

The art of research in live music performance

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ABSTRACT: Live performance is an under-researched area within contemporary music performance studies, and currently there is a very limited research context for studying the creation of a live performance of music involving a score. This paper presents preliminary artistic research on live music performance from the perspective of a classical professional pianist working within a chamber music context. It addresses two broad questions: 1) How do performers continue to learn on stage? and 2) What methods are appropriate for documenting and analysing a live performance in terms of musical content, social significance, and as a research outcome for dissemination to the wider research community? It is argued that performers continue to learn on stage, and that among other things a live performance is a site of knowledge production. The project takes the value of the live event for the performer as the starting point and thereby moves beyond the interests of merely gaining new knowledge and understanding into an area where artistic engagement with and commitment to the 'object' of research, i.e. the live performance, necessitates an interested and subjectively valorized positioning of the performer-researcher. The project also contributes to artistic research in music performance by motivating the emergence of a specifically performer-oriented discourse on live music-making.

KEY WORDS: artistic research, auto-ethnography, chamber music performance, live music performance, Schubert, value judgements

Only when the performance I gave with the Marmara Piano Trio on 7 April 2010 in Istanbul was over did I realize that the last two pieces included in the programme that evening could be the source – when performed one after the other – of a powerful yet curious emotional-physical journey that is not evident when the pieces are performed individually, or even when they are simply listened to: an experience of a decline followed by an ascent. Shostakovich's second piano trio in E minor Op. 67 (1944), lasting about 27 minutes and

involving some of the most carefully balanced textural formations for the ensemble, is not particularly difficult from the technical perspective. Yet it is a piece that leaves me and my trio partners emotionally drained at the end: as the music never reconciles with its own materials there is no sense of closure, of comfort, even as the E minor fourth movement turns to the major mode at the end. The emotional powerlessness we feel creates a sense of physical exhaustion. Following a short intermission, our concert that evening continued with one of the longest pieces in the piano trio repertoire, Schubert's magnificent second trio in E flat major Op. 100 (1827): depending on which cuts are made in the final movement, it lasts between 45 and 48 minutes. Technically, this is a virtuoso piece requiring prolonged physical endurance as well as a high degree of mental concentration to sustain the complex musical narrative that unfolds through its four movements. I therefore find it somewhat baffling that the sense of physical fatigue – which was definitely there by the time we reached the coda of the last movement – was wiped away, seemingly by a single stroke of Schubert's genius: the music following the quotation of the minor mode theme from the slow movement turns into a radiant major tonality – an unexpected move lasting for only about 40-45 seconds, yet creating a sense of total closure as well as an embodied rejuvenation. The physical exhaustion we felt at the end of Shostakovich's trio gave way to renewed vigour. It is evident that the emergence of such embodied, affective insights about these works is dependent on the experience of performing them one after the other – in one go, as it were – in a live performance context.

Live music performance is currently an under-researched area within contemporary music performance studies. The three broad areas defining this musicological discipline – namely historical performance practice, the psychology of performance, and analysis and performance (Rink, 2004) – characteristically employ recorded performances as their primary source material. The AHRC-funded Research Centre for the History and Analysis of Recorded Music (CHARM; 2004-09), which sought to re-evaluate musicology's priorities and move the foundation of musicological ontology from musical scores towards performances, shaped its research agenda exclusively around recorded performances. It is only recently that the focus of research has shifted to live music performance practices, following the launch in 2009 of the Research Centre for Musical Performance as Creative Practice (CMPCP), the AHRC-funded Phase 2 successor to CHARM. The projects and activities carried out within CMPCP aim to actively engage and collaborate with performers and performance teachers in exploring various kinds of live music-making practices, including processes of practising, rehearsing, teaching and public performing, where the sounds of music are produced there and then by actual musicians. The kind of methodical, and quite unprecedented, promotion of interaction between researchers and performers that the Centre aims to pursue assigns it the role and responsibility of drawing an epistemological profile for the new ontological landscape previously charted by CHARM, and detailing the 'how' and 'what' of knowledge production in and through live performance practices. Among CMPCP's wide-ranging research activities, the "Creative practice in contemporary concert music" project directed by Eric Clarke and the "Creative learning and 'original' music performance" project directed by John Rink refer to the study of live performances within their aims, yet the focus is largely on the preparatory processes leading up to a live

