

The Pianist as a Duo Partner: Understanding the role of the pianist in the rehearsal process when working with singers and instrumentalists

This project investigates the role of the pianist as a duo partner when working with singers and instrumentalists. The profession entitled ‘piano accompanist’, ‘collaborative pianist’ and ‘ensemble pianist’, amongst other titles, may seem simple to define at first glance. However, there are many aspects that require further detailed understanding and go beyond the generally perceived picture of the pianist presiding at the piano in “support” of the singer or the instrumentalist.

This practise-led research investigates my personal rehearsal experience in various case scenarios of working with a spectrum of musicians, from students to highly-established international artists, with the aim of addressing specific research questions. What is my role in the rehearsal process leading to the final performance? What is it that I actually do in what is regarded as a specialised profession, and what do other musicians that work with me expect from me? How does my role change in different scenarios, and what rehearsal structures do I adopt in different collaborations? The methodology involves video recording rehearsals, followed by in-depth analysis of rehearsal structure and discussion points. This presentation will focus on two contrasting short-term and long-term collaborations with the aim of highlighting specific discussion points as well as understanding the different rehearsal structures that I adopt. My personal experience is also supported by valuable insights from international pianists who practise the profession as well as instrumentalists and singers. A rigorous interview process has been carried out and the transcripts have been coded so that the various experiences and opinions from these musicians are presented in parallel with the outcomes of my rehearsal analysis. Observations obtained from this empirical research show that my role at the piano is ever-changing and my attitude in rehearsal varies, depending on how established the other musician is, the amount of rehearsal time available, and the degree of authority I have in the engagement. Rehearsal structure, as well as the number and type of discussion points triggered, also vary in different scenarios, and this will be demonstrated through snapshots of the analysis of actual rehearsals experienced in my profession.

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Maltese pianist Christine Zerafa has appeared in various venues and festivals around the UK and overseas, including the Royal Festival Hall, Wigmore Hall, Cadogan Hall, Queen Elizabeth Hall, and St John Smith Square, amongst others. She is in great demand as a chamber music and song pianist, having performed in distinguished festivals including Oxford Lieder Festival, Cheltenham Festival, Malta Arts Festival and has also played live on BBC TV and Radio 3. Christine studied with Norma Fisher, Andrea Lucchesini, Michael Dussek and Malcolm Martineau at the Royal Northern College of Music, the Scuola di Musica di Fiesole (Florence) and the Royal Academy of Music. She is currently in her final year of PhD studies at the Academy while also enjoying a busy performance career. She

has recently been appointed as a Senior Research Officer for the Institute of Creative Arts at the Malta College of Arts, Science and Technology.