

Overcoming Challenge Through Creativity

Oliver Searle is a composer and lecturer, recently involved in a number of collaborative projects with Drake Music Scotland (an arts organisation that provides music-making opportunities for people with disabilities).

A number of technologies were utilised in these projects (e.g. Skoog, Soundbeam, Brainfingers), with a view to introducing participants to inclusive musical performance, and to explore the development of digital instruments within a live, acoustic setting. Musicians from Drake Music Scotland's Digital Orchestra have on each occasion been joined by other young musicians with acoustic/electric instruments, giving the opportunity for individuals from a range of backgrounds to perform, learn and interact with their peers.

Since the completion of an initial project, *Technophonia* (the recipient of a PRS 20x12 *New Music Award*, and part of the cultural Olympiad that year), this work has impacted directly upon Oliver's teaching at the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland, with the formation of a new course component (module), available to students from a wide variety of disciplines across the building.

The aim of this module is to allow students to build the skills required to lead workshops and performances when working with individuals with Additional Support Needs, and to incorporate a range of inclusive technologies and music notation methods (including those utilised by Drake Music Scotland) within their practice and their future careers, as well as improving their abilities as musicians when developing new musical materials.

Oliver will discuss the integration of his work as a composer with the creation of this new module, presenting audio and visual examples of student work from the course, showcasing the outcomes of an intensive week of activity, through work with inclusive technologies and musicians with disabilities. These weeks of learning finish with short, informal performances of new work created by the students, with their involvement assessed through their engagement with the process and contributions to group activities.

Oliver has since shared this work with colleagues and students from across the RCS (at internal Learning and Teaching conferences), as well as externally with practitioners across Scotland and further afield, including as part of the ELIA Teachers' Academy in 2015.

How can playing serve as a method for teaching?

Following the module, students have performed within our new-music festival - PLUG - an opportunity to create works for professional performance. This provides a strong learning opportunity for disabled musicians from Drake Music Scotland/RCS students to gain performance experience, learning symbiotically by working and directing new music in rehearsal and performance.

Teaching the art of music making is not possible without playing. Conducting artistic research is not possible without playing. How do these concepts of playing relate to each other?

Improvisation is used as a tool throughout the working process in the module, asking students to respond to musical fragments and setting tasks to aid the creation of new music. I often demonstrate many of the working processes I have utilised and encourage students to engage with these as starting points, to create their own music and facilitate their own learning.

How can the output of artistic research be used as input in teaching activities?

My practice-based research as a composer/collaborator feeds directly into my work within the RCS, setting a clear example of professional practice for students and offering the opportunity to engage with placement-based learning with organisations such as Drake Music Scotland.



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Biography (150 words)

Oliver studied at the University of Aberdeen, continuing with a Masters degree at the Royal Scottish Academy of Music and Drama and a PhD in composition from the University of St Andrews. He has composed works for many professional, amateur and youth organisations, including the National Youth Choir of Scotland, Hebrides Ensemble, Red Note, Paragon Ensemble, the BBC Scottish Symphony Orchestra, the National Youth Orchestra of Scotland, the New Music Players, the Royal Scottish National Orchestra and Drake Music Scotland. In 2013, he was nominated for a Royal Philharmonic Society Award and a British Composer Award for his piece *Technophonia*. He has spoken about his work at a number of international conferences, is frequently involved in the creation of music for theatre, has worked on a number of music research projects for people with Cochlear Implants and is interested in creating new music for a variety of inclusive settings.