

COLLABORATIVE APPROACHES - Putting Colour in a Grey Area

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The past few decades have witnessed new socially driven models for arts practice, particularly in the education world, which involve practicing artists working as facilitatory leaders and collaborative participants in a workshop context. Motivation for this movement is interesting: it can range from a classroom-based policy that encourages a 'hands-on' involvement for all ages and abilities, to a search for meaningful connections through the fundamental elements of artistic experience which highlight the commonality, rather than the differences, between art forms and culture.

These 'laboratory' environments can sometimes be seen as little more than an artistic, educational and cultural meltdown, reducing collaboration through facilitation to little more than a "warm-up to nothing". Individual ideas become compromised for the sake of inclusiveness, with the quality and effectiveness of workshop practice being measured solely on the level of group ownership in relation to the creative process and its final product.

However, the improvisational nature of collaborative approaches in workshops can lead to people expressing themselves creatively, encouraging a "team" approach to music-making, instilling a sense of ownership and responsibility both in the process and in the final product. Exchange of ideas and skills amongst the participants becomes an integral part of the process, deepening group interaction through improvisation, encouraging musical awareness through tuning in to an idea, copying, extending, adding and responding to change. This experience collectively gives people the freedom to interact and to respond intuitively to what is going on around them.

The potential of ideas through collaborative arts practice is as relevant today as it ever has been in the past. Quite apart from the more recognised areas of improvisation-based music-making such as jazz, rock, folk or avant-garde, there is considerable scope for exploring the materials of music by drawing on the influences of 'non-western' music. This can be applied to aural as well as notated approaches to composition and performance. How far this potential can be realised within conservatoires, where teaching is still arguably locked into approaches that have evolved out of a 19th Century European tradition, remains an intriguing surmise.

Conservatoires: "Colleges for the study of classical music or other arts, typically in the continental European tradition." The New Oxford Dictionary goes on to acknowledging the Australian term *conservatorium* and the United States term *conservatory*, which in British terms is "a room with a glass roof and walls, attached to a house at one side and used as a sun lounge or for growing delicate plants." Take what you will from that. Whatever the chosen term, these schools or colleges (often affiliated to Universities) are dedicated to conservation, prevention or deterioration and protection from harm or destruction. Conservatoires value their autonomy and role in society as 'centres of excellence' with the primary focus of training resting within the Western classical tradition. However, pure preservation of this, or any other pop, jazz or 'world' music tradition will not be enough if conservatoires are to respond and develop within contexts which embrace tradition and innovation.

Contemporary culture is no longer limited to handing down a tradition. A belief in the integrity and transformative potential of 'local' traditions should be aligned with the development of skills, attitudes and outlooks which encourage connections within different contexts of our cultural evolution. What if conservatoires developed reputations as centres of excellence for new ideas and approaches as well as the preservation of our musical tradition?

There is an **emerging generation** of musicians coming from a wide range of backgrounds, disciplines and experiences, with many of them interested in extending the nature of their performance as interpreters and improvisers. The dawn of the 21st Century is brimming with 'non-definability' – culturally, artistically, socially – providing opportunity for the worlds of Electronica, Instrument Design, DJs alongside traditionally trained instrumentalists to create a new hybrid of music and performance. Many go into a project without fixed ideas, welcoming collaborators, and create a shape out of resources they are given. Could conservatoires break new ground by providing environments which extend artistic boundaries and deepen creative processes without merely being seen as providers of polite 'classical meets the rest of the world' projects?

Connected musicians who perform traditional and commissioned repertoire, who improvise freely and within collectively composed frameworks, collaborate with other artists, draw on non-European influences and embrace technology - this will be **dangerous territory** for some. Talk of change and diversification inevitably leads to suggestions of 'dumbing down', where individual skills and ideas become compromised for the sake of inclusiveness. Our fascination with technology and globalisation's suggestion of borderlessness can lead to technical and intellectual laziness. High standards can and should be maintained – what needs to change is the premise upon which the quality of process and product is measured.

One would hope that the opened borders of collaborative approaches which connect people, disciplines and genres would increase our cognitive capacity, giving us new points of comparison and departure. Yet while opened borders may have increased our ability to dream, they have also overwhelmed us with a deluge of information and experience that we are unaccustomed to processing. In response we rely more than ever on labels and categories rather than seeking out the ambiguous or the puzzling. Moreover, to seek the incongruities and explore other 'fields of potential' requires a lot more effort, as well as threatening to dislocate the ordered mechanisms of our lives.

