

**Chamber Music as Social Utopia?
On Ethics and Social Responsibility of Musical Practice**

In a world facing political polarisation, ecological crises, and rapid technological transformation, a central question arises: How can we reimagine society to foster empathetic togetherness and strengthen collective agency? This artistic research explores chamber music as a medium for ethical and societal reflection. Building on prior research on intersubjectivity and musical empathy in duo formations (Kaiser 2023), I argue that complex interpersonal phenomena can be investigated by means of musical interplay. Findings reveal that ethical processes unfold within musical interaction, allowing to negotiate not only artistic but also interpersonal values in real-time.

This insight is now applied to larger ensembles as well as a broader societal context. The research is grounded in a flexible understanding of ethics, where ethical considerations must evolve in response to societal shifts (Williams et al. 2020), requiring a constant re-evaluation and refinement of habitual actions with sensitivity to the (social) environment— akin to the dynamics of making music together.

This parallel underscores the relevance of an artistic-research approach that integrates critical practice with theoretical reflection, in order to understand ethical processes within and beyond the musical ensemble. Practical sessions, organised as artistic research laboratories, are permeated by discourses from ecological psychology, embodiment and social phenomenology. Contemporary repertoire for mixed ensemble with guitar focuses on relational and value-based aspects of interplay and interpretation. Embodied experiments regarding space, movement, and bodily interaction serve as epistemological inquiries, further substantiated through video documentation and analysis based on stimulated recall.

The aim is to create aesthetic and intersubjective spaces that foster new forms of action and perception. Such explorations also facilitate the artistic enactment of social utopias, allowing collective visions of togetherness to be conceived and tested through music. Ultimately, this approach redefines chamber music performance practice. Actively engaging audiences in performance through targeted interventions expands the scope of intersubjectivity, inviting also listeners to aesthetically experience social-utopian ideas. This opens new perspectives on the social responsibility of musical practice, aligned with the notion of artistic citizenship (Elliot et al. 2016): What defines a musical practice that not only accompanies but actively critiques, challenges, or initiates social transformation?

Parallel Session



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As a guitarist, chamber musician and artist researcher, Jessica Kaiser is dedicated to rethinking musical practice, through interweaving musical experimentation and critical reflection. Her recent focus has been in deepening the understanding of ensemble interplay as a complex expression of inter-human relationship and intersubjectivity.

Jessica received her Dr. artium degree at the University of Arts Graz in 2023. Her research has been presented at major conferences and published in leading journals. She has held a junior researcher position at the University of Arts Graz from 2019-2023 and organised the SONify! Festival of Music and Artistic Research. From 2022-2023, she served as Executive Board Consultant at the Society for Artistic Research.

Performances, lectures, and residencies have taken her to festivals and symposia worldwide. As a soloist, she has performed with orchestras in concert halls around the world. She is also a member of two award-winning chamber music projects, the KAISER SCHMIDT Guitar Duo and the Duo Karuna.