

What classical musicians can learn from working with actors: Conceptual and pedagogic foundations and outcomes of bringing musicians to integrate in a drama training environment

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Effective teaching in a music conservatoire needs a continual quest to find new and better ways of delivering excellence. The challenge is to keep the work innovative. In this article I argue that, for a classical musician the communication of personality is a vital component of excellence in performance and I give reasons why an authentic, confident personality should be nurtured as part of conservatoire training. I also examine in detail one approach to this issue that I explored in my action-based research and teaching at London's Guildhall School of Music & Drama: that is the practice of music students learning certain acting techniques and collaborating with actors (drama students) on specific projects that were designed to widen the musicians' range of expression. The article focuses on a two-year study which involved musicians working alongside actors on two devised performance projects: Storytelling and Circus. It describes the process in which the musicians were prepared for the eventual performances. I set out to explore exactly what musicians could learn from working with actors and what impact this might have on their normal sphere of performance. The projects demonstrated that, even a year later, some of the musicians manifested noticeable benefits in their mainstream playing, including greater levels of confidence, creativity and presence. The article also discusses some of the difficulties and shortcomings of this approach.

Introduction

For teaching in a music conservatoire to be fully effective, a continual quest is needed to find new and better ways of delivering excellence. The challenge is to keep the work innovative. One solution is to question constantly the process that leads to the goal, which in this case is likely to be not mere competence in the student but peak performance, by which I mean the highest standards of excellence (Rosset I Llobet & Odam, 2007). The issue is: What is the best road to that peak performance?

In this article I argue that, for a musician the communication of personality ('a person's own distinctive character', as defined in the Shorter Oxford Dictionary) is a vital, yet widely neglected component of peak performance. I give reasons why authentic, confident personality, revealed through positive visual codes, should be nurtured as part of a conservatoire training. I also discuss one approach to this issue that I explored in my action-

based research and teaching at London's Guildhall School of Music & Drama (Rea, 2005, 2014a, 2015): that is the practice of musicians learning selected acting techniques, then working alongside actors on specific projects that were designed to widen the musicians' range of physical expression and promote greater personal presence.

Personality and the classical musician

In considering the context of the research I shall establish first why the personality of the musician is relevant, both in training and the profession. In the live performing arts, such as music, dance and theatre, where the performer is the centre of attention, the development of personality is valuable because it focuses identity and projects the kind of individuality that an audience is likely to find attractive (Rea, 2014a).

However, as Kemp notes, classical musicians temperamentally 'are generally characterized by a distinct tendency to be introverted. Bearing in mind the nature of their working environment, this is not a difficult notion to develop' (Kemp, 1996, p. 40). Kemp identifies key factors in introversion as being aloofness and self-sufficiency, qualities which tend to exclude an audience. It follows that if personality is revealed predominantly through visual codes – for example, facial expression and body language – then musicians need to be aware of whether they are projecting a positive physicality so that the audience can be suitably engaged. See Eysenck's two-dimensional model of personality (Eysenck, 1965, p.54).

The issue of physicality is important because numerous studies have demonstrated that, even in the domain of live musical performance, where it is normally considered that the quality of sound is paramount, the visual codes projected by the musician will affect the audience's reception of the music (Juchniewicz, 2008; Behne & Wöllner, 2011; Tsay, 2014). This can lead to the perception that one performance is 'better' than another, when the judgement is strongly influenced by visual elements. To show why the visual and physical elements of musical performance are relevant in the development of musicians, I shall briefly highlight four such studies.

The first deals with the way a musician looks. For a discussion of the effect of a musician's appearance and physicality see Juchniewicz (2008, p. 419), who notes that in a previous study by Wapnick *et al.* (1998), 'more attractive violinists were given higher ratings [for quality of performance] than less attractive violinists in both the audio-visual and the audio alone performance settings'. In other words, attractive musicians were seen to be better players than unattractive musicians. We should however consider that attractiveness is highly subjective and embraces a number of qualities, such as gender, culture and the projection of an authentic personality through particular codes, for example, those involving body language.

The findings of Juchniewicz and Wapnick *et al.* are significant because they may well have commercial implications in the recording industry: what the performer looks like, both on the concert platform and the CD cover, can have an impact on the commercial decisions recording companies make as to whom they will promote. Evidence of this can be seen in the widespread trend for photographing young female musicians to look like fashion models.¹ The exception occurs when music is digitally downloaded, in which case visual images are seldom used.