It would be argued that a lot of energy is spent conditioning conservatoire students to traditional expectations. Whilst these expectations may be valid in order to ensure technical control on your instrument, there is a danger the student becomes disconnected from his or her own creativity. They should be encouraged to personalise their craft, consolidating their motivations as musicians in contemporary society as well as becoming accomplished instrumentalists or composers. The performance and communication skills of 'trained' musicians working in contexts beyond the concert hall are generally second-rate, despite the wave of music education, community and cross-over programmes set up over the past few years, especially in the UK.

At present, a rather narrow view of excellence favours a few but de-motivates the majority to the point where some no longer even want to perform. On one level, that's life! On another it means the conservatoire ship is possibly running on a false economy. They advocate excellence but are in fact producing a majority who are moderate by traditional standards and generally unable to realise their potential as contemporary musicians within a diverse and bewildering culture. The classical conservatoire culture is, of course, valuable and vibrant. It just won't do for the majority of people. Worse still, it alienates a huge number of potential music-making participants of all ages, backgrounds and abilities. Both the conservatoire and the wider community appear to be left 'high and dry'.

At the heart of any collaborative process lies creativity and ownership. By participating in the shaping of collectively conceived ideas and by performing something of their own, musicians of all backgrounds can begin to share their musical in the most direct way possible. This process enables people to be close to the conception and to the realisation of a performance. It can be challenging and uncompromising. There are no rituals or traditional procedures involved, rather a spirit of engagement which considers each individual as a whole and fosters a wide and open attitude to people and to the art. It encourages the meeting and engagement of apparent opposites.

The greyness of collaboration lies in vague “cross-overs” and a compromise of quality. The colour of collaboration lies in its uncertainty. It entails moving into unknown territory and developing a confidence to take risks. This, combined with integrity, a flexibility of mind and creative energy, will enable musicians of any genre to embrace new ideas and to live with cultural paradox.

Guildhall CONNECT: Creative Collaborations within a Conservatoire Culture.

Widening access has become a central issue within arts and education. Whilst remaining 'specialist', conservatoires could benefit from losing their 'elitist' label, giving the outside world a greater sense of access to their institutional skills and resources.

The Guildhall School of Music & Drama trains and educates musicians, actors and stage managers for entry to their chosen profession. The School seeks to blend the best of traditional and innovative educational and artistic practice through the diverse expertise of its staff and on the range and quality of its artistic activity. In addition to courses for full time tertiary study the School has an Initial Studies Department (encompassing a Junior School and an external Examinations Service), as well as opportunities for part-time study, a modular Continuing Professional Development and a Research Centre for Teaching and Learning.

Over the past two decades the Guildhall School has gradually extended collaborative opportunities for students and staff in a move towards strengthening its role in and contribution to regional regeneration, lifelong learning, widening participation, cross-arts and trans-cultural partnerships. After a period of satellite activities (from 1984), the School established a Department of Performance and Communication Skills in 1989 and an Arts and Community Development Project in 1995. A Continuing Professional Programme began in 1998, followed by a collaboration with the Royal College of Art in 1999 entitled "MAP/making: exploring new landscapes in Music, Art and Performance." The most recent development has been a generous award from the National Foundation for Youth Music. This is a new strategic programme of action research which aims to build on, extend and develop the experience of the School in the East London Boroughs of Newham, Tower Hamlets and Lewisham. All of these projects and programmes of activity have become integrated into the School's ethos, curriculum and infrastructure and continue to contribute to its ongoing development.

It is within a context of a music curriculum which aims at high standards of performing skill enhanced by a School culture which encourages collaboration, innovation, personal motivation and reflection that Guildhall CONNECT has evolved. The School is now poised to move ahead informed by its current work with partner organisations including schools, community groups, performance venues, hospitals, prisons, the Royal College of Art and London Contemporary Dance School, as well as members of staff who are researching the nature of music and the arts in non-European traditions. As an initiative that involves the commitment and input of all senior and departmental staff, the programme embraces a number of partnerships exploring ideas and approaches which may develop new modes of good practice in the field of creative and participatory music-making. This integrated forum of activity and liaison is helping to form a firm basis for future internal and external School developments. It presents an exciting opportunity for a conservatoire such as the Guildhall School to redefine its role in the community without compromising its reputation as an international centre of excellence.