performance rather than on the making of a live performance in real time for an audience.¹ Consequently, the research context on the making of a live performance of music in the Western classical style involving a score is currently very limited. One exception is the SongArt Performance Research Group, which operates under the auspices of the Institute of Musical Research (University of London), and is led by Kathryn Whitney in association with Amanda Glauert. This project studies the act of song performance in live concert settings, and significantly, it includes professional-level live public performances as primary research materials.

Although the frequently articulated folk-psychological opposition between live and recorded performances has been critically disavowed by various scholars – including Philip Auslander (1999), Dorottya Fabian (2008) and Peter Johnson (2010) – there is ample anecdotal evidence indicating that for performing musicians there are significant phenomenological, aesthetic and indeed existential differences between the experiences of performing live and in the recording studio. Robert Philip, in his book *Performing music in the age of recording*, writes that “Concerts in front of an audience are still what counts, and are the events most musicians measure their lives by... Musicians who regard recordings as preferable to concerts are in a tiny minority” (Philip, 2004, p. 60). In the Western classical instrumental performance tradition, musicians start training very early, and the skills necessary to sustain a professional career are developed over a long period of time: performing for audiences in live contexts is part of this highly specialized, rigorous training, and throughout one’s career it remains as the gold standard in evaluating one’s expertise and musicianship. The classical performer depends on live performance to establish and define his or her artistic identity as a musician. It is, therefore, particularly important to articulate the significance of live musical performance as the ultimate norm in classical music practice, at a time when performances recorded and edited in the studio provide the context for an overwhelming majority of musical experiences. This is one of the main aims of my artistic research project² entitled “Alchemy in the spotlight: qualitative transformations in chamber music performance”, again funded by the AHRC.³

The Alchemy project, which to my knowledge is the first artistic research undertaking to explore live performance in the Western classical tradition from the perspective of professional performers, explores the individual and collective cognitive-affective processes that shape live performance in the context of a professional piano trio. The originality of the project derives from a new conceptualization of live public performance it proposes. While the majority of existing research on how performers work and learn focuses on rehearsals and practice sessions, the Alchemy project makes the live public performance the aesthetic and epistemological point of reference in performance practice such that the preparatory

¹ This is true also of artistic research projects in music performance. To cite but one example, the “Around a rondo” project carried out by Stephen Emmerson at the Queensland Conservatorium Research Centre (2004) documents the process of preparing Mozart’s A minor Rondo K. 511 for live performance on the harpsichord. The focus is the process of preparation rather than the live performance itself.

² I use the term ‘artistic research’ to refer to research activities that are methodologically integrated with an artistic creation and cannot be pursued without art-making. In this sense, the domain of artistic research does not necessarily overlap with that of ‘practice-based’ research where the practice involved does not always result in an art-product.

³ For more information, see the project website at <http://www.mdx.ac.uk/alchemy>.

processes acquire their full meaning in the light of the ensuing live event(s).⁴ It is the live performance that illuminates the path leading to it rather than the other way round. The project also argues that the most significant knowledge acquisition during the development of expertise in music performance happens through live public encounters with audiences and music. In other words, the research is built on the assumption that one has “to learn to be a performer by working with audiences” (Wilson, 1998, p. 109). This is in contrast to the view that regards expert musical performance as the end result of the musician’s prolonged efforts to improve performance through deliberate practice, and that accounts for the individual differences in live performance in terms of the differential amounts of past and current levels of practice (e.g. Ericsson, Krampe & Tesch-Römer, 1993). The Alchemy project thus reverses the commonly accepted view of the relationship between rehearsal and live performance.