The second study explores the question of animation, when Juchniewicz investigated the influence of physical movement on the listener's perception of musical performance. A professional pianist was videotaped miming to a recording of a Chopin piece played by Vladimir Ashkenazy. The 'actor/pianist' recorded his visual performance in three movement styles: 'no movement', 'head and facial movement' and 'full body movement'. When participants were asked to rate the three performances, assessing the musical elements of phrasing, dynamics, rubato and overall performance, the results indicated:

that the pianist's physical movements significantly influenced the performance ratings given by the listeners. The 'full body movement' condition received the highest total and overall musical performance scores . . . The 'no movement' condition received the lowest ratings . . . Because the physical movements were the only variable that changed between performances, evidence from this study indicates the visual aspects of the performances may have had an impact on the listeners' evaluations. (Juchniewicz, 2008, p. 423)

The third study, by Behne and Wöllner, examines the issue of aural versus visual perception. A pianist was video recorded playing short pieces by Brahms and Chopin. Three other pianists were video recorded miming to this soundtrack and a group of 93 people (musicians and non-musicians) were asked to rate the performances. Almost all of them, even musically trained participants, strongly believed that they heard differences between the performances. As the authors concluded:

The influence of visual information on the ratings is remarkable. Since the majority clearly reported differences between the performances and only a small minority indicated no differences on the ratings scales, it can be concluded that it is relatively simple to delude the ear by manipulating what is perceived by the eye. (Behne & Wöllner, 2011, p. 334)

The fourth looks at the correlation between animation and peak performance. Tsay's study of ensemble players examined the way visual cues 'affect judgements of the quality of music performance'. Watching a video recording of three ensembles in a music competition – *without sound* – participants, both professional and novice, were able to predict the winner more accurately than those who were working from either sound-only or even video-and-sound recordings. As Tsay noted,

Whether the performance involves one musician, a chamber ensemble, or a symphony orchestra, people appear to overweight visual information in their evaluation of music performances. (Tsay, 2014)

Tsay further observed that 'There may be a critical and unrecognized discrepancy between what is conveyed through sound vs. vision; what is understood as a great performance through radio stations and MP3 recordings may be very different from what is deemed as exceptional during live concerts. . . . Although audio recordings may lead people to prefer one musician, live performances may lead them to prefer another musician. (Tsay, 2014)

The implications of these four studies are that, audio-only performances apart, if young musicians can develop the kind of visual behaviour that an audience will find pleasing, it may impact on their audience popularity and career success. As Behne and Wöllner (2011) have acknowledged, recent research in neuroscience reveals that our brains are powerfully affected by visual stimuli. For instance if we see someone eating a lemon we tend to have an involuntary chemical reaction in our mouths. This has been explained as part of our innate capacity to empathise with fellow human beings. Behne and Wöllner observed that:

watching the movements of musicians is supposed to be closely linked to the observers' motor processes. Observers may understand the intentions communicated by others via the activation of corresponding representations in brain areas, which are generally referred to as the mirror neuron system. Molnar-Szakacs and Overy (2006) suggested that musical enjoyment and even emotional reactions to music could be related to such processes. (Behne & Wöllner 2011, pp. 340–1)

Therefore, regardless of the sound that is produced, if a classical musician uses animated body language while playing, part of our brains will be taking on that animation. If the musician appears lifeless, we are less emotionally engaged.

This phenomenon echoes studies by Mehrabian on the audience's understanding of a spoken message. He concluded that when all the elements of the message – physicality, tonality and words – are congruent, then the message is effectively presented. But if, as often happens when unconfident speakers present a message, the words are contradicted by the body language and tonality, audiences will tend to believe these more than the words (Mehrabian & Ferris, 1967, pp. 248–52). More controversially, Mehrabian gave a weighting to these elements: visual 55%, aural 38%, words 7%, suggesting that the visual aspects of a spoken communication – what someone looks like when they speak – often count for more than the words themselves.²

Applying Mehrabian's findings and the above studies to the live performance of classical music, it is likely that, in the audience's perception, an aurally excellent performance can be undermined by negative visual codes, such as awkward body language, apparent physical tension and lack of animation. Therefore, visual codes need to be considered carefully in the training of musicians.

