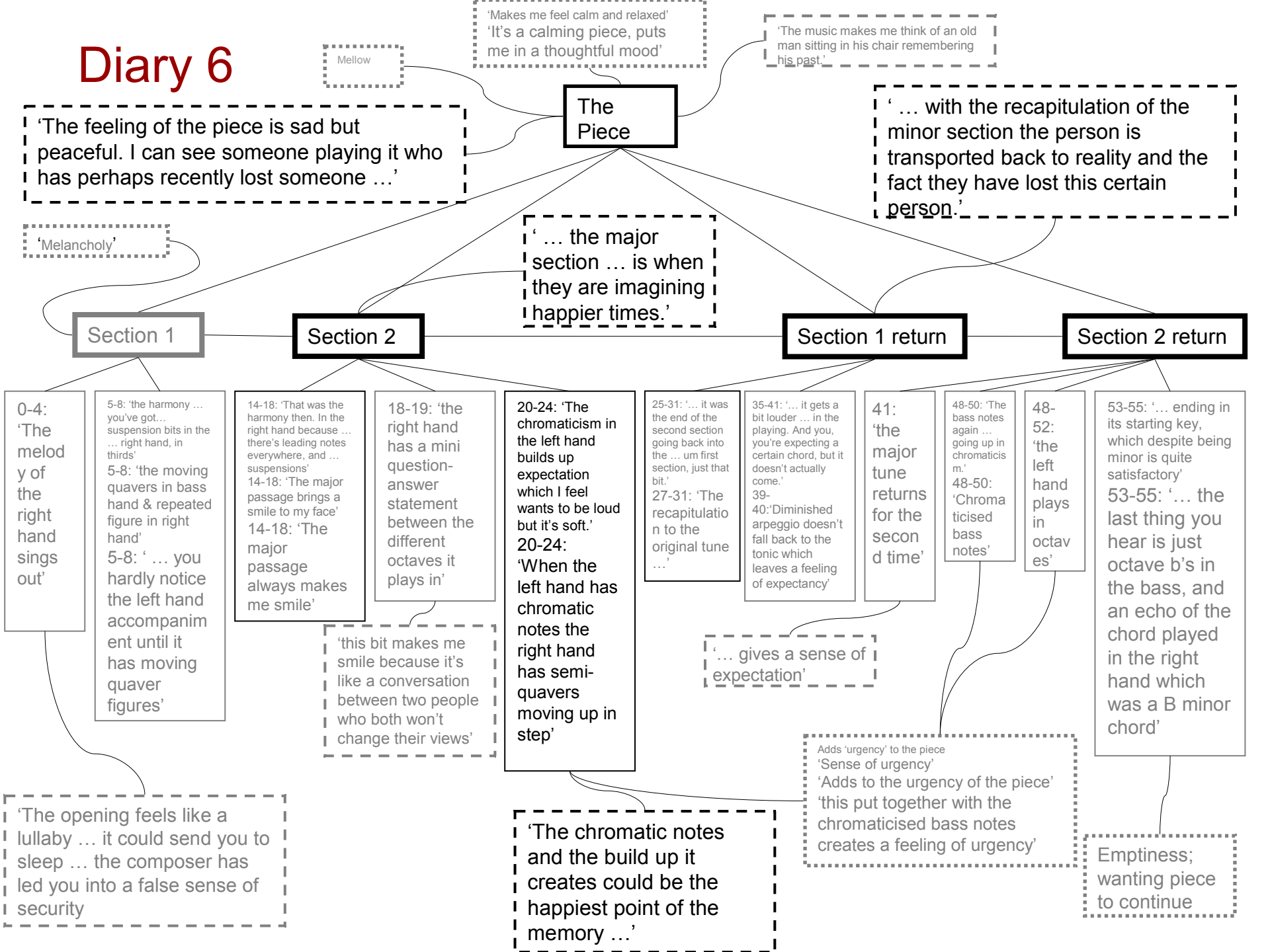
Interview 1: Clementi



Diary 1


'Makes me feel calm and relaxed'
Mellow
'The music makes me think of an old man sitting in his chair remembering his past.'
The Piece
Section 1
Section 2
Section 1 return
5-8: 'the harmony … you've got… suspension bits in the … right hand, in thirds'; Chromatic bass notes
14-18: 'That was the harmony then. In the right hand because … there's leading notes everywhere, and … suspensions'
14-18:'The major passage brings a smile to my face'
25-31: '… it was the end of the second section going back into the … um first section, just that bit.'
35-41: '… it gets a bit louder … in the playing. And you, you're expecting a certain chord, but it doesn't actually come.'
39-40: 'Diminished arpeggio doesn't fall back to the tonic which leaves a feeling of expectancy'
48-50: 'The bass notes again … going up in chromaticism.'
Adds 'urgency' to the piece

Diary 6


'Makes me feel calm and relaxed'
'It's a calming piece, puts me in a thoughtful mood'
'The music makes me think of an old man sitting in his chair remembering his past.'
Mellow
The Piece
'The feeling of the piece is sad but peaceful. I can see someone playing it who has perhaps recently lost someone …'
' … with the recapitulation of the minor section the person is transported back to reality and the fact they have lost this certain person.'
'Melancholy'
' … the major section … is when they are imagining happier times.'
Section 1
Section 2
Section 1 return
Section 2 return
0-4: 'The melody of the right hand sings out'
5-8: 'the harmony … you've got… suspension bits in the … right hand, in thirds'
5-8: 'the moving quavers in bass hand & repeated figure in right hand'
5-8: ' … you hardly notice the left hand accompaniment until it has moving quaver figures'
14-18: 'That was the harmony then. In the right hand because … there's leading notes everywhere, and … suspensions'
14-18: 'The major passage brings a smile to my face'
14-18: 'The major passage always makes me smile'
18-19: 'the right hand has a mini question-answer statement between the different octaves it plays in'
'this bit makes me smile because it's like a conversation between two people who both won't change their views'
20-24: 'The chromaticism in the left hand builds up expectation which I feel wants to be loud but it's soft.'
20-24: 'When the left hand has chromatic notes the right hand has semi-quavers moving up in step'
25-31: '… it was the end of the second section going back into the … um first section, just that bit.'
27-31: 'The recapitulation to the original tune …'
35-41: '… it gets a bit louder … in the playing. And you, you're expecting a certain chord, but it doesn't actually come.'
39-40:'Diminished arpeggio doesn't fall back to the tonic which leaves a feeling of expectancy'
41: 'the major tune returns for the second time'
'… gives a sense of expectation'
48-50: 'The bass notes again … going up in chromaticism.'
48-50: 'Chromaticised bass notes'
48-52: 'the left hand plays in octaves'
53-55: '… ending in its starting key, which despite being minor is quite satisfactory'
53-55: '… the last thing you hear is just octave b's in the bass, and an echo of the chord played in the right hand which was a B minor chord'
'The opening feels like a lullaby … it could send you to sleep … the composer has led you into a false sense of security
'The chromatic notes and the build up it creates could be the happiest point of the memory …'
Adds 'urgency' to the piece
'Sense of urgency'
'Adds to the urgency of the piece'
'this put together with the chromaticised bass notes creates a feeling of urgency'
Emptiness; wanting piece to continue

Interview 3

'The feeling of the piece is sad but peaceful. I can see someone playing it who has perhaps recently lost someone …'

'makes me feel reflective when I listen to it.'
'The piece has a calming influence about it …'

'… it's a plot. It's like an old man sitting in his chair … smoking a pipe. … He just sits there, and listens, possibly remembers things …'

'The quaver accompaniment in the left hand is mainly continuous throughout the whole piece which gives a lot of the piece a feeling of rocking.'

