

Research Presentations

“I Am Simpatico”: Exploring Interdependence and Shared Agency with Community Groups through Co-Creation

How can collaborative songwriting frameworks support shared agency, co-authorship and interdependence within participatory music-making with carers?

This research presentation explores the co-creative production of the song and music video “I Am Simpatico,” developed through a participatory songwriting process with a group of unpaid carers in collaboration with the Octagon Theatre in Bolton. Rooted in my broader doctoral research on collaborative composition with vulnerable groups, this project investigates how interdependence, shared agency, and ethical cooperation emerge through artistic processes. The research asks: How can collaborative songwriting frameworks support shared agency, co-authorship, and interdependence within participatory music-making with carers?

The presentation will examine how improvisation, collective decision-making, and lived experience shaped the musical and lyrical content of the final work. Drawing on my Spectra Framework - designed to evaluate participants' preferences for aspects such as authorship, leadership, vulnerability, and musical complexity - the project foregrounds how ethical artistic facilitation can balance support with autonomy. Through six intensive workshops, participants generated lyrical material, melodic structures, harmonic choices, and performance ideas, collectively negotiating artistic quality, emotional expression, and the responsibilities of co-authorship.

The research highlights the artistic implications of “making-with,” particularly the negotiation of power between facilitator and group, the ethics of drawing on lived experience, and the shifting boundary between individual creativity and collective identity. By analysing moments of improvisation, refusal, agreement, and collaborative problem-solving, the project offers insight into the relational and aesthetic dimensions of participatory composition. The final artistic outcome - the collaboratively composed song recording and accompanying video - serves as both documentation and artistic research output, illustrating how shared creativity can generate meaningful artistic work without compromising the values of care, respect, and mutual support.

This presentation will combine analytical reflection with excerpts from the final recording and video, demonstrating how collaborative songwriting can function as a powerful mode of artistic research grounded in interdependence.

“I Am Simpatico” video link: <https://youtu.be/y8eBD2STnYY?si=zGhap7r1ODDnex1i>

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James Holt is an award-winning composer, multi-instrumentalist, and educator with over a decade of professional experience. His work centres on how collaborative music-making can cultivate community connection, shared agency, and social impact. Holding an MA in Music Composition (Distinction) from the University of Salford, he has developed a

diverse career spanning artistic commissions, session recording, interdisciplinary collaborations, and extensive participatory work across youth, disability arts, and community sectors.

His PhD research investigates collaborative composition methodologies to examine how co-creative songwriting can empower underrepresented groups and ethically integrate lived experience into artistic outcomes. This research builds on long-standing practice, including his role as songwriter-in-residence for Manchester City of Literature, leading workshops with Bolton Music Service and Brighter Sound, presenting at SIMM Köln 2025, and supporting disabled musicians through Drake Music.

Across all projects, James aims to unite creative excellence with ethical facilitation, positioning composition as a transformative and inclusive mode of artistic research.