Nurturing personality in the classical musician

If the projection of personality and positive visual codes is considered useful to the musician as a means of helping achieve peak performance, this raises the question: How might that personality be nurtured? When one examines the process whereby most musicians are taught in a conservatoire, it becomes clear why this often leads to introversion and the suppression of personality. Musicians spend most of their time working individually, either in one-to-one lessons with a 'primary studies' teacher where the emphasis on technique is paramount, or in individual practice, alone.

Furthermore, the pressure on the musician to strive for technically perfect sound can exacerbate the impression of anxiety that especially young musicians often convey in performance (Kemp, 1996, p. 254). Being largely absorbed by the technical demands of

the music and the instrument, there is limited consideration for the relationship with the audience, an aspect that is widely neglected in the training. Consequently, young musicians frequently appear ill at ease with the audience or the others in an ensemble.

Further evidence of this overriding quest for technical perfection versus personality comes from a question I addressed to successive cohorts of music students: What makes an exciting musician? This was done as a facilitated discussion in which I recorded their answers on a flip chart. The question was put to five cohorts, averaging 16 students each. The following unedited list from one cohort of 18 postgraduate music students is typical. The order of their ideas (preserved here) is of interest.

- Interesting interpretation
- Command of the audience
- Totally, technically accurate
- Honesty – honest interpretation without being over sentimental
- Intelligence
- Detail
- Convincing
- Excellent tone and sound
- Finding your own unique voice
- Ability to change between different genres and composers
- Ability to change your interpretation over time
- Open-mindedness
- Effortless
- Physicality – expressing what you're playing
- Spontaneous and fresh
- Daring – breaking the boundaries
- A love of what you are doing
- Transcendent – touching something outside the space
- Charisma – though not showing off
- Presence
- Taking risks – not obeying the usual rules of interpretation

The first eight answers of this cohort were predominantly analytical. Then as the discussion continued and the musicians probed the issue more deeply, they arrived at more emotional qualities. These reflected some of the qualities that Tsay identified when discussing the processes of 'unconducted' ensembles such as the Orpheus Chamber Orchestra.

Nonverbal and visual communication within unconducted groups facilitates coordination under dynamic conditions where creativity, spontaneity, and responsiveness (Thompson, 1967) are prized over more routine task parameters. (Tsay, 2014)

Processes and mindsets in actor-training

As my action-based research involved musicians experiencing the processes of actors, a comparison is relevant. Pedagogical approaches to training actors and musicians are in

many ways diametrically opposed, and the difference has an impact on the performer's presence. Historically, the actor's craft developed from that of the storyteller, evidenced in the ancient recitation tradition of Homeric epics, folk cycles such as *The Mahabharata*, and tribal myths. The actor's main relationship has therefore always been with the audience, and later, after the emergence of Greek tragedy, also with the other actors on stage. But from the beginning, rapport with the audience was a crucial ingredient in the success of the performance. Elizabethan and Restoration plays, for instance, with their frequent asides and soliloquies, remind us that the actor was expected to be directly aware of the audience.

Historically, the musician's main relationship has been with the instrument, or with spirits and gods through the instrument, as for example among Indonesian gamelan players. In modern times it is also acceptable for the musician to be reading the music in a performance, which is the equivalent of an actor sight-reading on stage, a rare occurrence, even in a solo performance. One consequence is that, post-19th century, the classical musician's mode of performance has tended towards introversion, with an inward-turning focus (see Kemp, 1996, p. 35; Hallam, 2006, p. 125), while the actor's has consistently been towards extroversion. You can't very well have an introverted storyteller, nor an introverted *commedia dell'arte* troupe, but an introverted solo violinist or string quartet is widely accepted. For the classical musician, accuracy of interpretation generally takes precedence over personality.