The Piece

'… the major section … is when they are imagining happier times.'

'… with the recapitulation of the minor section the person is transported back to reality and the fact they have lost this certain person.'

Section 1

0-8: 'At the beginning, the left hand chords seem emptier than when the right hand plays them'

0-4: 'opening lilting melody'

5-8: '…at certain bits [the harmony] sort of builds up and then it'll … rest a while on the same chord, or just do a different inversion of it, I suppose. And then it changes. Gets a bit juicier.'
5-8: Left hand takes over
5-8: 'interruption of the bass hand figure…'
5-8: '… the harmony, where you've got some really quite crunchy chords, just in the right hand itself, really.'

8-12: Crescendo

12: 'The excitement gets built up with a triplet figure in the right hand …'

14-18: '… introduction into the major'
14-18: First section ends in major key
14-18: '… a major sounding passage, which despite being in the major key still sounds sad.'

18-19: 'quaver movement in both hands'

'this bit makes me smile because it's like a conversation between two people who both won't change their views'

'The opening of the piece is soothing and calming.'

'The opening feels like a lullaby … it could send you to sleep … the composer has led you into a false sense of security'
'The opening of the piece (and the general melody) feels like it's longing for something …'

'… when the major passage of the piece is introduced, it has found what it is looking for …'

Section 2

20-24: 'When the left hand has chromatic notes the right hand has semi-quavers moving up in step'
20-24: Crescendo and bass notes
20-24: 'The chromatic notes in the bass just lead you to the next part of the tune, you anticipate the chord the chromatic movement creates.'
20-24: 'The chromatic notes in the left hand added with the semi-quaver figure in the right …'
20-24: '… which leads to the section with the chromatic bass notes & the semiquavers in the right hand.'
20-24: 'It's just the whole build up of it, it just intensifies it … a lot more.'

'The chromatic notes and the build up it creates could be the happiest point of the memory …'

'… the chromatic notes in the bass hand show the excitement of having found what it is looking for.'

'The return of the minor key, could be that it's lost again …'

Section 1 return

32-38: Right hand 'playing in question and answer with itself'; 'it has three repeated notes at the top, and then it goes back down to the bottom.'

39-40: 'Diminished chord …. And it just doesn't resolve it.'
39-40: 'The diminished 7th chords are not resolved …'
39-40: Unresolved Diminished 7th chord

'acts like a question & remains unanswered'

45: '… the bass is playing in octaves, just repeating the same notes.'

'… but with the interruption of the bass hand back into the major section it seems that it has been found again …'

Section 2 return

44-47: '… it's the repeated phrase.'

'… gives a sense of expectation'

48-50: 'Chromatic notes in the bass'
48-50: 'the inner part, um, where it goes up, where you've got the semiquaver or quaver figures in the middle, and I just noticed it, sort of like, for the first time.'

'…unsatisfying'

'This put together with the chromaticised bass notes creates a feeling of urgency'
'Adds to the … urgency'
'… make this part … more dramatic & urgent'

53-55: '… the last thing you hear is just octave b's in the bass, and an echo of the chord played in the right hand which was a B minor chord'
53-55: '… ends on a minor chord … tonic key'.

Emptiness; wanting piece to continue
'… it ends and it just feels empty.'
'…until the piece finally settles in the minor, so we come to the conclusion that all is lost.'

Understanding performance preparation in detail

- Longitudinal case study approach
- Miklaszewski (1989): pianist
- Lehmann & Ericsson (1998): pianist
- Nielsen (1999): organist
- Chaffin, Imreh & Crawford (2002): pianist
- Chaffin, Lisboa, Logan & Begosh (2010): cellist
- Ginsborg & Chaffin (2011, forthcoming): singer / pianist-conductor
- Cristina Capparelli Gerling – yesterday: pianist

Stage	Explore	Smooth	Listen	Re-work	Prepare performance
Sessions	1-10	11-19	20-32	33-35	36-75
Expressive/Sections	B	BE	BE	B	B
Subsections	BE	BE	B		BE
Switches	E		E		
Interpretive PC				**BER**	**BER**
Intonation PC				ER	ER
Basic LH PC		ER	ER	E	**BER**
Basic RH PC			**BER**		-E
Dynamics	**BER**				-R
Sound quality	R	R		R	**BER**
Intonation	R	-E	ER		**BER**
Phrasing		BR			B
Hand position	R	R	R		R
Bowing/change string		E	ER		E
Technical difficulties			ER		**BER**

Variation in performers' approaches to learning

- Hallam (1995ab): professional instrumentalists
  - Strategies influenced by ability to create internal aural representation
- Ginsborg (2002) – experienced professional singers vs. amateur singers vs. student singers
  - Low-level methods: speaking words, humming/playing melody, singing words together
  - Higher-level strategies: goal setting and evaluation

Learning styles

- More than 70 models: “theoretically incoherent and conceptually confused” (Coffield, 2004)
- Visual, aural, kinaesthetic (VAK)
  - Learning Styles Inventory (Kolb)
  - Learning Styles Questionnaire (Honey & Mumford)
- Holistic or serial
- Surface, deep or strategic

Learning styles for music

- “Musical intelligence” (Gardner, 1983)
- Effective strategies for learning to play an instrument – music-specific (McPherson & Davidson, 2006)
- Learning styles for playing by ear (Green, 2010)
- Mental strategies (McPherson & Davidson, 2006)
  - Sight-reading: identifying important features
  - Memorising: linking sound with fingering
  - Practice: “business before pleasure”
- Memorising (Ginsborg, 2004; Williamon, 2002): multiple strategies including VAK *and* analytic

Development of schemata for music

- Potential links between initial encounters and first approaches to a new piece of music, and starting practice…
- …influence musical features and therefore the development of performance cues

