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**INSTITUTION:** The University of Hull, UK

**CONFERENCE CATEGORY:** An artistic research project currently in progress that is generating artistically relevant insights for the researcher, with thoughts as to how these might have a longer-term impact on his or her musical practice

**CONFERENCE QUESTION:** Do I integrate findings of my artistic research in my own artistic practice – including teaching practice - , and if so, how?

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## Investigating the Skills of Experienced Piano Accompanists

### Content Description

#### AIM

This project explores the skills of piano accompanists in the duo chamber ensemble context through observations and interviews with experienced musicians.

#### CONTEXT

The study of piano accompaniment has been motivated by a range of music practitioners and researchers to date. The majority of the early texts concern people offering advice (Moore 1943) or criticism (Cecil 1907) about accompanying, whereas the later texts concentrate on the technical (Cranmer 1970) and educational aspects of accompanying (Price 2005), the pianist as a coach (Adler 1965), chamber musician (Tomes 2004) and piano collaborator (Katz 2009). However, there is no existing empirical research that explores the views of both accompanists and instrumental/vocal soloists about accompaniment skills, which is the central concern of my research.

#### STUDY 1: Observations of Rehearsals and Performances

The first study investigates the skills exhibited by experienced piano accompanists when preparing familiar repertoire, for a public performance, with a professional soloist in a limited rehearsal time. The participants were 3 experienced professional piano accompanists, each working on the same repertoire with the same 3 professional soloists (a violinist, a flautist and a singer). The researcher conducted individual semi-structured interviews and video recalls with each participant after each performance. All components of the case study were audio-video recorded. In the final part of this study, the researcher, as an experienced professional accompanist, will rehearse and perform with the 3 case study soloists following the same procedure, in March 2015.

#### STUDY 2: Interviews

The interview study explores the views of 10 experienced professional piano accompanists and 10 professional instrumental and vocal soloists on piano accompaniment.

## **REFLECTIONS ON PRACTICE**

These studies will enable the researcher to develop her own artistic practice by investigating the skills which experienced piano accompanists assume in rehearsal and in performance, using systematic analysis and review of the data collected.

## **FINDINGS**

The skills are of functional (e.g. technical; practical) and socio-emotional (e.g. perceptive; social) nature, relating to skills concerning a) achieving ensemble, b) interpreting the soloist's intentions, c) dealing with unexpected incidents, d) achieving balance, and e) communicating with the soloist.

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## **How does this research relate to the conference questions?**

### **MY RESEARCH**

My research in the area of piano accompaniment endeavours to investigate, discover and document hands-on-information about what a pianist 'does' in order to successfully become 'one' with another instrumentalist or singer in a Western duo chamber ensemble.

### **THE RESEARCH OUTPUTS**

The research outputs hold educational value for future pianists intending to pursue a career in piano accompaniment, for current pianists specialising in piano accompaniment, for chamber music tutors and educational establishments offering courses in piano accompaniment and chamber music, and for instrumental and vocal soloists so to understand what their pianist's role is within a duo ensemble.

### **THE IMPACT OF THIS RESEARCH**

This research will not only have a long-lasting impact on my personal musical practice as a piano accompanist, but will also have a longstanding impact both on the specialised area of piano accompaniment and the broader area of chamber ensemble practices.