



Balancing proximity and distance in musical artistic research

Paul Craenen, Royal Conservatoire The Hague



'Song for a Child's Heache'
Jed Wentz (voice) and Artem Belogurov (piano)

“... my work on HIP musical practices ca. 1900 has made me even more allergic to the popular, in my opinion exaggerated, narratives of art's spirituality and elevation that were so popular at the time.”

The performing I and the reflecting I

Carolyn Abbate (2004):

‘While playing, ... I decided to ask myself some distracting questions. They were along these lines: Where exactly is the Enlightenment subjectivity in these notes? Is the regime of absolute monarchy reflected exactly there, in this phrase? Does this arpeggio represent Idamante’s secret sexual agitation, and exactly how?’

..., the questions became absurd, as if they were being asked at the wrong moment and place about something other than the reality at hand. What, I asked, am I actually thinking about this music? Clearing my mind, I realized that words connected to what was going on did flow in, albeit rarely, but these words had nothing to do with signification, being instead *doing this really fast is fun* or *here comes a big jump.*’

PREPARATION → PERFORMANCE → EVALUATION

- **Jed Wentz:** “My point of view had always been that during performance I *have* to believe that whatever version I am doing is the *only* possible best version... **as a researcher preparing to perform, I have to get myself into a state of belief. As soon as I get off the stage, I can question whether the performance was indeed any good *at all*, but not in the moment itself...**
- ...the preparation is the place where the artist and the researcher interact the most closely: the researcher-me has to convince the artist-me that this will be the best possible performance, so that by the time I get on stage I have absorbed the parameters of what I am doing to such an extent that I can work within them to create that ‘most beautiful, most moving and most convincing’ performance.’



Anna Scott in the recording studio

- “...right off the bat the engineer Geoff Miles hears that although I've got all the procedural detail down, there's something about the way Fanny plays the opening that I'm not capturing; we experiment with a bunch of solutions, and finally realize what it is - it's sort of a timing issue but much more so an issue of inhabiting Fanny's mindset.”
- “...my copying work now involves, almost entirely, listening, and much less analysis.
- ...those two modalities have become *reversed*. I find myself increasingly doing my questioning in the moment of performance, and thinking about versions, messages and intentions afterwards”

Kevin Fairbairn: ‘allowing the material to take over’



“I am extremely cognizant of quite an array of ‘out-of-time’ elements that *precede* the performance, that are *part* of the performance.”

“... there are many moments in performance where I am not actively involved, where something may start and then I actually step away and allow it to work by itself; which as a performer – and I am by profession a trained performer, performing contemporary music, that’s my upbringing – that’s a really alienating moment to actually become a kind of spectator, even if I’ve curated a little bit of what is going on.”

Suzan Tunca:
'allowing the body
to take over'



Can you be both performer and your own audience at the moment of performance?

Final reflections

- Belief, trust and criticality in performance
- Reflective distance in performance
- Research intentions in performance
- The paradox of performance as a research outcome
- Reporting from performance
- Distance and proximity in writing, writing as a loss