

Conference Review

The Reflective Conservatoire: Building Connections – 2nd International Conference (28 February to 3 March 2009) was held at the Guildhall School of Music & Drama and Barbican Conference Centre and hosted by the Guildhall School of Music & Drama in partnership with the 'Polifonia' project of the European Association of Conservatoires (AEC), London Centre for Arts and Cultural Enterprise (LCACE), and Society for Education, Music and Psychology Research (SEMPRE). Attracting an international consortium of music teachers, researchers, and performers representing twenty-three countries, the conference included a wide array of presentations, practical workshops, keynote addresses, and musical performances.

The 95 papers and workshops presented over the two-and-one-half days encompassed both research and practical guidance on one-to-one instrumental and vocal tuition, musician health and injury prevention, practicing, performance practice and artistic research of performers, improvisation, informal learning, and collaboration and interchange between institutions and with other establishments.

One-to-one tuition was presented through a broad range of perspectives. Kim Burwell outlined past and present practices and characteristics of apprenticeship found in the research literature. Christine Ngai Lam Yau presented a review of literature on instrumental teacher-student relationship in western and eastern cultural contexts, the issues of this investigation and its importance. Going beyond instrumental or vocal one-to-one tuition, Mike Roberts introduced teaching technology as an instrumental discipline rather than compositional one. Helena Gaunt and Bart van Rosmalen demonstrated how improvisation/conversation between two musicians relates to one-to-one teaching in that this process helps reflect what is going in a lesson whether in the form of imitation or leadership.

Matthew Draper and Caroline Hall having worked with both musicians and actors described and demonstrated their coaching approach to learning and performance. They outlined the use of encouraging self confidence to develop learning and student independence, an assessment-free environment and two-way conversation, and established agreement with student. Also with trust, active listening, powerful questions, direct communication, designing actions, managing progress and accountability, the teacher's mindset can empower- or limit the student.

Elizabeth Haddon presented her research on the practice of studying with multiple teachers. Using a questionnaire, she reported on the advantages, disadvantages, benefits, why, roles, conflicting demands, relationship between student and teachers, and the differences between studying with multiple vocal and instrumental teachers. Two presentations on peer learning looked at small chamber groups and voice class students. Jane Ginsborg reported on her study regarding peer learning in small music ensembles through analysis of participant diaries of group rehearsals and individual practice sessions and interviews. She looked at the success of the group and whether they knew each other, had an existing friendship beforehand, or became friends; getting along with other

members of the group and if it was explained by luck, trial and error, musical genre, or something they just had to do; and getting along vs. working well together, aspirations and working with tutors.

Awareness and consideration of the importance of investigating student practice was conveyed through presentations of both a research and practical nature. Sue Hallam presented a thorough review of research on practice over the last 70 years—covering aspects from effective practice, neuroscience, time, quality vs. quantity, context of learning, and strategies. Paivi Arjas presented on a course at the Sibelius Academy on how to improve practicing and performance skills through reflection, presentation training techniques, small group lessons, and lectures and conversations.

Examples of improvisation and performance practice sessions included Kaoru Mishima presenting improvising elements as seen in the harpsichord works in which she argued that economy of movement guided the improvisation; while Jena-Yves Haymoz's and Laurence Herklots Jeanningros' excellent presentation and demonstration on playing Beethoven in light of Czerny was a model example of historical research applied to performance and teaching.

Other 'reflections' on the issues of musician health and injury prevention, informal learning, and collaboration and interchange between institutions and with other establishments were also presented with wide-ranging perspectives. Sessions on musician health were particularly varied covering aspects of health awareness in curricula in conservatoires, preparing body and mind to play, performance anxiety, injury prevention, gesture and movement, and physical aspects of being a musician. Trager sessions were also offered to conference delegates.

The keynote addresses offered diverse, innovative views. John Sloboda's opening keynote appropriately spoke on the nature of reflection – critically observing the relationship between what you intend to do, what you do and the outcomes of what you do. He proposed two types of reflections - improving what you do for everyday expertise (professional) versus doing new things and changing what you do (paradigmatic). He outlined the strengths and weaknesses of professional and paradigmatic reflection and suggested that there is a need for this contradiction and finding balance between the two. Sloboda transferred these ideas to how conservatoires take on paradigmatic reflection in that conservatoire research can be distinctive and practice-oriented by looking at physical environment, expert performer in action, promoting expert performer and justifying the expert performer.

The second keynote by Sir Christopher Frayling on 'Research in and through the Arts: What's the Problem', spoke head on about the change in terminal degree from MA to a doctorate. He advocated that research should be distinct from traditional research and professional practice, and that there is a way to discourse about a work that is different than the professional world (which he termed "making a record or route map"). He maintained that traditional research has been research 'into' the arts and 'thru' the arts (i.e. solving problems through the use of the arts – in practice and about them). Frayling

believed that research ‘for’ the arts (i.e. research as a process) could be communicated not necessarily verbally, but as a documentation of the process.

Professor Barry Ife, Principal of Guildhall School; Sir Nicolas Kenyon, Managing Director of the Barbican Centre; Kathryn McDowell, Managing Director of the London Symphony Orchestra gave the final keynote address. They presented a history of the Guildhall School of Music facilities, present plans, and their collaboration with the Barbican Centre and London Symphony Orchestra. To illustrate this collaboration and its goals, a visual diagram of a wheel was displayed with the Barbican at the centre encircled by professional training, young artists, community programs and knowledge transfer, new audiences and lifelong learning, 3-18 year education and outreach, and finally, emerging talent.

Excellent musical performances were bound to be a part of such a conference, yet the reflective aspect of this conference carried over to the performances. An example of this was Saturday evening’s performance: “The Great Orchestral Debate” (demonstrating Guildhall’s collaboration with the London Symphony Orchestra and Barbican Centre). Chaired by The Guardian editor and musician Alan Rusbridger, the most important orchestral works from the last three hundred years were debated and voted on. Writers, musicians, artists and educators put forward their case to a panel of experts and the audience. Pieces from Baroque to Contemporary – Bach, Beethoven, Debussy, Mahler, and Ligeti – were introduced by an architect, lawyer, and businessman. The victor was Bach.

Congratulations to Conference Chair, Barry Ife and Conference Director, Helena Gaunt for a stimulating and enlightening assembly of presentations, workshops, and live music and for creating an environment of open discussion and exchange – both within and beyond the sessions.

Dr Cynthia Stephens-Benson
Associate Professor
Bowling Green State University