Creative Collaboration: Towards the recorded realisation of Gary Carpenter's 'Doubles'

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Background to the project

- Context
- Project Outline
- Collaborators

Research Question:

‘Is there a hypothetical model (or models) that can facilitate creative collaboration between composer and performer?’

Research Method

Action Research

‘Feedback Loops: Self-Action, Self-Reflection and Action’
(Robson 1993:438, derived Lewin 1946)

‘Sequence of action-reflection cycles’
(McNiff 2002: 40-42)

‘Situational, collaborative, participatory and self-evaluative process’
(Burns 2000:444)

‘Subjects are participants in the research process’
(Denzin & Lincoln 1998: 169-170)

Preparatory Phase: May-July 2010

Action:
Independent Learning: LM & PG (soloists)

Reflection:
- Focus on authenticity (to the score)
- Identification of challenges
- Intensive technical work
- Isolated learning process
- Fostered differing (personal) approaches
- Influenced by individual prior experience of the work
- Efficient use of time???

DYNAMIC
Independent and working in isolation

Rehearsal 1: July 19th 2010

Action:
Soloists' Rehearsal (LM & PG)

Reflection:
- New perspective on challenges (ensemble, intonation)
- Achieving a consensus in approach (e.g. setting projected tempi)
- Developing a shared interpretation of the composer's markings
- Initial thoughts on approach to the final improvised section
- A revised approach to learning
- Presented unanticipated challenges and concern about meeting these
- Mutual support built confidence
- Required shared leadership from both parties – chamber music
- Dealing with ensemble details without a conductor wasted time?

DYNAMIC
Equal Partners

Rehearsal 2: August 16th 2010

Action:
Soloists' Rehearsal 2 (LM & PG)

Reflection:
- Tempo of final section – both exceeded what had been agreed
- New challenges through advanced preparation (balance, intonation, detail)
- Increased reference to score and recording
- Interpretation more advanced – considering style beyond technique
- Experimentation on final improvised section, unsure without GC input
- Initial thoughts on how the recording session might be structured (edit points, order)
- More confident and comfortable together
- Still uncertain about what would be possible
- Lack of clarity about details in the score continued without GC
- Plans for recording session speculative without producer

DYNAMIC
Equal Partners (more relaxed)

Rehearsal 3: September 8th 2010

Action:
Directed Rehearsal (LM, PG & CR)

Reflection:
- Stylistic issues - from CR's experience of performing the work
- Addressing feedback from CR as an objective listener/'critical friend'
- Some earlier decisions reversed (tempi, flexibility in interpretation)
- Input of CR saved time, as it reduced ensemble difficulties
- Constructive criticism enabled progression to next stage of learning
- Style became the primary driver rather than technique (assumed)
- Reversal of original decisions led to additional work (slower tempi)

DYNAMIC
'First Among Equals': Leadership by CR- Practice = Rehearsal

Rehearsal 4: September 22nd 2010

Action:
Directed rehearsal in presence of composer (LM, PG, CR & GC)

Reflection:
- Clarification of details in the score
- Further discussion of technical challenges/feasibility (tempi)
- Similar approach to rehearsal 3
- Anticipation of greater input from GC?
- Reliance on previous experience of CR and GC
- Increased confidence, as GC positive in general about progress

DYNAMIC
Leadership from CR, complemented by input from GC

Rehearsal 5: September 27th 2010

Action:

Full Rehearsal 1 with wind orchestra (GC not present)

Reflection:

- Focus shifts from soloists to ensemble
- Conductor in heightened leadership role, soloists largely subservient
- Additional challenges (projection, tempi, ensemble, stamina/breathing)
- Increased responsibility for soloists to deliver
- Greater sense of style emerging
- Concerns about recording increased (apprehension about different acoustic)

DYNAMIC

Conductor in control – 'Democracy becomes Dictatorship'?

Rehearsal 6: October 1st 2010

Action:
Full Rehearsal 2 (GC in attendance for part of session)

Reflection:
- Greater interaction between soloists and wind orchestra
- Focus on details of ensemble and style
- Most technical issues resolved, but some re-emerging as focus shifted
- Still making technical adjustments to enhance the musical outcome
- Input of composer limited by problems of acoustic
- Transition to practicalities of recording session (position, mics., schedule)
- Recognised problems of rehearsing in different acoustic
- Lack of producer inhibited discussion of approach to recording?

DYNAMIC
Moving (back) towards a democracy

Recording: October 3rd 2010

Action:
Recording Session (All + Production Team)

Reflection:
- Most significant input from composer (late in process- inevitable?)
- New acoustic presented challenges/re-thinking of balance
- Unanticipated (extra-musical) circumstances tested professionalism
- Initial structural plan adjusted due to ‘feel’ of session (appropriate?)
- Practicalities paramount
- Personal responsibilities for consistency at forefront
- Issues arose that might have been addressed earlier in process?

DYNAMIC
Shared leadership by conductor, producer and composer
(Composer assumes a significantly greater role and responsibility)

Production Team Perspective

- Artistic responsibility devolved once the session finishes (production team in control) until comment invited on first edit
- New musical challenges emerge related to the technology
- Issues of score presentation are critical (e.g. condensed scores, repeats)
- Sound-world depends on personal preference/philosophy of producer, or ‘house style’ of the company releasing the recording
- Desire to debate and resolve balance issues from outset (e.g. double bass)
- Is the project A: a recording of the event (performance given), B: an artefact representing the composer’s imaginary soundscape at the time of composition or C: somewhere in-between (the norm). If C, who determines where C should lie on the continuum between A and B?
- Issues over where the composer should be situated, and whether s/he communicates directly with the performers
- ‘a more thorough discussion beforehand by all involved may have speeded some of this up’ (producer)

The ‘Control’

Reflection on prior realisation of the work for performance (premiere):

- Initial rehearsal with CR and GC took place, and was positive
- Early collaboration can facilitate the learning/psychological process
- Players were ‘liberated’ from ensemble difficulties by CR’s presence
- GC was ‘accommodating’ (e.g. tempo, improvised section)
- Composers are normally receptive to (re)-interpretation by players and the audience (= reception theory)
- Pre-conceived views remain and influence the process and relationships (e.g. the conductor’s role)
- Early communication can be counter-productive
- Logistics can override the best of intentions (acoustics, time)
- It is impossible to prepare for the final event – performance is ‘ephemeral’
- A recording (authoritative realisation) can elicit a different dynamic from a live performance (composer assumes a leadership role)

Conclusions

Traditional Model

Solo – Duo- Trio- Quartet – Tutti – Tutti + Production Team

Suggested (hypothetical) model – reverse order

Tutti + Production Team- Quartet-Trio-Duo

Review of Outcomes

- Approaches reflect collective experience, tradition and chance
- Early and ongoing input from the composer and producer is advantageous and can facilitate the process and outcome
- Flexibility is important to be able to adapt to circumstances
- Early decisions may not be the best ones
- Success depends on effective and inclusive communication
- Independent work can be counter-productive
- Important to agree shared goals and philosophy from the outset
- The suggested reverse model might have led to a more efficient and effective process although not necessarily an enhanced outcome