

# The roles of expertise and partnership in collaborative rehearsal

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The cognitive and social processes underlying collaborative rehearsal were explored in a case study using four singer-piano duos, two professional and two student groups. Participants rehearsed one song with their regular partners, a second song with a new partner of the same level of expertise, and a third song with a new partner of a different level of expertise. Verbal discourse during rehearsal was analysed to determine (a) styles of interaction and (b) salient musical dimensions. In the regular and new same-expertise partnerships, the professionals were more likely to give opinions than the students, much of whose talk concerned orientation about the song. In the new mixed-expertise partnerships, the professionals initiated more exchanges and offered more opinions than the students. Socio-emotional behavior reflected tension release, and the pianists gave frequent statements of solidarity to the singers. Basic, interpretive, and expressive musical dimensions were salient, as in previous studies. A range of rehearsal strategies was identified, although the most common was working from the beginning to the end of the song. Future research aims to identify other effective short-term rehearsal strategies and the use of physical gestures in collaborative practice.

*Keywords:* ensemble; rehearsal; collaboration; content analysis; singers

What is the nature of social and musical interaction in collaborative rehearsal? Over the past several decades, musicians' practice strategies have been identified and explored along with the social and cognitive processes underlying them. Much of this work has focused on solo performers, especially pianists (e.g. Chaffin *et al.* 2002) and singers (e.g. Ginsborg 2002). Little research to date has been undertaken to investigate the nature of

collaborative practice, which is surprising given that many musicians work in ensembles as well as independently. The present project builds on existing studies of ensemble rehearsal (e.g. King 2006). The relationships between singers and pianists, and their roles (whether the pianist is coach, accompanist, new or regular duo partner) merit particular attention.

This study investigates differences in short-term performance preparation by singers and pianists of different levels of expertise and familiarity as duo partners. Two research questions were posed: (1) how do musicians of different levels of expertise compare when they collaborate in ensemble rehearsal and performance and (2) how do established and new duo partnerships compare when they collaborate in ensemble rehearsal and performance? An observational case study was carried out using four singer-piano duos: two established professional duos and two established student duos. The participants were asked to prepare a short song individually prior to rehearsing and performing it (1) with their regular duo partner (established/same-expertise), (2) with a new duo partner of the same level of expertise (new/same-expertise), and (3) with a new duo partner of a different level of expertise (new/mixed-expertise).

This paper reports selected findings from the data, specifically the number of verbal exchanges in rehearsals, and content analyses of utterances.

## METHOD

### Participants

Four established singer-piano duos took part, each comprising a female soprano and a male pianist: Amanda and Colin (mean age=68 years, experience together=10 years, expertise level=professional); Isobel and George (mean age=57, experience together=15 years, expertise level=professional); Betty and Robert (mean age=25.5, experience together=2 years, expertise level=student); Sophie and Guy (mean age=21.5, experience together=2 years, expertise level=student). All participants' names are pseudonyms.

### Materials

Three songs by Ivor Gurney (1890-1937) of similar length and level of difficulty were rehearsed (see below). All were unknown to the participants, although they had performed other works by the same composer.

## Procedure

Each participant undertook two sessions lasting around 90 minutes on separate occasions. In session 1, they rehearsed and performed *An Epitaph* with their regular partner; in session 2, they rehearsed and performed *On the Downs* with a partner from the other same-expertise duo. Four participants then undertook a third session in which they rehearsed and performed *I Shall be Ever Maiden* with a partner from a different-expertise duo. Each session was video-recorded.

## RESULTS

The number of verbal exchanges that occurred between episodes of singing and/or playing in each rehearsal was calculated. These varied from as few as 1-2 to 46. The speaker of the first utterance was also noted. Second, each utterance was coded according to two frameworks: (1) Bales's (1999) *Interactive Process Analysis* (IPA) and (2) *musical dimensions* (based on Chaffin *et al.* 2002, Ginsborg *et al.* 2006). Coding of the first rehearsal transcript was made independently by the two researchers and tested for inter-rater reliability using Cohen's kappa: 0.95 (IPA) and 0.97 (musical dimensions). The other transcripts were subsequently shared out and coded independently.

### Verbal exchanges and initiators

The number of verbal exchanges in each 40-minute rehearsal varied from 27 and 62, with one exception. Amanda and Colin (established professional duo) used only half of the available rehearsal time, producing only 13 exchanges, 9 (69%) initiated by Amanda. In the other rehearsals, the singers and pianists initiated roughly equal numbers of exchanges, but in the new mixed-expertise duo rehearsals, the professional participants initiated the majority of exchanges (e.g. George, professional pianist, initiated 71% of exchanges with Betty, student singer).

### Styles of interaction

The following codes were used for the analysis of meta-cognitive statements reflecting positive and negative socio-emotional interaction (examples provided in brackets): agrees ("Yes, I guess so"), shows solidarity ("It's lovely, go on"), tension release (laughs), offers apology ("Sorry, that was me"), disagrees ("I don't see that in the harmony"), shows tension ("Aaargh"). No example of "shows antagonism" (Bales 1999) was found.

