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## Empathy in Piano Duet Rehearsal and Performance

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**ABSTRACT:** This article explores the concept of empathy within the construct of the piano duet. Analysis of data created through reflective writing following each of eight rehearsals revealed bodily, verbal, emotional, and cognitive empathy concerning increasing instinctive understanding and tacit communication, unspoken conflict resolution, and the development of creative empathy in relation to the piece of music being rehearsed. The findings highlight the importance of empathy in developing fluidity of roles in rehearsal and in the creation of a “safe space” for musical collaboration.

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**KEYWORDS:** *empathy, piano duet, rehearsal, performance, reflection, intersubjectivity*

RESEARCH has increasingly expanded understanding of empathy in relation to domains including psychology (Ickes, 2011), psychotherapy (Lichtenberg, Bornstein, & Silver, 1984; Dekeyser, Elliott, & Leijssen, 2011), education (Feshbach & Feshbach, 2011), and musical interaction (Laurence, 2009; Cross, Laurence, & Rabinowitch, 2012; Rabinowitch, Cross, & Burnard, 2012). Although authors tend to display agreement concerning the key components involved in empathy, noting that it requires “(a) an affective response to another person, which often, but not always, entails sharing that person’s emotional state; (b) a cognitive capacity to take the perspective of the other person; and (c) emotion regulation” (Decety & Jackson, 2006, p. 54), possibilities for varying perspectives and interpretations abound (see Batson, 2011). Empathy can be “presented simultaneously as a capacity, a process, and an expression” (Reed, 1984, p. 12); it can also be viewed as functioning as a “bottom-up” response which is “perceptual or sensory driven” (Eisenberg & Eggum, 2011, p. 71) evidenced through neuroscientific observation of the work of mirror neurons (Pfeifer, Iacoboni, Mazziotta, & Dapretto, 2008; Shamay-Tsoory, 2011), and as a “top-down” response which is “cognitive or attributionally driven” (Eisenberg & Eggum, 2011, p. 71). Empathy has been defined as a form of receptivity and as a form of understanding (Agosta, 1984). However, empathy also involves communication (Davis, 1994). This is acknowledged in the definition of empathy as the “ability to identify what someone else is thinking or feeling and to respond to their thoughts and feelings with an appropriate emotion” (Baron-Cohen, 2011, p. 11).

In music, empathy has been discussed in relation to cooperative music-making and intercultural understanding (Laurence, 2009), musical group interaction (Cross, Laurence, & Rabinowitch, 2012; Rabinowitch, Cross, & Burnard, 2012), within the study of ensemble rehearsal (Goodman, 2002; Williamon & Davidson, 2002; Davidson & King, 2004; King, 2004; Ginsborg & King, 2007; Seddon & Biasutti, 2009) and within the learning of popular and jazz musicians (Green, 2002; Seddon, 2005). Common to these studies are views of empathy as fundamental to creating cooperation and collaboration, involving “the connecting of one person’s (or group’s) imagination with that of another” (Laurence, 2009, p. 6) in which non-power based empathic relationships enable enhancement, rather than restriction or limitation of the other’s possibilities. Tolerance of variation of preferences and attitudes can be facilitated by empathy, for example, in the development of popular music bands, in which “reading off people” allows shared understanding of feelings and concerns (Green, 2002, p. 116). This is analogous to classical chamber music where “quartet players feed off each other” (Murnighan & Conlon, 1991, p. 166). Laurence noted empathy’s value as “a way both of *overcoming* perceptions of dissimilarity, and of *accepting* others’ difference” (Laurence, 2009, p. 8; emphasis in original), which is reinforced in the findings of Triantafyllaki and Anagnostopoulou (2013) in relation to music students’ engagement with the community.