Research question

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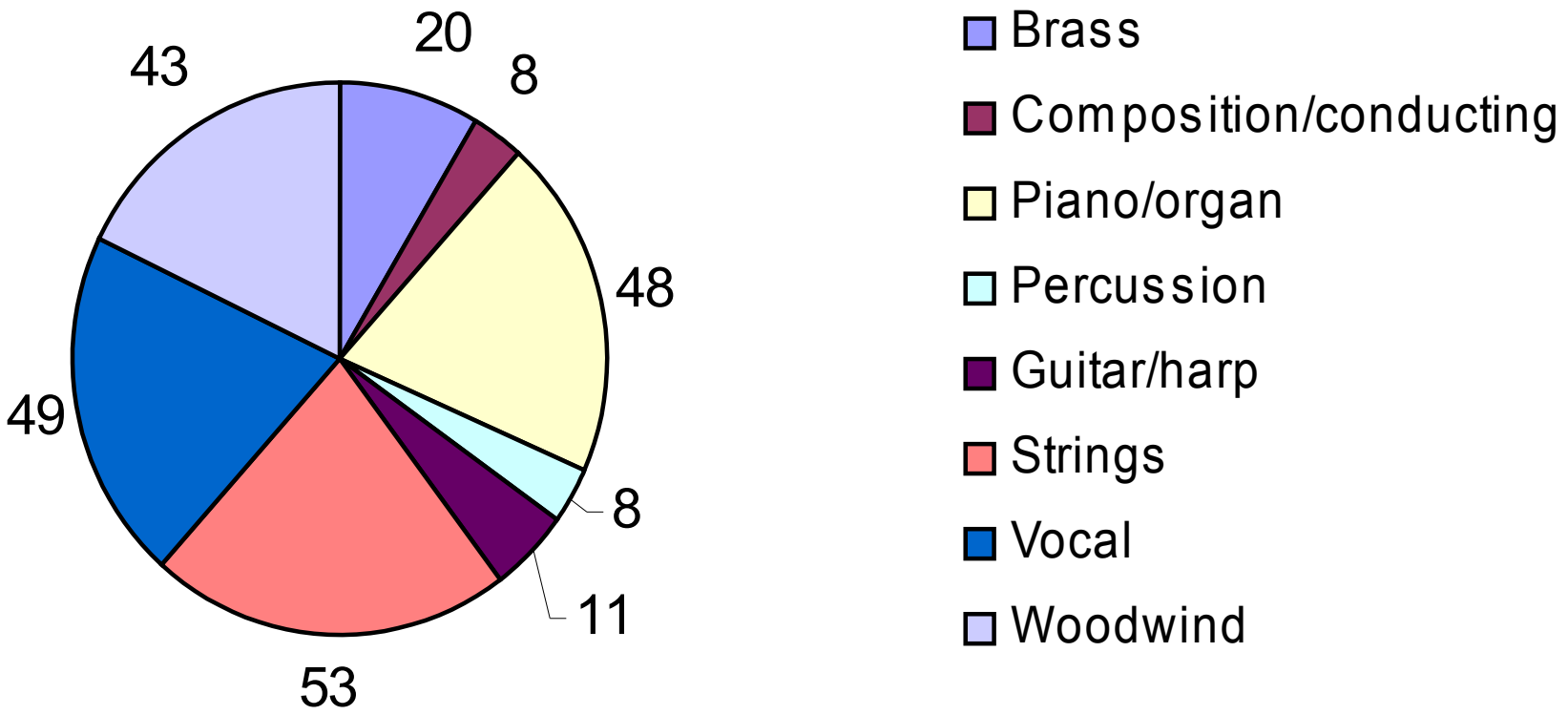
- Identify nature of first encounters and approaches ⇨ learning styles
- Questionnaire survey: how did you start work on the piece you began to learn most recently?
- Look at score?
- Listen to recording (Spotify, iPod, CD)?
- Do both sequentially or simultaneously?

Method: design and respondents

- Online questionnaire using Surveymonkey™
- 240 respondents (91M 149F) recruited via authors' institutions and those of helpful colleagues
- Four conservatoires (RWCMD, RNCM, RSAMD, Trinity Laban)
- Four university music departments (KCL, Hull, RHUL, York)
- 20 instruments, or sang, conducted or composed
- 73% of non-first study keyboard players also played a keyboard instrument

(Preliminary) breakdown by instrument group

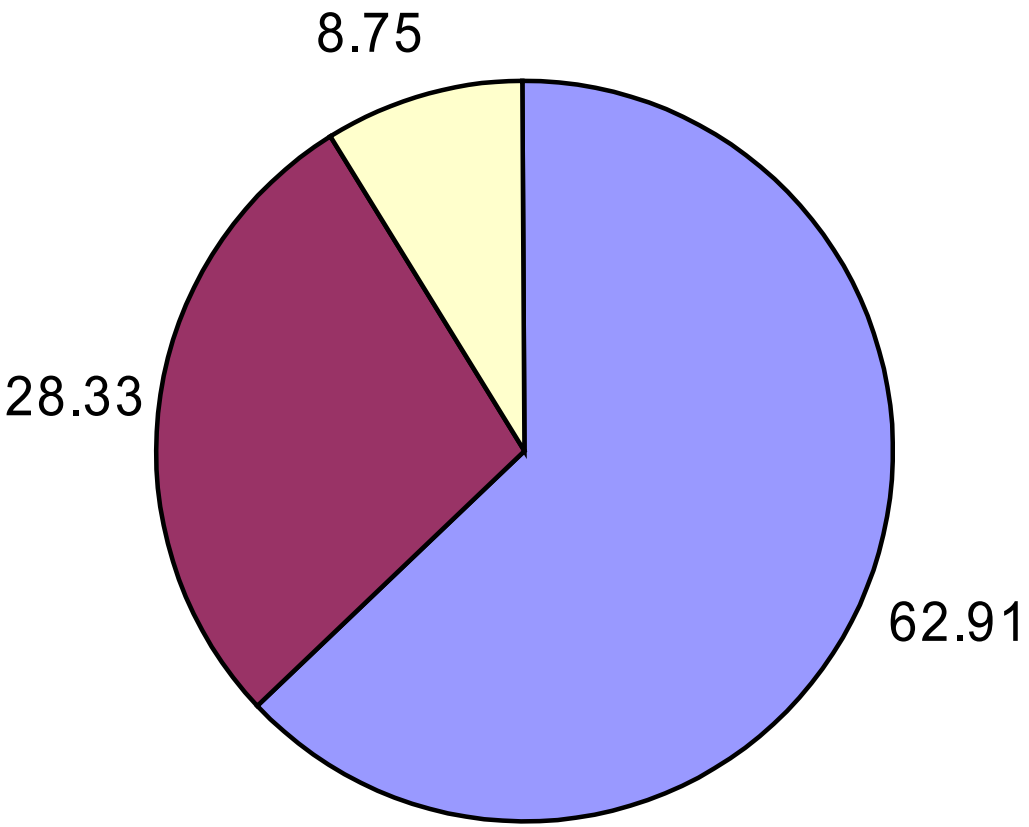


Method: materials

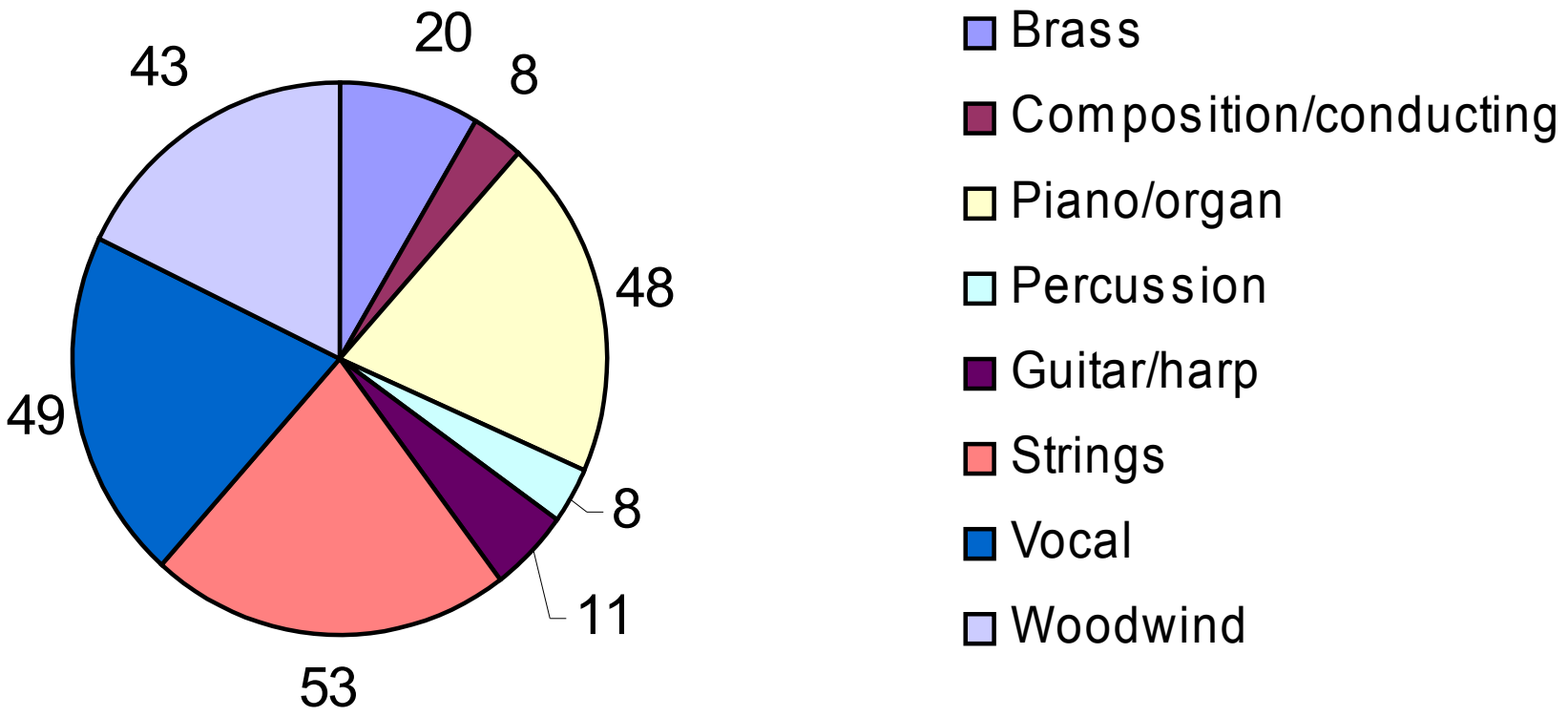
- 14 items including demographic information (sex, main instrument/voice, additional keyboard instrument, year of study)
- Name and composer of last piece practised
- When and how first encountered and first learned
- Estimate of time spent during first week of practice