In all the duo rehearsals, the bulk of socio-emotional interaction was positive, and utterances were categorized most often as “agrees.” In the established duos, all the singers agreed more often than did their regular pianists. The pattern was more variable for the new same-expertise duos: Guy (student pianist) agreed more often than Betty (student singer); Isobel (professional singer) and Colin (professional pianist) agreed to a similar extent. In the new mixed-expertise duos, the students agreed more often than did the professionals. Interestingly, there were relatively high proportions of utterances coded as showing solidarity in the student rehearsals (e.g. 23.5% and 30.7% for Guy and Sophie working together). One explanation is that all the students were familiar with one another as friends, even if not as duo partners. Yet, while the professional musicians were also friends, they offered solidarity less often. For George and Betty, one of the mixed-expertise duos, tension release (e.g. laughter) was more frequent than solidarity. Thus familiarity and expertise can impact in different ways upon musicians’ socio-emotional behavior: the experienced (professional) musicians in our sample offered less solidarity toward one another, whether familiar or unfamiliar with working together; the less experienced (student) musicians offered more solidarity toward one another, whether familiar or unfamiliar with working together; the mixed-expertise musicians working together for the first time agreed with each other more often than they showed solidarity, but one duo at least showed more tension release than solidarity.

The following codes were used for task-related discourse: asks for opinion (“I wasn’t making enough difference there, was I?”); asks for orientation (“Can you play that C# so I can get it?”); gives suggestion (“Let’s go from...”); gives opinion (“The phrasing’s easier in two”); gives orientation (“I’m breathing before ‘in the west’”). No example of “asks for suggestion” (Bales 1999) was found. The professional musicians gave more opinions than the students (range 26.9-45.8% professionals; 6.6-18.1% students). In contrast, the students were more likely to provide orientation, such as correcting errors and clarifying locations (range 8.4-26.4%). Interestingly, mixed-level duos produced higher frequencies of opinion than orientation or suggestion, with the professional giving more opinions than the student; however, the latter offered more opinions than when working with a peer.

### **Musical dimensions**

Verbal utterances were coded according to four types of musical dimension: basic, interpretive, expressive, and strategic. Sub-categories were provided for each, except expressive, as these referred to the implementation of

*Table 1.* References to musical dimensions with frequency/number of participants.

<i>Dimension</i>	<i>Sub-category (frequency/no. of participants)</i>
Basic	Pitch (130/8), tempo (125/8), technique (76/7), breath (71/8), ensemble (66/8), rhythm (58/6), harmony (40/4), composition (40/4), dynamics (37/5), words (30/7), notation (20/4), meter (12/4), figuration (12/4), entries (6/3), instrument (5/2), articulation (2/2), structure (5/2)
Interpretive	Rubato (171/8), dynamics (89/8), words (69/6), tempo (25/6), articulation (14/5), phrasing (15/5), energy (13/5), climax (11/4), color (9/4), pedal (3/1), harmony (3/1), meter (1/1)
Strategic	Whole song (56/8), repeat bar/phrase (46/4), learning strategy (19/4), slower tempo (14/4), rehearse by phrase (11/3), chord and vocal line (10/3), rehearse by verse (6/2), rehearsal time/pace (5/3), rehearse by bar (1/1)

interpretive decisions. Frequencies of utterances (from high to low) for each type/sub-category are shown in Table 1.

The professional musicians talked more about basic than interpretive dimensions, and rarely about expressive and strategic dimensions. The established student duos contrasted with each other: Betty and Robert focused more on basic than interpretive issues but Sophie and Guy discussed interpretive issues more often than basic issues. Yet when Sophie worked with Robert, she made no references to interpretation. In the mixed-expertise duos, over 50% of utterances related to basic dimensions, but over 20% reflected strategic issues, indicating the need to exchange ideas about rehearsal method.

## DISCUSSION

This case study was devised to explore collaborative practice among singer-piano duos working in established and new partnerships, and across similar and different levels of expertise (student/professional). Time was used very differently by each duo: some wanted more or less rehearsal time, the students worked in shorter bursts than the professionals, and the professionals produced fewer verbal exchanges. Established and new duo partners initiated similar proportions of dialogue, effectively sharing the direction of the rehearsal, although professionals began more episodes than students in mixed-expertise partnerships. Socio-emotional interaction was largely positive, perhaps because participants felt they had to be pleasant in the somewhat artificial setting of a one-off video-recorded rehearsal. Singers, especially, showed solidarity toward their regular pianists, and tension was

released particularly by one of the mixed-expertise duos. Professionals offered more opinions than students, albeit comparatively fewer when working with students; students offered plenty of orientation when working with peers but more opinions when working with professionals, hence establishing a middle ground.

The musical dimensions discussed in these rehearsals are similar to those observed in previous research. Relative attention to these dimensions, especially basic and sometimes interpretive, reflected the individual concerns of musicians, as the interests of one influenced the other. The lack of familiarity and comparability of experience among musicians in new mixed-expertise duos led to more frequent references to strategic dimensions than was evident in other rehearsals. Further analyses of data—e.g. the portions of music actually played and sung, errors, and non-verbal communication such as glances and gestures—are necessary in order to provide deeper insights into collaborative rehearsal and performance.

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