Guildhall CONNECT aims to present a series of artistically driven activities which are creatively and inclusively led and where reflection on practice encourages continued innovation amongst musicians and composers of all ages, professional and amateur. The project facilitators include orchestral, jazz and electronic musicians as well as composers and music educators, all equipped to extend musical boundaries through improvisation and collective composition, and feed the imaginations of project participants. Drawing on a wide range of musical influences, they have provided a catalyst for an artistic identity and musical language that resonates with people and community groups of all ages, cultural backgrounds and abilities, leading to flexible music making that can draw on many musical disciplines yet be totally distinctive. An equal emphasis is placed on process and performance for project leaders, musicians, artists from other disciplines and participants.

'The essence of the (Guildhall's) work, embedded in improvisation and structured fusion, has helped create a musical language in Tower Hamlets which is truly international, reflecting the many cultures residing both in the Borough and further afield.'

Diane Warne, School Development Advisor (Music) for London Borough of Tower Hamlets

There are five key areas of developmental activity within the Guildhall CONNECT framework, underpinned by the School's Research Centre and running in association with the undergraduate, postgraduate and Continuing Professional Development programmes:

1. **Youth Music/Creative Partnerships** with young people, teachers and parents across the London Boroughs of Newham, Tower Hamlets and Lewisham.
2. **Arts and Community Development Project** for Healthcare and Disability Centres, hospital patients, prisoners and young offenders, 'third age', parents and toddlers. These projects are also run in association with orchestral and opera education programmes and regional instrumental teaching services.
3. **MAP/making-Exploring New Landscapes in Music, Art and Performance** in collaboration with the Royal College of Art and the London Contemporary Dance School.
4. **Trans-cultural Collaboration and Research** involving developing relationships with the Queensland Conservatorium, the Amani Ensemble (Tanzania) and the British Council.
5. **ANIMARTS** – Action research with the London International Festival of Theatre, exploring definitions for the role of an artist in the community.

The **Youth Music/Creative Partnerships** build on the Guildhall School's 12 year experience in Tower Hamlets schools, developing new partnerships with a range of schools, music and community organisations in East and South East London in order to extend music making opportunities for young people between 8 and 18 years of age. The **Arts and Community Development Project** works with all ages and abilities in a broad range of contexts around the United Kingdom. Associate organisations include Bath International Festival, Irish Music Network (Health Care and Education), Wigmore Hall (mothers and toddlers), Middlesex Hospital and the Irene Taylor Trust (Music in Prisons).

A key objective for both these areas of activity is to strengthen and develop the capacities of all project partners. As well as having a positive impact on the Guildhall School, the projects draw on partners who have not worked together before, with CONNECT acting as a catalyst for these organisations to develop other work together in the future.

There are three key areas of research, underpinning and informing all activities for the **Youth Music/Creative Partnerships** and **Arts and Community Development** projects. These 'experiments' have the potential to make a significant impact on the creative music making landscapes.

EXPERIMENT 1 – Researching, evaluating and benchmarking inclusive creative music education practice

It is increasingly recognised in the professional arts community that there is no one immutable standard of excellence. Any valid view of excellence should be defined in relation to context and fitness for purpose. A chamber ensemble performing in one of the world's leading concert halls or creating and performing a new work in collaboration with teenagers in East London; both these activities should strive for excellence, but the criteria of appraisal would be different in each case depending on the aim and context. Arts institutions working in the field of creative music education have yet to establish a framework and critical vocabulary for assessing quality in three

central areas of process, project and performance. An action research exercise which aims to develop an enabling framework and critical vocabulary for assessing quality in these areas, and which acknowledges diversity of need and purpose, is now a crucial part of these projects.

EXPERIMENT 2 – Research into potential of various models of instrumental learning and teaching, which encourage widespread access and participation

It could be argued that accepted traditional approaches to instrumental teaching and learning involve a form of conditioning which appeals to a few but alienates many. This conditioning, for all its former resonance and meaning, now effectively cuts the majority off from the creativity, flexibility and breadth of perspective that are necessary for music to be a vibrant force in society. This piece of action research is investigating various models of instrumental learning and teaching with a view to providing an enabling framework for individuals and organisations involved in the delivery of music education at all levels that responds to the cultural landscape of the 21st Century. In particular we are looking at the following questions:

- What constitutes access to instrumental teaching and learning?
- What constitutes good practice in the provision of instrumental teaching?
- What is the function of music in the community?
- What is the nature of the dynamic between 'learning' and inclusivity?
- What is the nature of the dynamic relationship between creative workshop environments and instrumental learning?
- What is the nature of the dynamic between instrumental learning and music technology?