1. “Working on the piece”
2. Listening actively and passively
3. Playing alone, reading from the score
4. Rehearsing with others

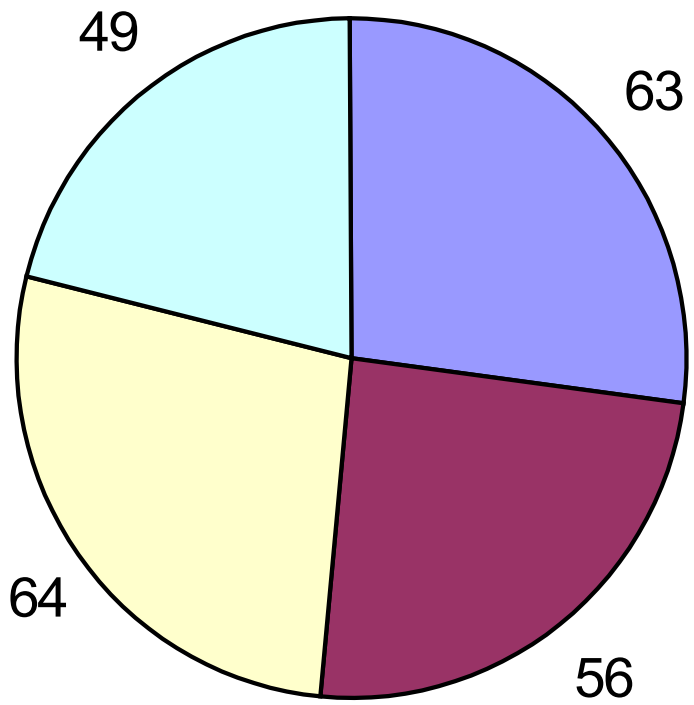
Results: genre of pieces practised



(Preliminary) breakdown by instrument group (numbers of Rs)



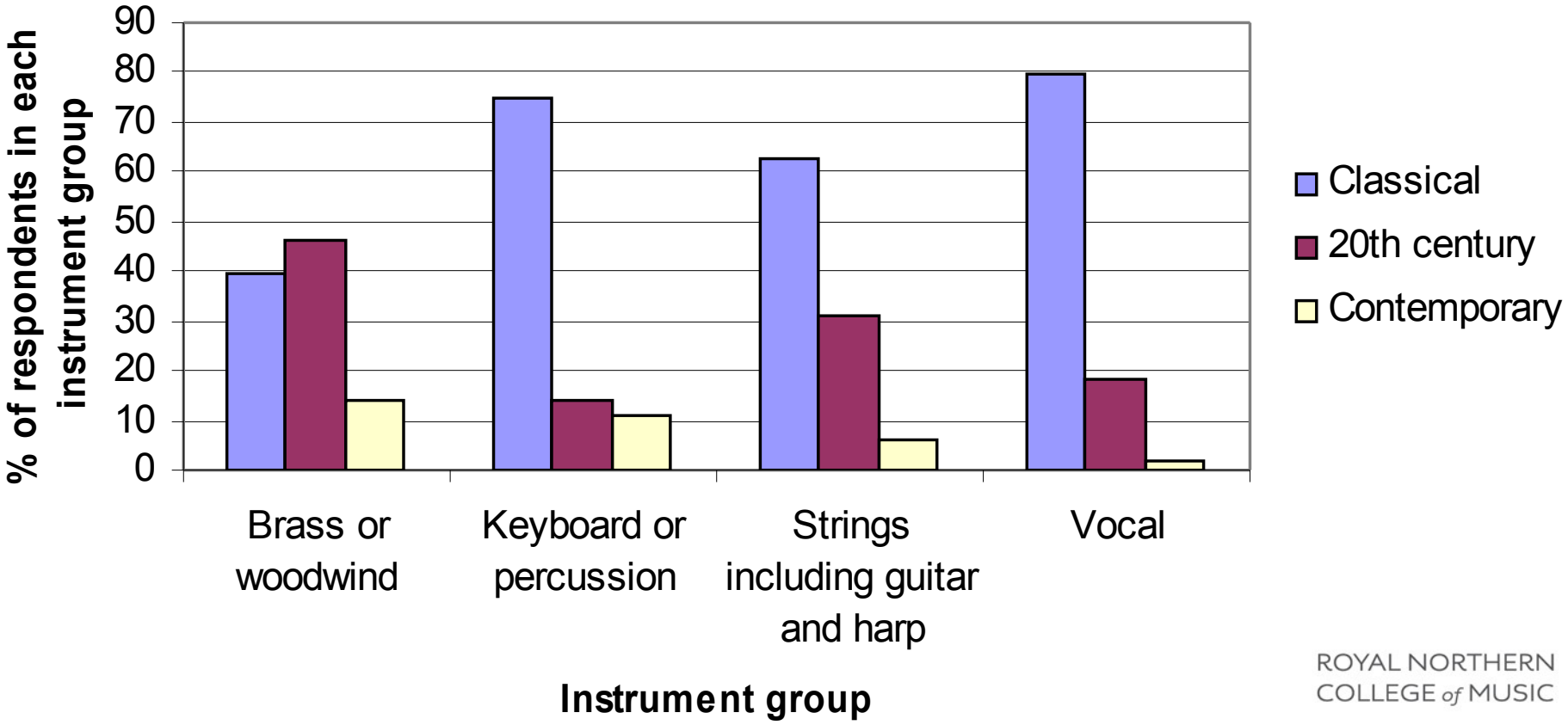
Instrument groups for analyses (numbers of Rs)



- Brass and woodwind
- Keyboard/percussion
- Strings including guitar and harp
- Voice