Empathy can be evidenced in various ways. Cognitive empathy, involving “the ability to engage in the cognitive process of adopting another’s psychological point of view” (Shamay-Tsoory, 2011, p. 215) may include verbal empathy, created through “the affective sharing of self” and maintaining self-identity while adopting the other’s perspective (Bozarth, 2011, p. 109). This can be utilized in the discussion of working methods and performance choices (Green, 2002). Affective or emotional empathy is “activated by other people’s expression of emotion and is founded on one’s own understanding of specific situations that might stimulate various emotional responses” (Watson & Greenberg, 2011, p. 133), which may play an essential role in the bonding of the musical group (Davidson & King, 2004). Embodied or gestural empathy, which may include unconscious postural mimicry and mirroring of facial expressions and mannerisms (Gueguen, Jacob, & Martin, 2009), may create a sense of cohesion in rehearsal and performance (Williamon & Davidson, 2002) as well as in experimental conditions (Leman, 2010). Mimicry may extend further in musical performance to include overt imitation between players of musical motifs and gestures that are presented as part of the notation, occurring within simultaneous or successive passages. These musical opportunities for mimicry enhance the notion that mimicry may contribute to enhancing “pro-social” behaviors through encouraging “similarity in behavior, cognition, and feeling” (van Baaren, Decety, Dijksterhuis, van der Leij, & van Leuwen, 2011, p. 38). Furthermore, empathic contagion may be created through emotional response to music (Juslin & Västfjäll, 2008), which could be reinforced through co-performers’ bodily and cognitive responses. These empathic processes may contribute to a sense of “affiliation” (Douglas, 1993), which strengthens the sense of the group as a whole, enabling the creation and realization of shared musical goals (Davidson & King, 2004).

The various dimensions of empathy appear to play a large part in creating musical collaborations operating in a range of genres. However, there remains scope to extend understanding of empathy in relation to musical partnership. This research explores the concept of empathy within the rehearsal and performance of the piano duet, examining empathic processes between co-performers involved in a concurrent process of rehearsal and shared reflective writing.

### **Issues Arising From The Format of The Piano Duet**

The piano duet format has a number of features that are particularly relevant to questions of empathy within musical performance. The most obvious of these are physical: duetting pianists are unique within chamber ensembles in sharing a single instrument. This situation creates not only an unusual level of physical proximity, but also a high level of musical interdependence between the performers. The context creates several physical constraints: each pianist only has access to around half the keyboard; their seating position is no longer central; players often have to work hard to avoid each other’s hands and arms; moreover, one pianist has to relinquish sole control of the pedal, a crucial (and often instinctive) element in any player’s armory.

Beyond these physical constraints are further musical ones. Much of the piano duet repertoire consists of orchestral arrangements which often make little or no separation between the two players, distributing middle-register chordal material between *primo* (first player) and *secondo* (second player) as if it were between left and right hand. There is thus frequently an implicit expectation that the two pianists should be functioning not as individual players but as a single unit. Even where the compositional writing does not demand this level of unity, each player is still highly dependent on the other for successful tonal balance and clarity.

This points towards a high level of complementarity between the roles of the two players. Although traditionally the *primo* takes the lead there is no real reason for this, apart from the (arguably unnecessary) tendency to allow the melodic line to dictate the interpretation. In larger ensembles the benefits of having a defined leadership role are understandable, but in the case of a duo of equal instruments (neither of purely “accompanimental” role) this kind of clarity of roles is much less obviously useful. In practice, through this research project there was rarely any clearly defined “leader” of a rehearsal.

## METHOD

### Rehearsal and Reflective Writing

The two pianist-researchers were known to each other already from a teacher–student relationship that had come to an end six years previously; we both had both continued to work in the same department in the intervening years, and had considerable experience of piano performance and teaching, particularly in an ensemble context; however, we had not previously worked together as a duet partnership. After meeting to discuss potential research/performance ideas, we then met eight times over a period of four months to rehearse a piano duet version of Beethoven’s Symphony no. 2. Discussion of possible research interests in conjunction with the learning process took place during the first rehearsal, at which it was agreed that we would jointly create a reflective diary. Although writing a shared diary has, to our knowledge, not previously been used as a tool to gather data in this area of research, we felt it had certain advantages over other methods of data collection: for example, enabling immediacy of data entry following rehearsals, freedom for issues to emerge, the possibility for dialogue and cycles of expansion, and in-depth discussion of issues arising. We agreed not to place any limits on topics, means of expression or length of writing, and made entries after each rehearsal, which were often followed by a chain of responses and further reflections. This process generated over 15,000 words.

Reflection can enable consideration of the processes of learning, critical review, generation of theory, personal development, decision-making, resolution of uncertainty, empowerment, and emancipation (Moon, 1999, p. 23). Through writing it was possible not only to discuss practical arrangements such as schedules, but also to articulate and elaborate ideas, to clarify viewpoints and attitudes, to discuss abilities and feelings, to affirm ideas, behaviors, processes, and the project itself, and to witness progression of a musical project as well as individual and joint understanding. The “synergy” (Saltiel, 1998, p. 8) created through intense collaborative experiences appears to help build mutual trust and a stronger “emotional base” to support on-going learning (Peel & Shortland, 2004, p. 56). In this case, early recognition of the privilege of open access to the thoughts of the co-participant motivated investment and re-investment in the activities of writing and rehearsal, thereby establishing mutual recognition and appreciation of the value of both the project and of the participants.