As has been widely documented, this was not always the case, especially in the 18th century, when composers normally performed their own music and regarded their scores as less than rigid, permitting themselves a certain amount of improvisation. With an increasing reverence for the score and a broadly introverted style of playing, it is nowadays acceptable to appear to ignore the audience during the playing itself. Musicians taking part in the Guildhall projects reinforced this view. The following opinion, as Ford noted, was typical:

St.B.M3: I'm just trying to play the piece how I think it should be played or how I think I should play it. I don't try and be condescending and play it in a sort of more popular manner. (Ford, 2013)

And again, discussing consideration of the audience's needs:

C.I.M1: I've talked with a friend of mine who is a conductor ... He says 'I'm just doing my thing, I'm just conducting or playing and the audience can pick up whatever they want.' (Ford, 2013)

Apart from highlighting the issue of the musician's relationship with the audience and the role of personality, such examples also raise the question: To what extent should personality be actively encouraged at the training stage? Indeed, it may not be helpful for everyone. A very introverted and shy musician, for example, may display great technical mastery, but to be coerced into projecting more 'personality' could undermine that musician's confidence and self-esteem. Clearly, a musician's personality should never distract from the music, but as the above studies have shown, a highly introverted performance is likely to be less successful in engaging the audience fully. It is also relevant to note that some of the

most commercially successful classical musicians in modern times, such as Liberace, Nigel Kennedy and Lang Lang, cultivated extrovert personalities.

The purpose of highlighting the above studies has been to establish the impact of the visual aspects of performance on the audience, and by implication, the influence of the musician's personality. In considering pedagogical solutions, I shall now discuss the process in which two cohorts of postgraduate music students at the Guildhall School of Music & Drama underwent acting exercises, then worked alongside actors at the School and finally performed with them.

What musicians can learn from actors

Methodology

In this practice-based research I was supported by a music improvisation specialist (David Dolan), two research assistants (Biranda Ford, Mirjam James) and a research adviser (John Sloboda). We set out to explore what musicians could learn from working with actors and what impact this might have on their normal sphere of performance.

Our starting premise was that if young musicians in chamber music and solo recitals often look anxious, conveying very little presence or rapport with their audience, their unease is likely to make the audience feel uncomfortable (see above on mirror-neurons). Extending the findings of Juchniewicz (2008) and Behne and Wöllner (2011), this raises an intriguing and under-researched issue: when inhibition is reduced and the musician's sense of enjoyment and play is enhanced, can the audience detect a positive difference in the sound? To explore this we set up a learning environment where the musician could feel completely free to make mistakes, concentrating not on note-perfect technique, but on the personality and emotion in the music. Reflecting Dweck's (2007) research on growth mindset, we encouraged an attitude in the musicians where risk and failure could be seen as acceptable steps towards success.

The 12-week projects were documented on video, and the research assistants interviewed focus groups comprising both the actors and musicians, at the beginning and end of the projects. Several months after the Circus project, I interviewed two of the musicians, discussing the longer-term effects of that project on their repertoire playing. I also interviewed some of their teachers

Engaging with acting techniques

Our first requirement was to get the musicians 'speaking' to each other through their instruments, in other words, following an acting process rather than a conventional musical approach. The musicians, being postgraduates, were at an advanced technical level and had been trained in classical improvisation, which is uncommon among classical music students. As Dolan explained his process, 'For many, the notion of risk-taking and playing without a score will at times contradict their previous way of practicing music. But the exchange of musical dialogues between partners evokes active listening, and enhances openness and reaching out' (Dolan, 2014).

Working alongside Dolan for three half-day sessions I took the musicians through a range of simple acting exercises. The aims were to strengthen the musicians' sense of personality through being physically aware of each other in the space, to help them become more at ease in their bodies (for example by reducing physical tension) and to release their imagination in a physical way. This process involved gently taking them out of their comfort zone to widen their range of expression.

During 30 years of teaching actors internationally, I have demonstrated with successive cohorts that one of the most effective ways of developing imagination, presence and personality in actors is to encourage them initially to find a level of physical exaggeration through simple games and exercises (Rea, 2014a). This can later give actors a sense of ease and confidence when performing less flamboyant actions, or when executing moments of energised stillness on stage (see Pisk, 1975, p. 10). One aim of the projects was to test the extent to which that kind of ease could be useful to musicians.

A typical exercise was 'sound and movement', which concerns transformation. The performers stand in a large circle. One person creates a pattern of sound and movement, using large but simple movements and open vocal sounds. This pattern is passed on to someone else in the circle, who mirrors that exactly, then creates a new pattern of sound and movement (for a fuller description of this exercise see Rea, 2015). The first attempts at this game were awkward because the musicians were not used to expressing themselves in such an extrovert manner. With practice they gradually found more courage and relaxation. The power of games such as this is that they can raise energy levels and nurture a sense of enjoyment in a highly physical manner. In the conservatoire context, where learning and making music is normally a serious and pressurised process, the concept of having fun initially surprised these musicians.