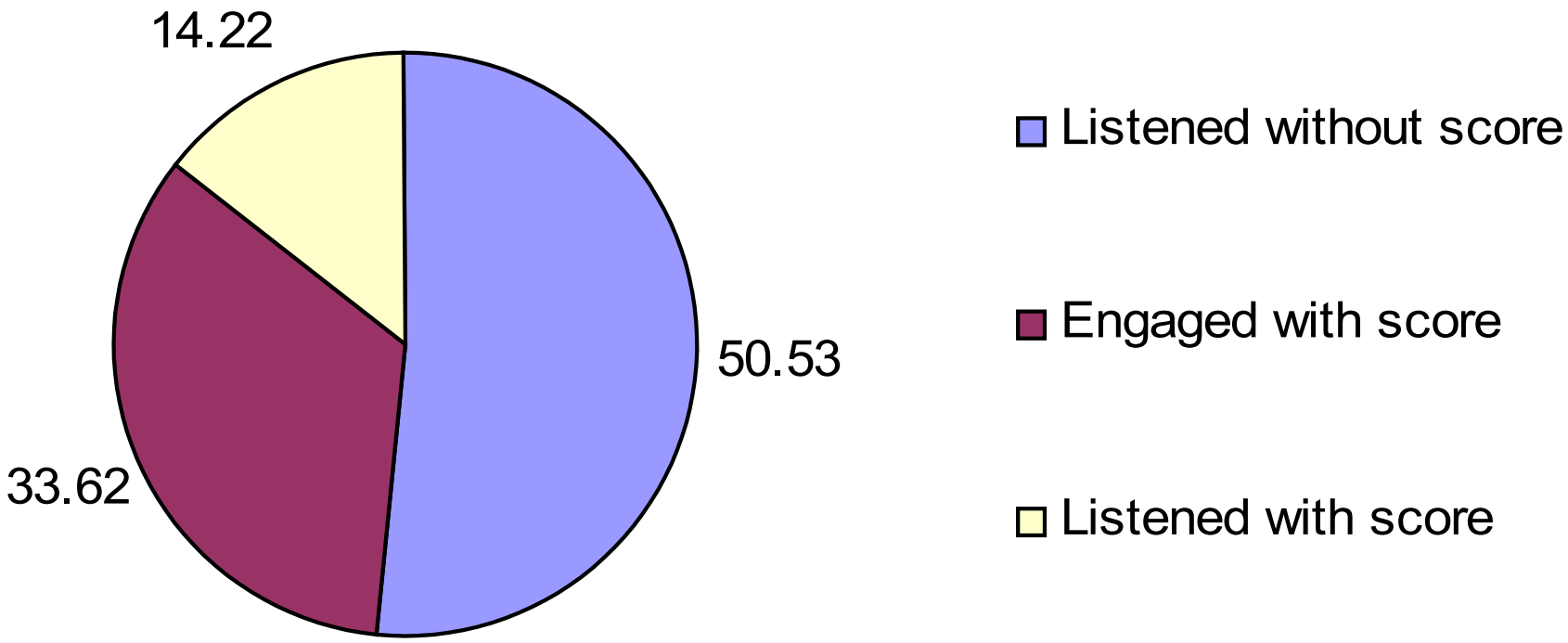
Genre by instrument group (%)

X^2 (6, N = 232) = 27.1, p < .0001



First encounters (%)

No significant association between instrument group and first encounter

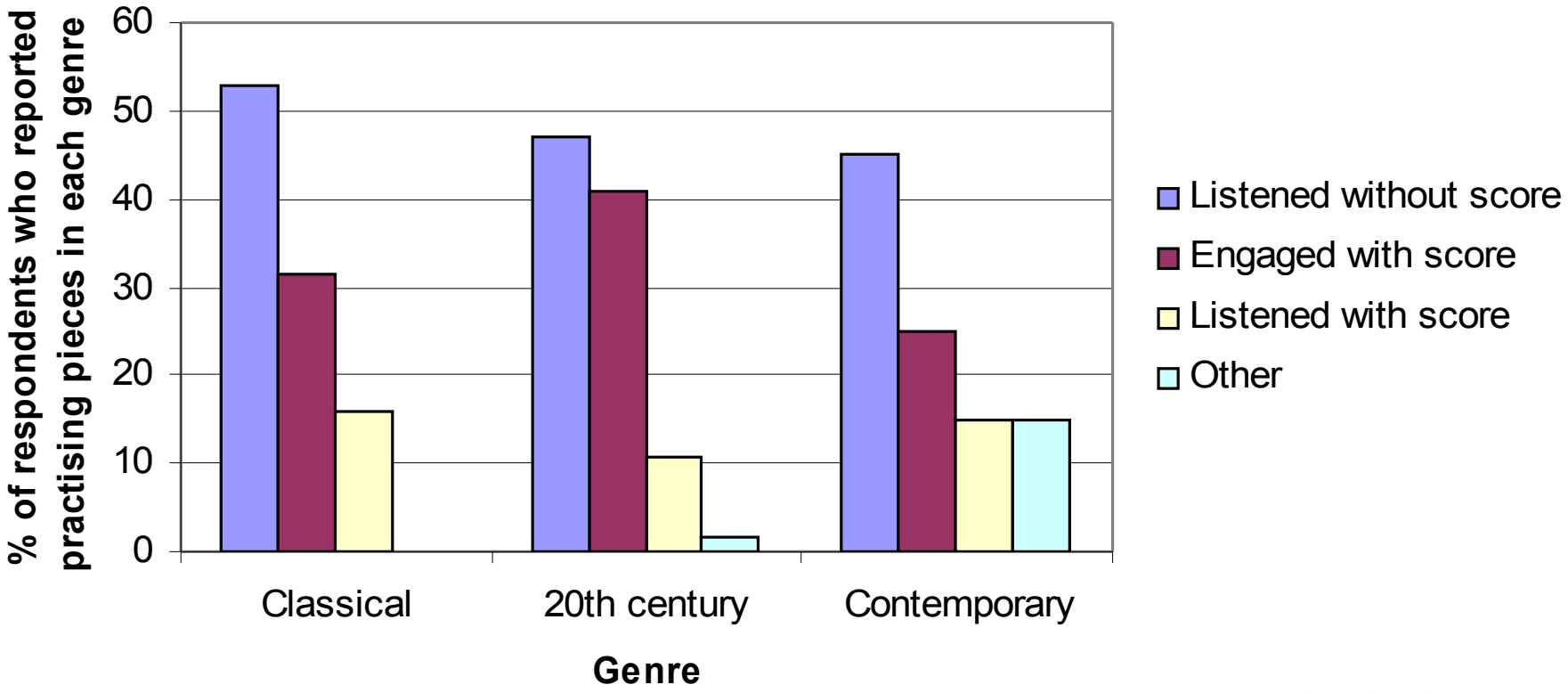


“Other” forms of first encounter

- *Teacher recommendation*
- *Saw it on a list of new works by the composer*
- *Saw the score and a description in a book*
- *Played it at a jam session*
- *I wrote it*