### Data Coding and Analysis

After a period of several months in which the pianist-researchers maintained a critical distance from the body of writing and from further rehearsal, the participants met to discuss empathy and to structure the process of data coding and analysis. In order to remain open to the generation of codes, it was agreed not to use pre-selected codes applied from other literature as definitions of empathy might arise from the data that were not present elsewhere. After individually coding a pre-defined portion of text the codes were compared. While there was general agreement, some portions of data related to more than one code and therefore posed some challenges in categorization. The process was repeated with subsequent sections of text. The final codes emerged as: bodily empathy (including gesture, seating positions); cognitive empathy (including verbal and written empathy), emotional empathy; instances of instinctive empathic understanding; empathy relating to complementary skills and priorities, and empathy in relation to pre-emptive resolution of possible conflicts. At a further meeting, possible outlines for writing were discussed, arriving at the following structure: 1) delineation of relevant issues arising from the piano duet format; 2) examples of empathy drawn from the reflective writing; 3) discussion of empathy as a facilitative tool. Where diary extracts are used in the text, “M” (*primo*) and “L” (*secondo*) are used to distinguish the co-participants.

## DISCUSSION

### Developing Empathy and Communication: Two Case Studies

Two examples from the early stages of the rehearsal process demonstrate the vital role which negotiation and empathic experimentation played in establishing a working partnership. The most immediate issue was

to do with physical gesture. The first session demonstrated marked differences in the playing styles of the two pianists:

(L, 5<sup>th</sup> February): [M] is a much more gestural player than I am...it obviously helps ensemble, though perhaps we can look at whether we always need a big “lead in” or whether we can be more subtle about some of them?

M had noted the ease of rhythmic co-ordination in his diary, but had not noticed the discrepancy between our gestures. In response, he became concerned that

(M, 7<sup>th</sup> February): ...it does potentially constrain your freedom to take the lead at times where it would be beneficial, simply because my more overtly gestural manner might end up taking over without me meaning it to.

As a result, we decided to experiment with a subtler approach to gesture in the next rehearsal, but this was notably unsuccessful:

(M, 22<sup>nd</sup> February): I decided to try and be more understated, because I didn’t want my gestures to get in the way of natural musical expression—but the result was that at first our ensemble was a lot less secure... and I also felt quite constrained in my playing. Once we talked a bit about the gestural side, and agreed that we’d both noticed this, I decided to revert more to my previous style, and that seemed to work a lot better...I do just tend to move around a lot naturally in playing, and trying not to “overdo” this ends up with my playing suffering as a result of the sense of physical constraint.

This realization was a pivotal moment in our handling of this issue. From this point onwards, we very rarely discussed issues of physical gesture in rehearsal; instead, we both seem to have accepted that our different approaches were complementary rather than conflicting. However, discussion was very important for building a sense of trust: M’s attempts to tone down his gestures emphasized the desire to establish an equal partnership where neither player dominates, and confirms other research findings that duet players adapt to coalesce their styles of movement (Williamson & Davidson, 2002).

The second issue concerned the use of the pedal. Once again, it quickly became apparent that we had different instinctive preferences: after the second session, L noted that

(L, 22<sup>nd</sup> February): [M] at one point said something about “full-blown romantic” whereas I’d say I’m coming at it at it from a more classical HIPPP style.

These preferences were compounded by technical issues: M had noted in an earlier diary entry that he often tended to use pedal to cover up poor *legato* and other potential problems, and as a *primo*, losing this resource carried the potential for some embarrassment. Again, the discrepancy of approaches was resolved through a combination of discussion and experimentation. M wrote:

(M, 22<sup>nd</sup> February): At one point, I felt like I wanted some pedal in a decorative passage but that it was impractical (because it was too fast) for [L] to pedal it for me; so we tried swapping and me having the pedal.

This experiment was powerful for both players:

(L, 22<sup>nd</sup> February): We had a fun experience with [M] pedaling—and it was definitely good to try it, although my playing felt extremely weird with it out of my control! ...I realized more powerfully what it feels like to need pedal and not have it, so developing our collective feeling for more lush or resonant moments is going to be important.