EXPERIMENT 3 – External and self evaluation, to measure success against objectives, and to evaluate participants' experiences

Like it or not, we are in a society increasingly geared towards evidence-based policymaking. As Higher Education provision enters a period of real organisational development, the need for objective evaluation of its work is imperative. More to the point, if conservatoires remain entrenched in a 19th Century mindset, they will be slowly suffocated by the 'sexy' cultural industries and participatory music-making will mean little more than 'Rock School', 'DJ' or 'World Music' workshops. This experiment therefore seeks, through a process of on-going evaluation, to establish a baseline position for the Guildhall School from which to develop future work in the community. It is hoped that the creation of an environment that encourages reflective practice, skills-sharing and self-evaluation will result in strands of evaluation that inform any decisions the School makes in terms of balancing its dual role of community resource and centre of excellence.

A priority for all three experiments is to ensure that the evaluation and research findings highlight how conservatoires could, if they want, have a unique role to play as providers of a music education that embraces traditional and contemporary music practices which have relevance and meaning in today's society. Informed recommendations, based on sustained practical project activity with our partners, will also lead to a long-term strategy for participatory music making in the future.

MAP/making; Exploring New Landscapes in Music, Art and Performance is a collaborative project that has been established as a result of an evolving partnership between the Guildhall School and the Royal College of Art (RCA). This CONNECT pathway enables musicians to meet with confidence the opportunities offered by the growing market of cross-arts multi-media presentation. The programme has been designed to bring together MA/Ph.D. Communications students from the RCA working in the field of audio-visual, video and light projection, sound and multi-media with undergraduate and postgraduate instrumentalists, singers, composers and electronic music students from the Guildhall School. Comprising creative workshops, presentations, forums and public performances, the project aims to foster the development of cross-arts initiatives which are innovative and responsive to changes in arts practice, and is designed to reshape and add a new dimension to the training in both institutions. Students from the London Contemporary Dance School are also periodically involved with this project.

Crossing boundaries, artistically, educationally or culturally, can quickly lead to compromise. The individual's 'voice' gets lost in a collective 'mist' of styles, genres and disciplines. Ideas are 'played with' rather than explored in depth due to exotic ideals and economically led initiatives. The people involved, and their ability to connect, listen and find a way in, then becomes critical. Musicians in particular need a firm footing so that they can build up their involvement from a position of strength. Certain faculties may need 'awakening', such as confidence in finding ideas without notation and performing away from the music stand, but quality of musicianship should remain intact.

'On creative collaboration I would say there is a danger of no seeds being planted, only water and fertilizer. This leads to secondary, or pastiche, music and not primary, or original, composition...it is about giving new ideas, a new outlook, and a sense of building up. It is about having the feeling of the 'whole' music by setting up different frameworks to improvise around and within. It is about freedom of expression as well as the limits and boundaries. So, a seed is planted and the musicians water the seed to make the plant strong. The performance gives the message.'

Cassius Maganga (Amani Ensemble, Tanzania) Guildhall School of Music and Drama Continuing Professional Development Student

Trans-cultural collaboration and research is facilitating a network of musicians who can meet, exchange skills and ideas and share resources. This began as a collaboration between staff and students at the Guildhall School and musicians, dancers, and teachers from the Amani Ensemble in Tanzania. It quickly developed a momentum of its own as it became clear that it provided an excellent opportunity to look deeper at what lies behind both African and European approaches to creating and performing new work as well as our respective education methodologies. Since 1998 the British Council and the Guildhall School have supported this project by assisting tutors from Guildhall to continue working in Tanzania, and members from the Amani Ensemble to come to the UK and to learn from and contribute to the School's Continuing Professional Development and CONNECT programmes.

The philosophy and practice of the Amani Ensemble arise from a process of redefining the traditional concept of 'ngoma' within a contemporary living culture. 'Ngoma' embodies a whole way of life which generates a web of interconnected social and cultural meanings through music, song, dance, drama, storytelling and ritual. Amani captures the spirit of 'ngoma' by devising creative, participatory processes, projects and performances which have a resonance with today's social, educational and cultural needs. Through developing its own artistic language, Amani is creating a new living tradition which both connects to the present while being rooted in the past.

More recent connections have been made with musicians from The Gambia, South Africa, Somalia, India, Brazil as well as Aboriginal visual artists and musicians via the Queensland Conservatorium in Brisbane. Through practical collaboration, workshops and forums, a focus is emerging on what the function of music is in contemporary society alongside an exploration of the

distinctive methods and approaches used in our respective teaching and learning processes. The possibility of offering Guildhall student placements in African and Aboriginal communities is also being explored.