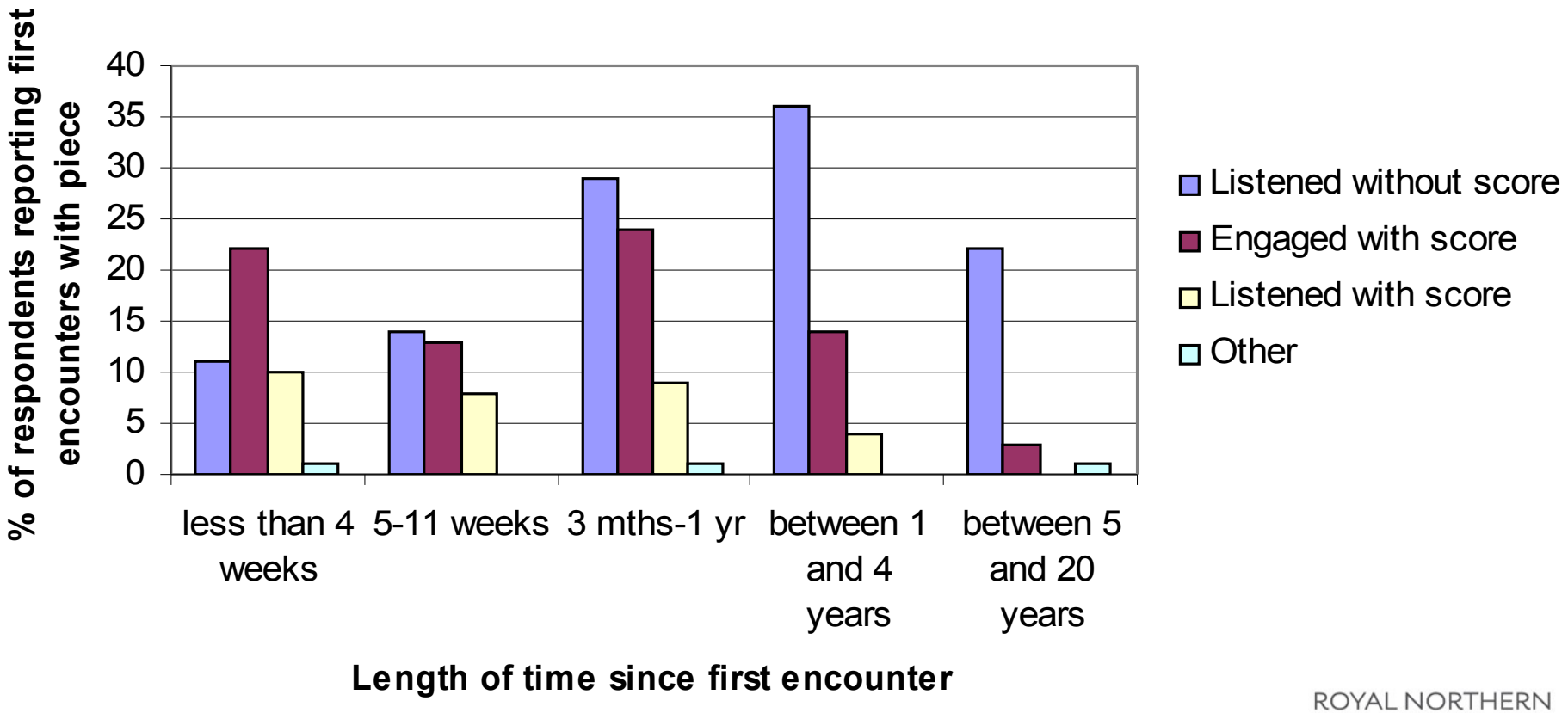
First encounter by genre (%)

X^2 (6, N = 232) = 25.94, p < .0001



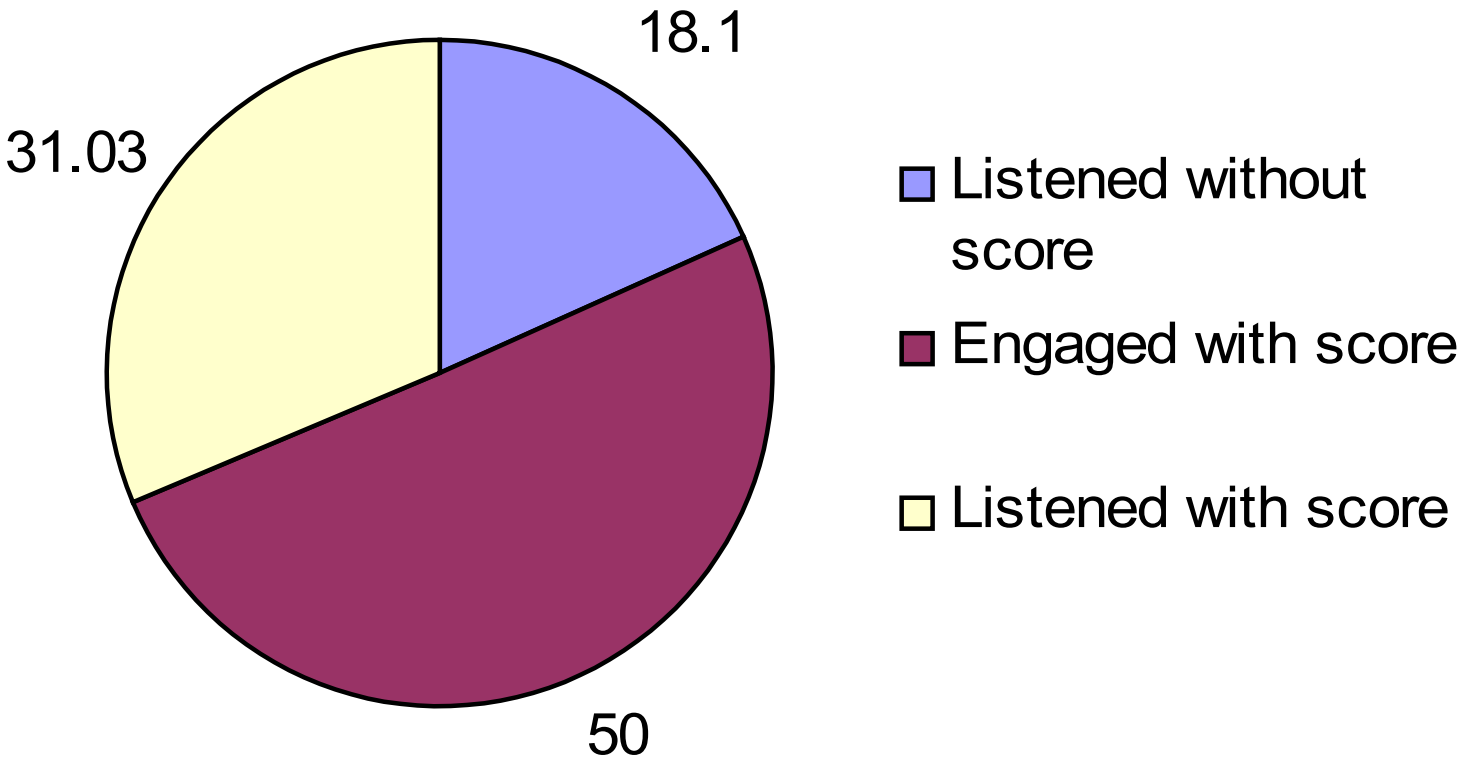
Type of encounter by length of time since encountered (%)

X^2 (6, N = 232) = 36.44, p < .0001



First learning (%)