Transitions to music-making

With an acting teacher and a music teacher working alongside each other, as we did, it was possible to make a connection between the acting games and music-making. For example, we adapted the 'sound and movement' game to be played with instruments: each musician passed on a musical phrase to the next person, who then transformed it. Because they had just been working in a highly physical way, it became relatively easy for the musicians to become more physically expressive in their music communication.

Later, we applied acting 'objectives' to music-making, often with remarkable results. The 'objective' is a technique developed by the Russian teacher and director Stanislavsky (see Hodge, 2000, p. 11; Alfreds, 2007, p. 48). It is essentially a want or intention, directed at the other person: for instance, 'I want to dominate you', 'I want to calm you down', 'I want to win your confidence'. Objectives are widely used in actor-training but their application to musical performance has no precedent that I could find.

In a typical example a violinist played a fragment of a Bach partita. He then repeated this, directing the music to another student, but this time focusing on a given objective: 'I want to cheer you up'. While the notes were the same, the music became noticeably lighter with a more flexible rhythm. We then suggested different objectives – 'I want to seduce you'; 'I want to threaten you' – which in turn gave the playing more legato, more attack and so on. Significantly, the playing of the music instantly became an acting exercise, with

the musician communicating through his eyes and body as if literally speaking to the other person, but with the language of Bach. Just as actors aim for ownership of a text, making it appear as if the words are their own thoughts, so this musician gained ownership of the music through a freer interpretation that conveyed a high level of technical virtuosity: it became his own.

'Talking' to the actors

When the musicians began working with the actors, the immediate requirement was to find a workable level of communication. One exercise, developed during the project, involved a dialogue between an actor and a clarinetist. The actor started the scene: 'I've been waiting here for ages. Where have you been?' The musician responded through her clarinet with a short musical phrase that appeared to answer the question. Interpreting this response, the actor spoke and that in turn was answered by the musician. The task was to have a coherent conversation across the two modes: music and speech. Sometimes this produced little more than a friendly conversation; at other times it led to a more emotionally powerful scene with an element of character conflict. This affected the musician's performance in a number of ways. There was strong eye contact and a wide range of facial expressions, as well as a stronger sense of 'acting' through the music.

One explanation for this behaviour is that when the musician had such a strong impulse to 'speak' through the instrument and was literally thinking in words, or at least specific thoughts, she compensated for the lack of words by instinctively making her body more animated. This in turn affected the expressiveness of the sound. Significantly, the specificity of the thought was strong enough to allow suspension of disbelief (when performers imagine themselves to be the character) and overcome any inhibition the musician might normally have had.

Playing with the actors

The next stage involved the musicians playing together physically with the actors, by joining the actors' warm ups and improvisation exercises. To begin with, the musicians worked alongside the actors, as actors. Later they provided music as well. The aim was to help the musicians find more physical freedom as a way of nurturing their imagination. There were mutual benefits: the actors also learnt to appreciate and use the possibilities of musical pulse, rhythm, pitch, loudness and timbre in the context of physical action. Initially some of the musicians were intimidated by working alongside the more extrovert actors. As one of them later commented:

C.I.M3: musicians tend to be very inward as people and when you compare them to the actors, there's an even bigger contrast. (Ford, 2013)

The core of this work involved emotional risk and the concept of risk-taking proved to be novel to the musicians. For actors, it is fundamental to the ethos of their training (Johnstone, 1999; Alfreds, 2007). Given the conditions I have described there was frequent laughter in the room. The musicians' eyes expressed warmth as everyone engaged with each other.

Spurred on by the bravery of the actors, who were also being pushed out of their comfort zone, the musicians seemed to find more courage to enjoy making music in an uninhibited way.

Performing with the actors

The goal of both projects was to create devised performances with a balance of words, action and music. The musicians were to be actively involved in an integrated way, where possible moving around in the space, exploiting the physical possibilities of their instrument and acting alongside the actors with confidence, presence and personality. I shall describe briefly how each project was structured and how the performances worked.