Meanwhile, for M the experiment helped to reveal the interpretative and ensemble issues underpinning his approach to pedaling:

(M, 22<sup>nd</sup> February): I think the pedal sound of the piano (or even just the idea of using pedal) opens up a more rubato, Romantic mindset, whereas when I can't use it at all I tend to seize up a bit and think in more organ-like, restrained terms—partly, perhaps, because I'm anxious not to let any notes off too early... I think part of my response to this is to relax a bit more in the duet situation, knowing that the pedal will be used when needed, so I don't need to hold everything organ-style (and be willing to talk to [L] if it should feel a bit dry at any stage).

For both players, this experiment, and the dialogue which followed it, both within rehearsal and later in the diary entries, was crucial in developing a sense of intersubjectivity: the awareness that each player was thinking about the other's needs and able to communicate their own. This fits well with Rabinowitch, Cross, and Burnard's (2012, p. 111) notion of a "merged subjectivity," where the fluid sharing of intentions, emotions and cognitive processes through various forms of empathy brings players to the point where they are able to make decisions as a unit and even to experience each other's senses as their own. In this situation, through conscious experimentation we were able to experience "empathic attunement," which occurs "when musicians are able to decentre and see things from other musical perspectives" (Seddon, 2005, p. 50). L experienced this as a growing empathic awareness of the discomfort a *primo* player can experience when they do not have access to the pedal. For M, it was the awareness that pedaling can and should be discussed together; moreover, there was a more fundamental realization that a kind of "merged subjectivity" was crucial to successful duetting as a *primo*, since without this kind of instinctive trust it is all too easily to think soloistically, playing "organ-like" as if there were no-one pedaling at all.

This illustrates a fluidity of roles that was crucial throughout the rehearsal process. Indeed, frequent role-switching was such an obvious feature that it was noted in the reflective diaries from quite an early stage. In a sense, the division of roles which the piano duet necessitates carries over into the rehearsal process: just as players have to divide up the keyboard, the pedal, and the physical space of the piano between them, so likewise the two participants in this project seemed to discover and rely upon certain complementary musical strengths and priorities throughout the rehearsal process. Growing awareness and integration of these balanced roles was highly reliant on the exploration of various kinds of empathic processes.

### EMPATHY AS A FACILITATIVE TOOL

Empathic processes concerning cognitive, bodily, and verbal empathy thus appear to be significant in managing some of the unique challenges presented by the piano duet format. In the second part of this article we explore the concept of empathy as a facilitative tool, contributing towards the construction of shared concerns, facilitating socio-emotional connections, the development of flow, and pre-emptive resolution of potential conflict.

#### Construction of Shared Concerns

Empathy appeared to facilitate the construction of shared concerns, which included documenting the rehearsal process and discussing possible research as well as creating a shared conception of the musical material. Empathy was an active part of the individual learning processes of both players, (evidenced through diary comments concerning thinking the other part while practicing one's own part) and during the rehearsal process, where it related to interpretative choices as well as to technical and cognitive processes. This opened up space for creative dialogue:

(M, 22<sup>nd</sup> Feb): It was really good to be able to talk through things like phrasing, because it helped me understand better why we'd naturally tend to do things a bit differently... It was great to be able to think through some of these issues of interpretation together and

come up with the beginnings of a unified conception for some quite close details and also for longer-range shapes.

This led to a strong sense of becoming a working unit; not merely two players rehearsing together, but a partnership bound by a strong relationship:

(L, 1<sup>st</sup> March): Even though we have talked a lot about the music, and our playing, we seem to be becoming a working unit through something more than those two things. I suppose it's an understanding of support—that it's always going to be mutually present. I suppose also we are both seeing more clearly that what we say has a positive effect—even if it's ultimately a suggestion that we reject, the fact that it was made contributes to our understanding of the piece and of the duet partnership.

This commitment to mutual encouragement and positive discussion provided a backdrop against which some fundamental shared musical concerns could also arise, evidenced by their frequent recurrence in the diaries. Some of these were quite localized, such as the handling of balance between the two parts and the control of dynamics and momentum through particular passages; others were broader and more far-reaching, such as the issue of how to manage the “thick,” orchestral texture of the arrangement, and what kind of approach to take to sonority, ornamentation, and *rubato*. These common interests were clearly highly valued by the two players:

(M, 7<sup>th</sup> Feb): ...even just the feeling of playing with someone whose awareness of the musical possibilities of a passage is at least as sophisticated as mine (and, I would say, far more so in terms of conscious awareness at least) is very encouraging.