No significant association between instrument type and first learning

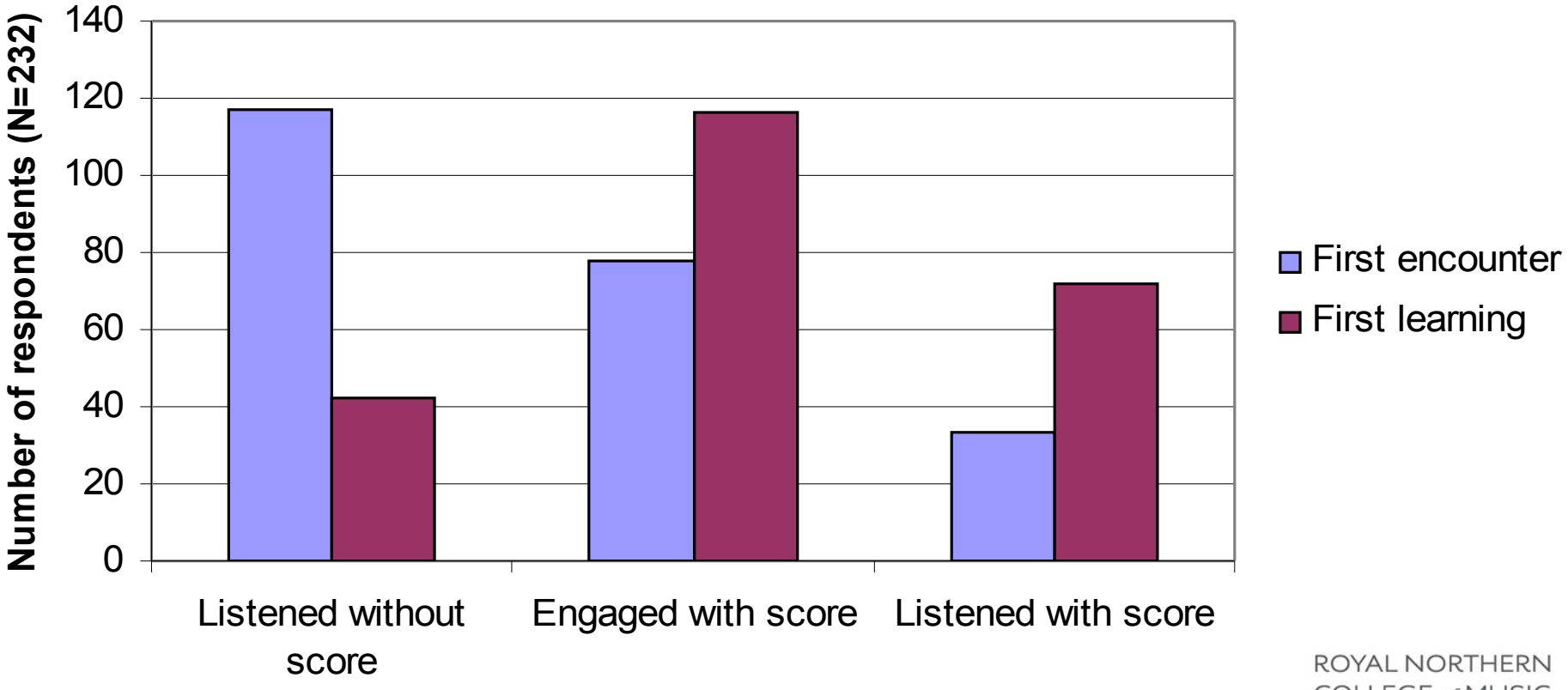


“Other” forms of first learning

- *Listening to a live performance while transcribing the piece*
- *The learning was a fundamental part of writing it. I sang the lines as I wrote them*

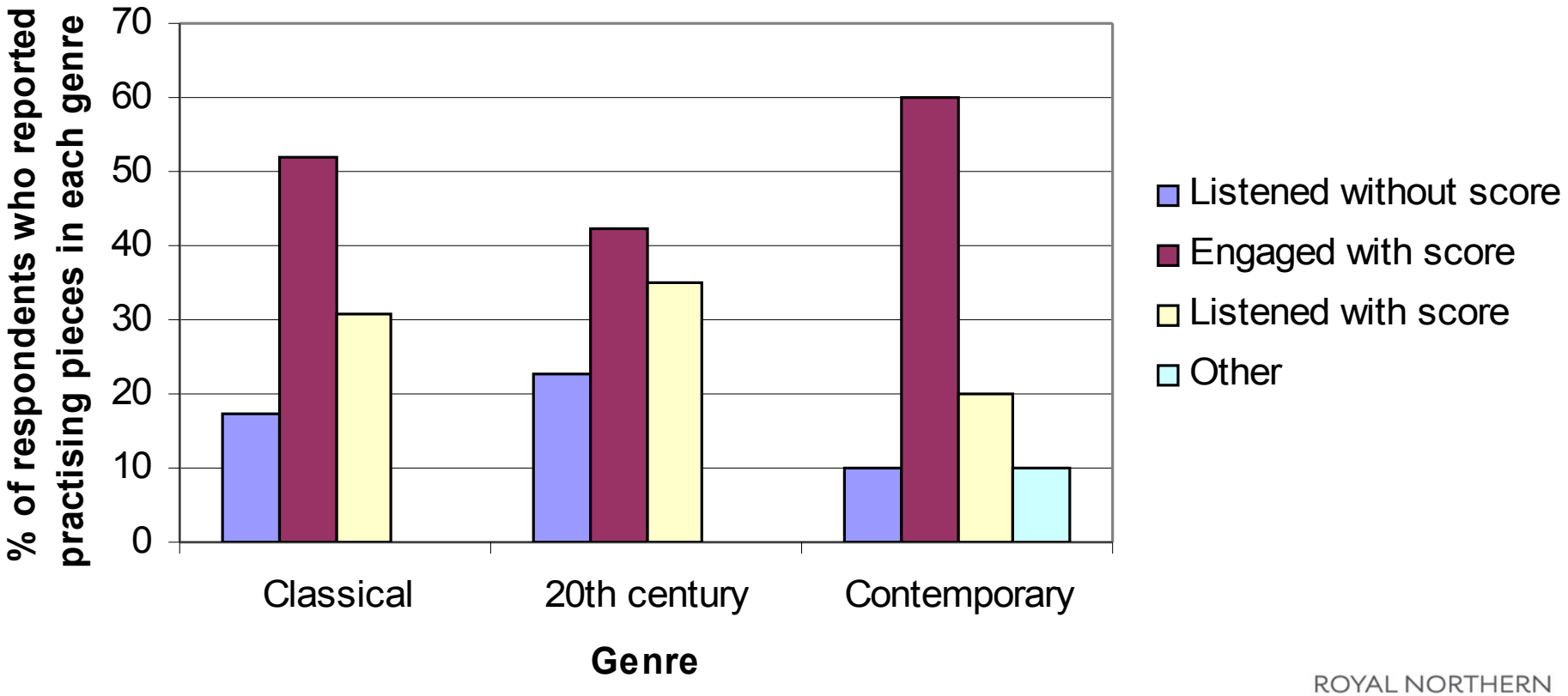
First learning by first encounter (numbers of Rs)

X^2 (9, N = 232) = 46.52, p < .0001



First learning by genre (%)

X^2 (6, N = 232) = 25.16, p < .0001



Estimated practice time in minutes

- Significant differences between instrument groups (ANOVA)

1. Playing while reading from the score: F [3, 228] = 10.59, $p < .0001$
2. Estimated time on piece spent on other activities: F [3,228] = 3.75, $p = .012$