There is no lack of evidence that participation in the arts can contribute to social cohesion and produce social change. Strengthening inter-cultural life through participation in the arts is a vital factor in the creation of a healthy society rather than a soft option in social policy. However, certainly in the UK, there is a shortage of artists and teachers who can deliver high standards of experiential learning through the arts in education. This diminished supply could be strengthened, though not replaced, by a more substantial complementary resource of trained animateurs (sometimes called arts education practitioners or artists in education) working in partnership with teachers and community group leaders. Animateurs are seen as practicing artists, in any art form, who uses his/her skills, talents and personality to enable others to compose, design, devise, create, perform or engage with works of art of any kind. ANIMARTS aims to:

- Establish distinct and recognised professional status for artists working as animateurs
- Increase the supply of and demand for trained animateurs
- Improve access to trained animateurs
- Enhance the professional standing of trained animateurs

A team of twelve, comprising two musicians, three visual artists, three actors, three teachers (two of whom trained as musicians) and one community arts facilitator have begun an action research programme investigating what it takes to be an effective animateur. In the next year it will identify the particular competencies and qualities which are needed to work in this way and outline a training model for arts animateurs that could be adopted nationally.

LOOKING AHEAD

Education can be about the future. It facilitates acknowledgement of our environment, respects its heritage and invests in the new. Collaboration amongst people, their culture and disciplines is an essential ingredient for this process, particularly if the motivation to maintain the aesthetic authority of traditions such as Western art music continues to wane. It is impossible to ignore the fact that this canon is not as relevant to the artistic needs and fulfillment of contemporary artists or their audience as it once was. The society which gave rise to it, and the time in which it was created, was very different to our own.

This can cause understandable concern for conservatoires. Any organisation involved in cultural change will wonder about the message it is giving out to the world. A reputation for excellence in collaborative and community-based activities could undermine the conservatoire's core activity of principal study tuition. Will standards fall through widening participation? It would be a shame if 'access' and 'excellence' could not be seen as complementary forces. Frameworks for the measuring and delivery of excellent practice will shift as we broaden our perception of context and community. More facilitatory approaches would enable conservatoires to become a network of creative, performance and educational possibilities, strengthening its capability as a flexible resource for the professional arts world, education and the wider community. Quality can, and should prevail at all times.

All this talk of accountability can quickly become wearing and confusing for everyone concerned. This raises the imperative for conservatoires to recognise their capacity to blend the best of traditional and innovative practice, embracing imaginative approaches to performance and creative collaboration in different contexts. The result of this is a potentially critical role for conservatoires as an interface to arts, educational and cultural practice. However, as representatives of the pinnacle of music training in higher education, they are always in danger of a museum mentality that preserves and guards purely traditional principles, rather than

encouraging the teaching and learning of a living art form relevant to the needs and context of the 21st century.

The role of a conservatoire should be re-aligned to meet the needs, expectations and potential of today's society. Reformulating the idea of what a musician could be – what they have beyond their technical proficiency on one instrument – is highly relevant to the workplace as musicians now need many strings to their bow. Being creative, a multifaceted performer who is effective in collaborative environments are important qualities for musicians who want to remain employable.

Collaboration is about connecting with people, their context and the culture it creates at a particular moment in time. For participating artists, especially playing musicians, it is about accepting a bond, accepting everything for the way it is. It takes a lot of patience and a lot of taking chances with each other. It means seeing each other in weak and strong lights, accepting both, and utilizing the high and low points of the relationship. Above all it transcends the qualitative and the quantitative.

“People talk all day in a practical way, but real language that penetrates and affects people and carries wisdom is something different. Maybe it's the middle of the afternoon and you see a child's moon up in the sky, and you feel it's such a simple, pure, wonderful thing to look at. It just hits you in a certain way, and you point it out to a stranger, and he looks at you like you're weird and walks away. To speak that way, to point out a child's moon to a stranger, is original language, it's the way you originate yourself. And the great thing is, if you catch people in the right moment, it's totally clear. Without knowing why, it's simply clear. That sort of connection is very empirical. It comes from the part of you that understands immediately. All these types of things are gold, and yet they are dishonoured or not paid attention to because that kind of tender communication is so alien in our culture, except in performance. There's a wall up between people all day long, but performance transcends that convention.”

Singer/Songwriter Jeff Buckley talking to Dimitri Ehrlich
INSIDE THE MUSIC – Shambala (Boston and London 1997)

Collaboration is so many things. It's not just the performance. It's the creative process and the participants together with the audience and the architecture of the final product. It generates excitement that is not just aesthetically pleasing but is something that connects understanding and is felt, at that moment in time, to matter.