(L, 22<sup>nd</sup> Feb): It is great to talk about the piece's structure and our interpretive choices with somebody who clearly enjoys doing this as much as I do, and whose insights and manner of expressing them are so positive!

### Socio-Emotional Role of Empathy

As the two previous extracts suggest, empathy also plays a valuable socio-emotional role in this context. Empathy emerged through the shared enjoyment and processes of meeting, rehearsing and writing, but was also important as a tool in “leveling” our relationship, which had evolved from a former teacher–student construct. This was discussed at various points through diary entries:

(L, 22<sup>nd</sup> Feb): I definitely went into “teacher mode” when we got to the final line of the introduction, and made a few technical suggestions for the left hand trills which hopefully might make them as good as the right hand ones... It didn't feel like a bad thing at the time because [M] is open to anything, but I probably should have waited because I'm sure he would have sorted them out on his own!

(M's response, 22<sup>nd</sup> Feb): I thought it was funny what you said about “teacher mode” because when you were making suggestions about those trills it did bring to mind what you'd said in the previous email about the old teacher-student relationship and I found that it felt more like a “lesson” for a moment—I nearly mentioned it in the diary entry, but it didn't really seem important enough. The thing is, this wasn't a negative experience for me, because it was genuinely very helpful.

Empathy helped us recognize these moments and develop our relationship into one which was not power-based or hierarchical.

Written empathy was apparent through many instances where the working partnership offered trust, security, freedom to take risks, to explore, experiment. The process of written reflection also allowed us to acknowledge areas of what might have remained unspoken understanding:

(L, 10<sup>th</sup> May): We've got to a point of mutual reliance, expressive understanding, knowledge that whatever happens we'll be fine... I wonder how much writing has contributed to this, because normally I don't think you would ever know such detail of another musician's reflective thinking. It's a privilege to experience this!

Writing the diaries enabled us to reassure, affirm, and appreciate the other player, and to express and develop strong emotional connections that were also reinforced by our shared empathy towards the actual music. This emotional investment was also supported by many of the conversations that took place at the start of rehearsals before playing commenced. Verbal empathy in these instances allowed us to share and connect with the other person as a human being, not just as a musical agent:

(L, 20<sup>th</sup> March): Today we had a session on the second movement, which was preceded by quite a lot of discussion about procrastination and working methods. While others might have considered this not particularly relevant to actually playing the piece, I think that our conversation was very important in helping us feel on the same wavelength. People might think that on a basic level, "partnership" equals time spent rehearsing, but I think that the factors of a shared understanding of approaches to work and learning are probably as important.

(M, 22<sup>nd</sup> April): We started out by chatting about our respective weekends...although it might not seem immediately "relevant" to the music, actually I think it's a very important part of the musical rapport we've developed that we are able to understand where one another is coming from.

This suggests that empathy may operate as a regulatory device that stabilizes and reinforces the duo partnership through not only allowing us to acknowledge and discuss other concerns but also enabling us to "tune in" to each other through processes which may have included unconscious facial, vocal, and postural mimicry allowing "affective sharing of self" (Bozarth, 2011, p. 109), maintaining individual self-identity while adopting the other's perspective. This was reinforced through empathy in the writing process, which allowed us to step into the other's shoes, then to communicate back our feelings and understandings of these shared insights.

## **Flow**

Through analysis of our written empathic reflections, we observed a recurrent process involving the relationship between instinctive understanding and a more cognitive approach. We noted that instances of overthinking were not necessarily helpful, perhaps in fact hindering our capacity for empathy:

(L, 20<sup>th</sup> March): ...whenever I consciously thought about playing really well in time and watching, it was always less successful than just going with the flow. When we talked about this it seemed to be the same for both of us... there's a level beyond listening which is the zone of awareness and anticipation in which things just happen rather than are made to happen.

(M, 22<sup>nd</sup> April): I was also struck again by how much more time we spend playing than talking now... I think this shift has come about partly because we've seen how often a verbal discussion can end up constraining performance, whereas "trying stuff out" and being more instinctive seems to be more successful.