- Estimated overall time spent during first week neared significance $p = .095$

Estimated time in minutes

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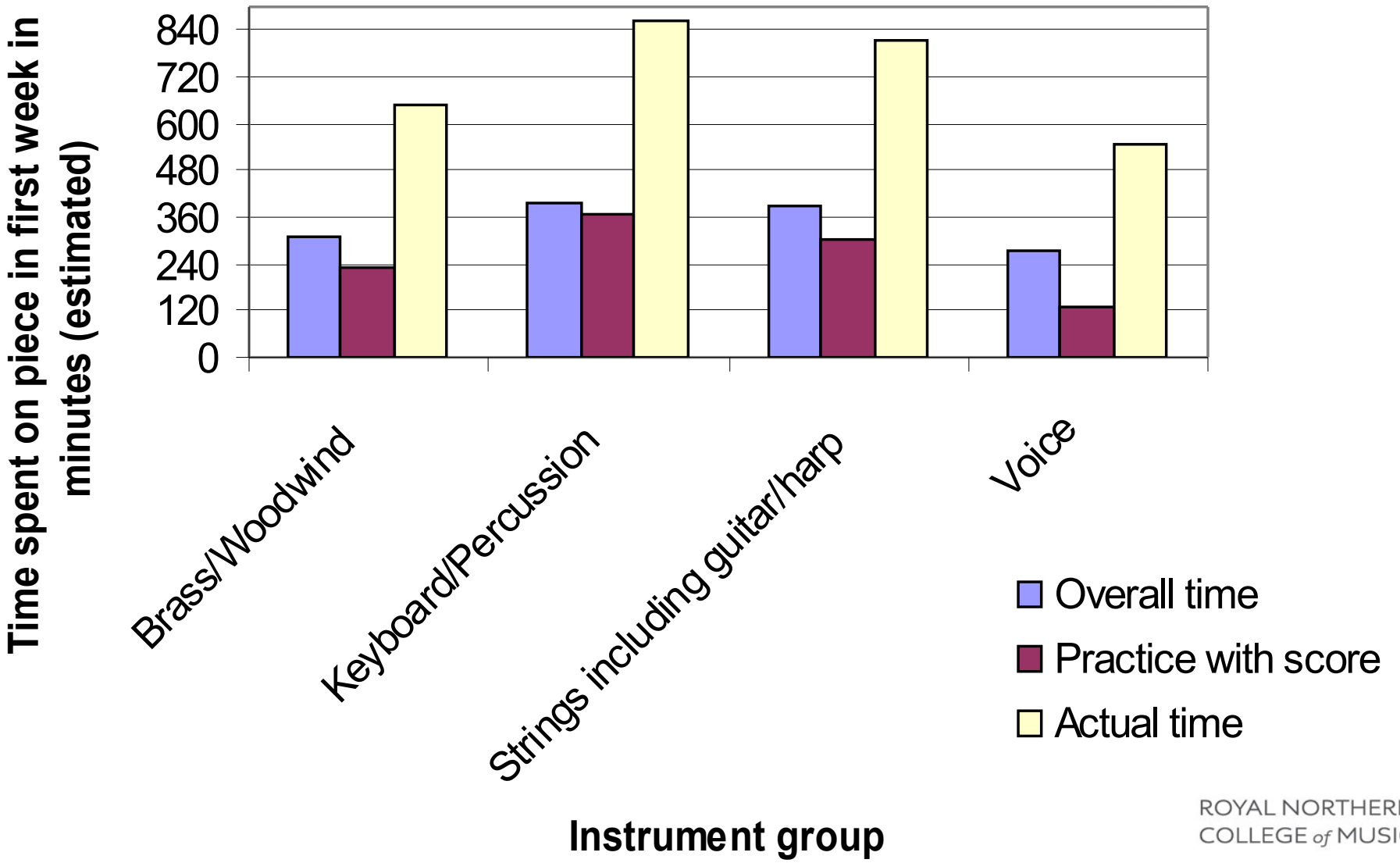
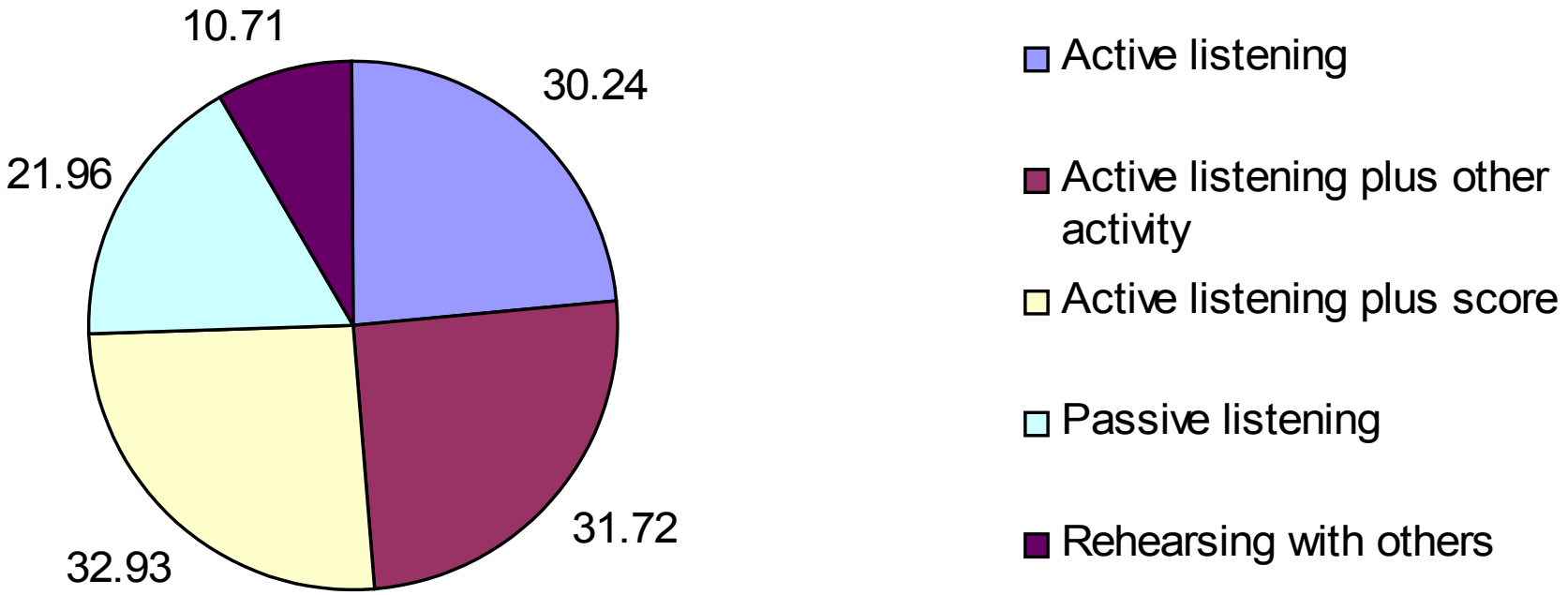


Estimated time on other activities (in minutes)

No significant differences between instrument groups



Other activities while listening

- Checking e-mail, searching copy of the music
- Browsing the net
- Reading books
- Answering e-mails
- “office work”
- Defragmenting computer
- On the bus
- Eating a meal
- Tidying up, cooking, washing up
- Working out

Discussion (1)

- Snapshot approach rather than micro-analysis
- First encounters may or may not coincide with first learning
- Earliest encounters serendipitous, more recent deliberate
- While most first encounters involve listening, 50% of respondents also began learning by listening
- Use of score for learning
- Different strategies suggests use of multiple strategies, as for memorising

Discussion (2)

- Different instrument groups
  - estimate different periods of time engaging with the score (Jørgenson, 1997)
  - play different genres of music – limited repertoire for some groups
- Genre but not instrument associated with different kinds of approach to learning
- Do students use learning strategies appropriate to the piece they're learning?
- If so, learning strategies are probably flexible

Future research

- Ask respondents to report on first encounters with and learning of pieces from different genres
- Identify students with preferences for particular approaches and persuade them to track subsequent preparation and performance

➢ how learning styles influence the development of schemata and performance cues

Thank you for your attention

- Any questions?
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