Storytelling

The initial sessions introduced both actors and musicians to various techniques for dramatising myths and legends. About half way through the project the students selected stories to take forward into performance. The actors formed four groups of six, with two musicians attached to each group. Because the work was self-devised, the fluidity of this process necessitated a positive rapport between all group members in order to create a coherent performance.

Because the stories were text-led, rather than action-led, there was more pressure on the musicians to be assertive with their ideas in order to give more status to the music. When they achieved this, actors and musicians learnt to perform in a highly integrated manner, sometimes sharing the spoken dialogue, so that it was occasionally not obvious who was a musician and who was an actor. That became one of the indicators of the success of the project.

Circus

The weekly sessions (supported by an acrobatics teacher) began with a physical warm up leading to light acrobatics and basic circus skills, such as balancing, throwing and catching objects, or using climbing ropes and wall bars. These skills were applied to short, devised circus acts in small groups. To provoke their creativity and discourage an over-reliance on intellect, the students were given a series of simple tasks, all carried out under pressure of time and immediately performed to the rest of the group. For example: an eight-second acrobatic composition comprising a run, a roll, two jumps, a catch and a fall, prepared in three minutes. Juxtaposing apparently unrelated elements proved a highly effective way of stimulating creativity. After several classes with the actors, almost all of the musicians exhibited more extrovert behavior and a relative lack of inhibition that enabled their personality to be projected positively.

In the later classes, more time was given to rehearsal, in which the actors, in groups of two or three, with one or two musicians, devised short circus acts, lasting between two and three minutes. Because these pieces were led by action, the musicians found it easier to integrate physically in each act. While the music itself was initially improvised in rehearsal, the musicians composed motifs so that they could arrive at a more sophisticated score.

Reactions

When each project was performed, what most surprised the musicians was the highly animated reaction of the audience of about 60 people. As well as applause, this included laughing, gasping and cheering, in sharp contrast to the customary hushed atmosphere of the concert hall. As some of the musicians later reflected:

C.FG.M4: you're used to sitting on a platform and it gets all very serious and professional . . . it was really a good experience as a performer to feel that closeness with the audience.

C.FG.M3: it surprised me that [the audience] were so responsive, like vocally responsive, so when you did something funny or impressive, you would get calls or laughter and that was something new for me.

C.FG.M5: we kind of had to be very present and get a connection with the audience – that's how I felt. (Ford, 2013)

General discussion

Both projects challenged the musicians' propensity to introversion in a number of ways. They were required to be acting, to project a greater range of personality while playing music, and to avoid self-consciousness. One measure of the success of our pedagogical aims was the fact that in both performances, the musicians maintained the necessary concentration in the face of a radically different audience reaction from what they were used to. They therefore achieved the unusual task of simultaneously making music, moving with fluency, speaking dialogue when called upon and above all, finding a level of personality on stage that sometimes matched that of the actors.

The relative lack of inhibition was partly because the musicians were using similar processes to the actors: serving a specific narrative and making that clear to an audience. For actors, the bottom-line question – Are we telling the story? – is a powerful means of taking the pressure off oneself by concentrating on the content that is being communicated to the audience (Johnstone, 1999). For musicians, being mostly used to expressive rather than narrative structures, the actor's process proved to be liberating in terms of projecting personality.

Difficulties and shortcomings

Exposing musicians to acting techniques has clear benefits and is relatively easy to set up. Nor is the idea especially new. From his own work with music students, Kemp 'witnessed the beneficial impact that first-hand experience in another expressive art, particularly dance or drama, can exercise on a student's musical imagination' (1996, p. 253).

The impact may be greatly accelerated when musicians work alongside actors, but this is less easy to achieve. Although numerous music conservatoires share their campuses with acting courses (for example, the Sibelius Academy in Helsinki and the Royal Conservatoire of Antwerp), it is hard to get musicians and actors working together, mainly because of timetable incompatibilities. Actors work to a fixed timetable, almost exclusively in class

groups. Musicians on the other hand have a more fluid timetable: alongside one-to-one teaching they may have orchestral rehearsals, recitals, or even performances in international competitions during their training, all of which provide their own pressures (Burland, 2005). However, in the case of the Guildhall projects, those musicians who were most regularly present showed a marked development in the expression of their personality, which was also noted by their principal study teachers. A viable solution to the timetable challenge would be to set up short-term intensive collaborations, say of one or two weeks, where everyone could be committed to be present all the time.