While our shift towards greater amounts of time spent playing than talking reflects the findings of other research (Murnighan & Conlon, 1991), it may be the case that through "overthinking," empathic response became more difficult as the cognitive demands were increased in ways which prioritized notions of accuracy and evaluation as opposed to being able to achieve a "flow" state (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990). Co-performer empathy appears to be a key construct in achieving flow, along with other components including



performance conditions, repertoire, and environment (Waddington, 2013). However, by focusing on achievement and analysis, anxiety levels may rise and thus inhibit flow developing.

### Pre-Emptive Resolution of Potential Conflict

Diary entries revealed that our approaches to preparation for the initial sessions were quite different:

(L, 7<sup>th</sup> February): I usually feel with any ensemble playing that there's no point rehearsing with others unless I know my part pretty well—I don't like wasting rehearsal time/feeling embarrassed if I've gone wrong!

(M, 7<sup>th</sup> February): I note with interest that our approaches towards practice/ensemble situations are pretty much diametrically opposed! You said that you don't like to rehearse with a group until you know a piece well, so as not to hold others up or cause embarrassment; in fact, I find that I often only begin "proper" practice on a piece after I've had a first rehearsal with others.

Goodman identified similarly contrasting approaches towards preparation, and felt that "individuals should be wary of the amount of practice they do on their own in preparation for ensemble work" (Goodman, 2002, p. 157), because this may lead to inflexibility and hinder the collaborative development of shared interpretation. This is confirmed in our diary entries:

(M, 7<sup>th</sup> February): ...often I only feel like I'm really getting the idea of what a piece is really about when I'm playing it in the ensemble.... I find the solo practice of an ensemble piece a bit uninspiring, perhaps because I get so much enjoyment from the sense of shared interpretation/expression you get in a group music-making dynamic; that's partly why I like the idea of cultivating a more conscious approach to interpretation, so that I can use it to motivate me a bit more in my private practice! I think this might actually help with the sense of *dual* ownership of a piece...

(L, 7<sup>th</sup> February): ...we should definitely discuss our different perspectives! Though what you've written makes me wonder whether my kind of approach actually restricts shared evolving interpretation? Hmm, this could be a major point!

Moreover, these issues raise additional questions as to the way in which differences of interpretation are handled in rehearsal. Historical approaches to performance seem far more relaxed than present-day groups in their attitude towards the unity of interpretative details across an ensemble, even when dealing with seemingly fundamental issues such as ensemble co-ordination (Philip, 2004); likewise, Toft noted that singers wishing to emulate historical "bel canto" style "must be prepared to set aside the modern practice of precisely synchronizing the rhythm of the vocal part with that of the accompaniment" (Toft, 2013, p. 83). In our rehearsal, we enjoyed exploring the idea of non-unification:

(L, 1<sup>st</sup> March): It felt good to animate the music through thinking about shape and direction... I particularly enjoyed discussing the textural aspects and liked the fact that we could do our own individual expression to make a more undulating and intriguing expression... Allowing ourselves to experience this kind of diversity actually seems to give us a kind of unity—maybe by realizing that what might seem like beyond the bounds works really well and therefore gives us a green light to do our own thing within the partnership. So by embracing diversity we can be more unified!

While empathy can allow increased sensitivity and awareness to the other's perspective, it also enabled us to articulate differences in what had become a "safe space":

(L, 3<sup>rd</sup> March): The discussion of pianistic and orchestral makes me think that we may have different feelings about the duet version of the symphony, which is interesting, and

not a negative thing at all, as it opens up discussion and therefore leads to experimentation.

(M, 20<sup>th</sup> March): By this stage in our playing together I really enjoy the differences between [L]'s interpretive approach and mine—often I find that what I'd choose to do myself is made much more interesting when it interacts (or occasionally collides) with her choices, and we get something that's a kind of strengthened compromise...sometimes...it's interesting just to try and go all out on our own way, and see where we differ through that—then use that to move towards a shared interpretation which we can both stand behind.

Through expressing these different attitudes we began to identify them as what we described as pre-emptive resolution of potential conflict. In instances of disagreement “the best solutions have been shown to come about through compromise, rather than one individual taking a dictatorial approach” (Davidson & King, 2004, p. 107). Further strategies for managing conflict could include delay, playing the piece in different ways in different performances, and giving control to the person with the lead (Murnighan & Conlon, 1991, p. 177).

