

**Case study: Listening to the Louvre –  
an example of cross-arts collaboration**

Since 2006, the Paris Conservatoire and the Louvre have joined forces for two annual projects involving musicians: in return, the participation of Conservatoire students has provided all students with free admission to the Louvre on a year-round basis. These projects take place on Friday evenings, when the museum is free of charge to young people under the age of 26, and are part of the Louvre's Educational and Cultural Services' overall effort to attract new and in this case younger audiences. Extensive publicity by the Louvre made for impressive turn-outs in all cases. The Conservatoire's Dance division also participated in the project, and in some instances performances included musicians, just as some musicians chose to bring dancers to participate in "their" evenings.

"Listening to the Louvre" or "A l'écoute du Louvre" engages students to explore the museum and then to perform, either in an improvised form or in more traditional formats. Sixty-five students participated in the first edition in March 2006, in disciplines and groups ranging from jazz to baroque music, from improvisation classes to duos, trios, and even a saxophone ensemble: some 3400 spectators visited the Richelieu wing, the dedicated "music" wing on this evening. In March 2007, with over 60 musicians spread out in two wings of the museum, attendance totaled 6500.

The staff made itself available for visits beforehand by classes to explore the museum (on days when it was closed to the public) and to test acoustics in different venues. A dress rehearsal was held, allowing for last-minute adjustments, taking into consideration areas that were too noisy when the public was present. Musicians performed from 6:30 pm to 9 pm, taking breaks. Visitors were invited to roam, though to everyone's surprise, many stayed put, sitting on the ground and settling in as if for a concert – this was particularly true in the large, sculpture filled court-yards which resonate like cathedrals.

The audience ranged from families with children in prams to tourists and senior citizens, and often audience members stayed to ask the musicians questions and to engage in conversation. In 2006, when the museum guards announced it was closing time, the jazz musicians on the top floor started to wend their way down the stairs, playing as they walked, and they were followed by literally hundreds of people, who came together under the Pyramid of the Louvre in a spontaneous, joyful procession.

For musicians participating, this was a "moment of exchange in a totally different context than that of the concert" in which, for a jazz musician, the "classic scheme of 'spectator-artist' was largely bypassed and made more complex thanks to the [nature of the] place in which we were creating our music. The large public reinforced this feeling through the multiple facets in which it could assume its role. The spectator was faced with the choice of remaining concentrated on the Museum's art while listening to the different musical works proposed or he could stay longer, listening to the musical event while taking in the force that emanates from the Museum's rooms. For us, musicians, our challenge was to be inspired by these works while also trying to breathe life into them in a different way." Further, "the importance and grandeur of the Louvre make it an ideal place for an encounter between different art forms. And this encounter did indeed take place for an evening, as we went beyond our simple role of artist, for as we were playing, we were also spectators of the works surrounding us." Finally, others left with a "feeling of nostalgia – when we will again inhabit such a (magnificent) place, and when will we find a comparable audience? Playing well is not

an end unto itself, and seizing opportunities such as these to put ourselves in front of our public is vital for our survival.”

“Les Jeunes ont la Parole” – “The Young Speak” – constitutes the second facet of this collaboration, in which young people from universities and art schools choose works of art which relate to their future profession, and share their vision of the work of art with the public. Post-graduate students in music pedagogy participated. As with “Listening to the Louvre,” these evenings take place on Fridays, when the Louvre is free of charge for young people under 26. In this case, students may be called upon to make their presentations in other languages, which in our case ranged from Greek to English to Russian and Italian. In addition to talking about the work each had chosen, the musicians often came accompanied by their own instrument (or CDs), alongside with visual aids to complete their presentations. The first edition in 2005 drew 15 students; this year some 30 participated, many in each of the 3 evenings scheduled.

For the students, this project was above all “a human adventure. I’m in front of the work of art that I am to present, and visitors who, under ordinary circumstances, would not have spoken to me, come towards me. They are attracted by the work in facing us, and are eager to enter into its universe, its history, its symbolism.” This experience “is an encounter, an encounter with the place that is hosting us, but which also seems to adopt us, an encounter with a work of art which we got to know in its infinity of detail, an encounter with the public, between perception and thought, a human encounter, an encounter around a work of art, an encounter through sound, gesture, image, voice and music: the magic of an encounter at once verbal and non-verbal.”

What is “fascinating about the experience at the Louvre is the feeling that one is moving over to the other side of the looking glass, literally becoming part of the museum.” “The public’s reactions following our presentations were often touching, revealing a strong interest in the connection between the musician’s work and the painting.” The project was a “fantastic initiative which allows for the possibility of speaking about art while confronting different points of view: that of the musician, the man of letters, the painter, the art lover, the professor, the student of languages, the philosopher, the historian, and that of the museum lover. I am neither a painter nor an art historian, but each artist carries within him a sensitivity which allows him to express his relationship to his art. I was literally intoxicated by this appropriation of culture and with the sense of belonging to one of the most beautiful museums in the world ... the experience inspires several thoughts: exchange, listening, poetry, analysis, curiosity, transmission, reflection, and an open mind.”

For others “what was wonderful was to provide musical illustrations to our presentations. Eyes and ears were solicited. The complimentary nature of music with painting, a “living art,” gave birth to beautiful emotions. What a joy it was for me, as a cellist, to play under the portrait of Sainte Cécile by Dominiquin! It was as if different concepts of time and space were mixed: the time of the painting, of the music, and of the present. Above and beyond the special relationship with our audience, the works of art astonish us the most. Each work harbours endless secret (treasures), speaking to us beyond time.”

Text by Gretchen Amussen