While this process has strong benefits for most musicians (see below: Back to the concert platform), it is important to acknowledge that it is not necessarily right for everyone. Musicians with a highly introverted personality style (Kemp, 1996) may feel threatened when invited to make leaps out of their comfort zone. For example, in the Circus project one enthusiastic musician suddenly withdrew when he became worried that the sexually suggestive content in one of the acts would compromise his strongly Christian principles.

Furthermore, because of the spontaneity of the creative environment in which these projects take place, the musicians need first to be properly trained in improvisation, because they are required to think on their feet without written music. For the musician who has not been prepared for the demands of making up the notes on the spot, this could be stressful. And finally, as well as collaborative learning, these projects also require collaborative teaching because, in a predominantly acting environment the musicians still need input on the technical aspects of the music they are creating. That is not always economically possible. But when the challenges are met and the difficulties overcome, it is evident that the collaboration between musicians and actors can produce highly positive results that enable musicians to take a significant step towards projecting a more extrovert personality as one route towards peak performance.

Outcomes

When interviewed after the projects, the majority of the musicians considered that they had experienced major shifts in the projection of personality and a significant boost to their self-confidence (Ford, 2013). Their informal comments during the classes and after the performances also suggested that they felt higher levels of motivation and were able to bring more fun to music-making than they had been accustomed to. For a discussion of motivational challenges among conservatoire musicians, see Burland (2005). Dolan (2014) noted, 'By working together with actors, the musicians gained a stronger awareness of stage presence, communication with their fellow performers as well as the audience, and managing risk-taking.'

My observations indicated that by the end of the projects most of the musicians had become more physically released and expressive. They learned to project more personality through their playing and they made connections with the actors' process, where dramatic performance requires communicating a narrative with specificity. As Ford notes, 'Many music students reported that working with actors showed them a different way to think about performance and to prepare for it; one student described her music training as being about 'technique and music', whilst the actors 'seem to consider kind of a spectrum of

issues' (St.A.M1)' (Ford, 2013). This view is supported by Kemp who asserts that, 'if a higher education in music is to be truly educational, it may need to take a broader view on the way in which music relates to other areas of human experience' (Kemp, 1996, 255).

Back to the concert platform

While these collaborations may lead to significant breakthroughs, the efficacy of the process depends on its impact on future performances that the musicians will go on to give. Can the exposure to acting techniques help produce better musicians on the concert platform? Will the musicians feel freer and more creative as artists? Will they be able to communicate the music more vividly with a stronger presence? And considering Juchniewicz's study, will they appear more attractive to the audience? The final part of the projects allowed the musicians and their teachers to reflect on the process, and note any changes that might have occurred in their repertoire playing.

Interviewed nine months after the Circus project, one musician recalled a recital that he had later given professionally in Barcelona:

M1: So the first concert I did after that, I was just going onto the stage and I was thinking, okay, this is my first Mozart project and this is important and the audience don't know me, blah blah blah. And I just thought, okay, so let's think about it, you know. This is a game, let's give it all to them. And while I'm there, let's try to be in the flow and at the same time try to be really creative in every aspect, so like physically as well. . . . There was this lady who came to me and said, 'Today it was quite special what you did.' And I was like, 'Okay'. She had seen me many times before. . . . So I started thinking and probably this experience of working with the actors, who are very much in the moment – and I think they have to be – I think as musicians we have to be too, but maybe sometimes we don't. So I think that really affected me. And I think they [the audience] could feel that too. (Rea & Dolan, 2012)

In an interview 10 months after the Circus project, another musician, who had taken part in both projects, noticed in her performances the effects of relaxation:

M2: I'm definitely more free and open in comparison to almost two years ago when I first started with any improvisation. . . . The impact from the Circus project is that we are more flexible with our bodies and can be more relaxed at any given moment. And that is something very important when we are on the concert platform, that we know what we are doing, that we can relax more and enjoy the atmosphere. (Rea & Dolan, 2012)

Reflecting on their experience, both musicians expressed a radical shift in their attitudes to making music, especially with regard to risk-taking:

M2: It's amazing and sometimes shocking because they're [the actors] so open and they're so active with their bodies . . . To most musicians, and especially instrumentalists I have to say, we are more rigid. (Rea & Dolan, 2012)

M1: Being in the Circus project pretty much changed my approach to music. All of a sudden you see music as a game and you actually live it like that. (Rea & Dolan, 2012)

Conclusions

One result of these projects was that some of the musicians returned to the concert platform with a heightened sense of rapport in the way they communicated with each other during performance and with audiences. The perceptions of the students' own music teachers are therefore relevant here. As one head of department at the Guildhall School observed, more than a year after the projects:

The Storytelling and Circus projects have been influential on two students, percussionist [X] and clarinettist [Y]. Both of them found confidence in expressing ideas with greater coherence, and also in being adventurous in planning artistic projects – trusting their instincts, in fact. They are quite different musicians [now], both have a heightened sense of self-knowledge as a result of their involvement, and both brought this back to their mainstream work with tangible benefits for themselves and their colleagues. (Rea, 2013)

A music tutor who supervised a subsequent cohort of the Circus project observed that:

It has been apparent that some have been able to transfer the skills they honed there [the Circus project], and have subsequently trusted their instincts more in improvisation lessons, which simply leads to higher quality music making. (Rea, 2014b)

The long-term effects of collaborating with actors, need further testing. However, the comments of the above musicians and teachers, nearly a year later, indicate that musicians continued to implement the principles learnt, in both their solo and ensemble work. Indeed, maintaining the sense of ensemble, in which there is personality and rapport, remains an ongoing challenge for musicians, especially in larger groups. Strong rapport between musicians has been a characteristic of more innovative ensembles, such as the Orchestra of the Age of Enlightenment or the Orpheus Chamber Orchestra, though I suggest that ensembles such as these are unified by a particular ethos that challenges that of orthodox orchestras (Sloboda & Ford, 2012). Part of the difficulty of achieving rapport may be symptomatic of the conservatoire training process, in which musicians spend most of their time practising or playing in isolation. As one of the participants observed:

C.1.M3: Well if you have to be communicative and play for the public and you're too shy then it doesn't get through, and that's very, very often the case for people who study music in a conservatory and maybe we don't have so many chances to really perform and I would say 95 per cent you play/practise alone in a room and that makes it very difficult to project. (Ford, 2013)

This reflects Kemp's assertion that, 'It is also probable that such extended periods of isolation, engaged in frequently, may also exercise the effect of rendering such persons more introverted' (Kemp, 1996, p. 40).

One of the most significant results of the collaborations was a fundamental change of thinking on the part of the musicians, both in how they saw their relationships together

and their relationship with the audience. As Ford comments: 'That musicians' training contributed to them being less "open" emerged as a common theme amongst students':

C.I.M2: it was very obvious as a musician to see these actors with very little self-consciousness . . . It was a reminder for me about the need to open up on stage. (Ford, 2013)

The way forward

Further research is needed to track these musicians through their repertoire playing over the next few years. If the collaboration had a noticeable positive effect on the playing of some of them, this suggests that it could be productive for other conservatoires to consider a similar process. Not only would this greatly widen the field of research; it might affect the career prospects of graduating musicians. As Sloboda notes:

There is one very compelling justification for exposing students to this way of working, and this is that such 'crossover' projects are becoming more common in the professional world that musicians and actors inhabit, and therefore it advantages students to enter the professional world with experience of such work. (Sloboda, 2010)

Like most radical ideas though, the collaboration between actors and musicians can also have a divisive impact in less forward-looking conservatoires: it challenges, even threatens the exclusively technique-based approach to training. But in a confident institution this need not happen. Surely the two approaches can exist healthily side by side, complementing each other rather than posing a mutual threat.

As I suggested at the beginning of this article, music teachers should continually look for innovative ways of producing peak performance, which means having an open mind about all aspects of the training. In this spirit, more conservatoires might explore their own ways of introducing acting techniques to music training so that, over time, more information can be shared, leading to new processes and the wider acceptance of the idea that personality is an important component of peak performance.

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Notes

- 1 See the front page of The Daily Telegraph, 10 July 2012. It featured a highly glamorous photograph of the young violinist, Nicola Benedetti.
- 2 However, as Mehrabian cautiously noted, this ratio will sometimes be altered by the context in which the message is delivered.

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