Empathy appears to be a vital tool in developing positive ways of discussing and resolving potential issues of divergence, and in promoting active, positive thinking about the processes of shared rehearsal and performance. Furthermore, empathy seems to encourage investment in these processes and therefore in the partnership. Through feeling, thinking, and responding to the other greater resourcefulness and self-awareness develop:

(M, 3<sup>rd</sup> March): It's really beginning to strike me how much of an impact these sessions are having on the way I think about ensemble playing. I don't know how much stems from the freedom and level of discussion in the sessions themselves, but over the last few weeks I've really been thinking about a lot of elements of accompaniment and of my own playing in a different way...it's also got me thinking a bit about the kind of creative dynamic there might be in my own piano teaching... So it's clear that this duet partnership is having an impact on a whole load of other areas of my musical life, which is really encouraging.

(L, 3<sup>rd</sup> March): I'm enjoying the rewards of a kind of communication that doesn't happen in teaching very easily... This feels very positive...and has also encouraged me to think about the way that communication can effect permissiveness or simply block any kind of productive exchange. It has also reminded me that there is a place for “play” within the seriousness of wanting to do something well, and that enabling the human spirit to shine through also enables the musical spirit too.

The openness to different perspectives facilitated by empathy thereby seems to create interest, curiosity, and flexibility, as opposed to defensiveness and rigidity. These factors combine to have a positive effect in performance, where we noted that not only is co-performer communication enhanced by empathic gestures, and through the empathic awareness to gestures that may be an unplanned response to the stress of the performance situation, but empathy also allows for a sense of co-performer trust and security.

## KEY CONCEPTS

Two key concepts emerge from our delineation of empathic processes operating within our co-performer relationship. These are: 1) fluidity of roles, and 2) safe space, both of which are facilitated by empathy.

### Fluidity of Roles

While it has been suggested that in piano duet performance, players “exchange roles, to allow one or other to lead” (Appleton, Windsor, & Clarke, 1997, p. 474), we propose that more complex mechanisms of role exchange occur in this context. In our case, our individual prior experience as instrumental and academic

teachers may have enhanced our awareness of the importance of taking an active role in communicating empathic understanding, thus promoting acceptance and self-esteem when working with students. As Feshbach and Feshbach note (2011, p. 85), teacher–student relationships are analogous to those of therapist/counselor and client. Drawing on Carl Rogers’s model of activities undertaken by the therapist, parallels can be observed when comparing these with those of co-players in the duet context. Activities noted by Rogers include:

1. The therapist entering the private perceptual world of the other;
2. The therapist being sensitive, moment by moment, to the changing felt meanings that flow in the other person;
3. The therapist temporarily living in his/her life, moving about in it delicately without making judgments;
4. The therapist communicating her sensing of the client’s world;
5. The therapist frequently checking with the client regarding accuracy of these sensings, and being guided by the response received (Rogers, 1975, p. 4).

In piano duet playing, each co-performer enters into the private musical world of the other; is sensitive, moment by moment, to the changing felt meanings flowing in the other; momentarily lives in the life of the other; avoids judgments; communicates understandings of the other’s world; checks these and is guided by the response. This produces a cyclic process where both players enter into each other’s worlds while simultaneously expressing their own, responding to each other through playing and through gesture, facial expressions, subsequent verbal (and, in our case, written communication), in a context in which players maintain communication of “empathic understanding and ... unconditional positive regard” (Rogers, 1959, p. 213). The fluidity of the shared experience of these processes means that neither co-performer assumes a role of teacher or learner, therapist/counselor or client, leader or follower, but both share continually in dialogic processes of listening, responding and co-creating a shared musical interpretation. Therefore, the boundaries to open-ended exploration that might be created by a more formal construction of leadership roles become eroded through adopting a process that is “other-*enhancing* rather than restricting or limiting the other’s possibilities” (Laurence, 2009, p. 10; emphasis in original). This not only develops a partnership that is attuned through our empathic understanding and response but also develops individual capabilities and cognition.

