

Balancing proximity and distance in musical artistic research

It is a commonplace to claim that artistic research requires artistic practice to be central to the research process. In the context of music, this means that musical practice not only provides the motivating context for the researching musician, but also the main vehicle to conduct the research and, at least in part, the medium to express the research findings. The role of musical expertise 'in action' is crucial, as is the access to such knowledge from a first-person perspective. Yet research also involves observation, analysis and discussion, processes that presuppose the ability to temporarily distance oneself from the flow of music.

The relationship between artistry and reflection has been a recurring topic of discussion in the short history of artistic research. Sceptics have expressed doubts about the possibility of combining artistic engagement with scholarly rigour, while proponents of the artistic perspective have warned of the effects of a narrowing academic view on artistic practice. In this presentation, we do not want to further expand on this debate, but rather examine how time-related aspects of music create specific opportunities and constraints for combining positions of artistic proximity and reflective distance in music research.

Based on a Zoom discussion held with four experienced artist-researchers (pianist Anna Scott, flutist and conductor Jed Wentz, trombonist and sound artist Kevin Fairbairn and dancer and choreographer Suzan Tunca), different viewpoints are discussed regarding the relationship between being in and outside the flow of performance as a researching artist. Where and when do thinking, experimentation and observation take place? Which strategies and methods can the researching musician use to access knowledge-in-action from a position outside the flow of musical time? How do insights and interpretations developed outside music influence musical action and experience? And how can understanding be shared with a listener or audience that lacks the first-person perspective on which the artist-researcher's reflection is based? Special attention is paid to the moments of interruption of the musical or reflective flow, intrinsic to any artistic research process.



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Paul Craenen is a researcher, lecturer and composer and a frequently demanded expert at the intersection of artistic practice, education and research. He studied piano and chamber music at the Lemmens Institute, Leuven and received a PhD from Leiden University (2011) for an artistic research on the status of the performing body in contemporary composed music. His thesis was published by Leuven University Press under the title "Composing under the Skin. The Music-making Body at the Composer's Desk" (2014). He taught piano and experimental music at various music schools in Flanders and intermedia studies at the Conservatory of Amsterdam. He has been director of Musica, a Flemish organisation for art education, from 2012 to 2018. In 2018 he was appointed Research Professor and head of the research group Music, Education and Society at the Royal Conservatory The Hague. He is also a guest lecturer at Leiden University.