### Safe Space

Another factor that had a positive impact on our work together is the creation of a sense of a shared “safe space” in which we developed a musical working relationship that felt unrestricted by questions of possibility or permissions. The idea of “safe space” is significant in contexts including music education (Davis, 2009), music therapy (Bates, 2006), and community music (Higgins, 2007). In literature discussing the functions of empathy in therapy, features emerge which map onto the co-performer relationship. These include the facilitation of: 1) a positive working relationship; 2) the exploration of experiences, attitudes, and assumptions; 3) emotional regulation (Elliott et al., 2004). In therapy, the therapist’s empathic relationship to the client enables the client to feel acknowledged and understood. This is achieved through active listening (Howe, 2013, p. 118) and through the therapist developing “an attitude of *warmth* and *acceptance...congruence* and *authenticity*” (Castonguay & Beutler, 2006, p. 359; emphasis in original). Only when the client feels “safe, supported and heard” (Howe, 2012, p. 117) will the client commit to the relationship (Howe, 2013, p. 110). This could be seen to be analogous to musical rehearsal. If co-performers adopt these pro-social behaviors there is a greater likelihood of a productive relationship developing through individual commitment and mutual investment in the partnership.

These aspects could be reinforced through the presence of four conditions influencing interaction: 1) group assembly (bodily presence); 2) exclusion of outsiders; 3) shared focus of attention; and 4) shared mood or emotional experience (Collins, 2004, p. 48). In musical rehearsal, these conditions are strengthened by the motivation arising from the personal and shared responses to the repertoire being rehearsed, creating an even stronger sense of shared meanings and investment. In our case, the undertaking of a shared reflective diary contributed to the creation of a further dimension of safe space through enabling additional opportunities for empathic attunement. This attunement supported the development of trust, both

in each other and in the process of working together, and can be seen in an extract written after our fifth rehearsal:

(M, 22<sup>nd</sup> April): It's really interesting to compare the way we tend to rehearse now to when we started out—now, little slips are comedy moments which make us laugh, where at first they'd have made us say sorry and feel very embarrassed...I think it's part of the sense of trust that's so important in a duet context. It takes some of the pressure off the playing, because we don't feel like every rehearsal has to be a "performance," or that when we make mistakes we're somehow "letting the team down."

This suggests that through adopting attitudes of warmth, acceptance, congruence, and authenticity both players co-facilitate the development of mutual trust, shared partnership, and teamwork, and through this, create a safe environment in which to experiment, enjoy, and continually re-invest in the partnership.

## CONCLUSION

This study carries a number of implications for both research and practice within the field of ensemble performance. One striking discovery is the effectiveness of the shared diary for tracing these kinds of complex, highly nuanced interactions. This stems perhaps from its unusual combination of detail and openness. No limitations were placed on subject-matter, and the two pianist-researchers were free to write and respond at their leisure, yet the result of this freedom was a number of topics upon which discussions converged, often through chains of increasingly detailed responses and counter-responses where the boundaries between "researcher" and "participant" were usefully blurred. For a topic as fluid and subjective as empathy, this balance of complexity and directness is highly useful in outlining areas for further study.

It is clear from this project that empathy plays a crucial role in establishing a successful and rewarding partnership between performers in an ensemble, particularly one as small and potentially egalitarian as the piano duet. Empathy eases the practical difficulties which can arise with two players at a single instrument, facilitates the construction of shared musical concerns, contributes to the socio-emotional bonding necessary for an equal partnership and for creative "flow," and helps both players to negotiate and resolve possible areas of conflict. The shared reflective writing process that accompanied our rehearsals served in many ways to intensify the empathic aspect of our partnership. The result was the creation of a rehearsal environment where each player felt free to shift between different roles as the musical or personal situation demanded, and to enter to a significant degree into each other's creative world—the "merged subjectivity" to which Rabinowitch, Cross, and Burnard allude (2012, p. 111).

Moreover, and perhaps most significantly, this environment was felt as a "safe space" within which both players felt free to experiment, take risks and make mistakes without fear of embarrassment or judgment—a factor that was crucial in developing creative musical interpretations. Within ensemble performance, then, it is clear that empathic processes can help to unlock players' musical potential, and open up interpretative possibilities which might otherwise stay closed off through lack of discussion or fear of failure. Beyond this arena too, there are implications for performance teaching and coaching more generally. Whilst performance coaching at the highest level through public masterclasses can be characterized by displays of power and dominance, judgment and embarrassment, this research suggests an alternative way of developing creative freedom and originality: through the creation of a "safe" rehearsal and/or teaching space characterized by equality, openness, and freedom, where players are increasingly aware of each others' musical strengths and priorities, liberated to communicate their needs and experiment with different approaches, and able to enjoy and appreciate the shared rehearsal process. Empathy has a powerful role to play in establishing and nurturing this environment.

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