The practice of the piano trio in rehearsals, workshops and live performances forms the heart of the Alchemy project in addressing the research questions. As an artistic research undertaking, the project reveals an insider’s perspective on the peculiarities of performing live and explores some of the popular yet unquestioned assumptions about live music-making, including the idea of performance being an ‘extreme occasion’. Edward Said’s frequently quoted characterization of live performances as *extreme occasions* “whose core is precisely what can be experienced only under severe and unyielding conditions” (Said, 1993, p. 17) reflects the perspective of audiences rather than that of professional performers. By the time a classical instrumentalist is in his or her late teens, he or she has normally acquired considerable experience in live music-making. For those who go on stage regularly, live performance-making becomes a totally natural activity, a way of being and of becoming; indeed, if one does not feel at home on stage and find it distinctly rewarding – as Glenn Gould apparently never did, for example – the result can be a turning away from this kind of experience.

To be sure, this is not to deny that a live performance displays characteristics that are strikingly different from those of ordinary daily occurrences and experiences not only for audiences but also for performers. These characteristics include the transformation – once on stage – of the consciousness of the spatio-temporal continuum, and the necessity of uninterrupted flow in the activity within an inherently indeterminate or unpredictable context, requiring the mobilization of a remarkable range of skills and experiences. The indeterminacy is related to the ‘living’ nature of the performance environment such that at any moment an acoustical, psychological or social incident in the performance venue could displace the attention of the performer away from the music and from a focus on performance-making. As Jonathan Dunsby has argued, unpredictability plays a fundamental role in musical performance, and “although the performer can seek to eliminate some uncertainties, there will always be others” (Dunsby, 1995, p. 12). Such unpredictability, together with the uninterrupted unidirectionality of the event, marks the psychology of performing live. Peter Johnson characterizes this psychology as “vulnerability” and states

⁴ One study emphasizing the striking difference between rehearsing and live public performing is that of Jane W. Davidson and Jorge S. Correia (2001), who argue that the moment-by-moment relationship with the audience in a live context triggers a phenomenological process of ‘becoming’ in performers that is not experienced during rehearsals.

that “the lack of a second chance, such as is available to the artist in every mode of artistic enterprise other than live performance, becomes critical in passages of virtuosity where the possibility of failure ensures that the event is suitably charged with tension” (Johnson, 2010, p. 41). The aesthetics of live performance in the Western tradition obliges the performer to keep going in the face of disruptive occurrences, and an expert performer is one who is able to create the illusion that he or she is in total control of the performance situation physically, mentally and aesthetically, even though in practice this is never the case. When studying the musical content of live performances, the researcher needs to note that what he or she hears in the performance may be the result of the performer’s expertise in smoothing over an unexpected, unintended and possibly unwanted momentary loss of control in any parameter of the music such as timing, dynamics, articulation, textural balance, etc., rather than the result of intended expressive, interpretational choices. Consequently, although few, if any, would explicitly argue that a live performance is no more than a repetition of what has been achieved in the practice room, the established research methodologies of musicology lead researchers to proceed as if this were the case, with the result that the restrictions the live context imposes on the performer and the opportunities it opens up for emergent meaning are not taken into account.

In my view, artistic research projects about live musical performance are particularly valuable on two accounts, both of which concern the future direction of music performance studies. One has to do with the role and status of performers within the discipline. I have on various occasions argued that there is a need to include the performer’s authentic voice and discourse within the discipline.⁵ To be sure, various studies in music psychology represent this discourse, which the researcher documents through questionnaires, interviews with performers, observational case studies, etc.⁶ However, the context within which the words of the performer are quoted, analyzed and interpreted is created and written by the researcher; in other words, the performer’s discourse is embedded within the researcher’s discourse. Qualitative research in the social sciences in general and ethnomusicological studies in particular have frequently drawn attention to the complicated issues related to researchers representing their research ‘subjects’.⁷ Some of these issues have been discussed in *Practicing Perfection* (2002), in relation to a collaborative project on music performance undertaken by a concert pianist, Gabriela Imreh, and two psychologists, Roger Chaffin and Mary Crawford. The project explored how an experienced pianist organizes practice and employs practice strategies in the process of memorizing a piece for performance. The three collaborators noted the difficulties they faced in working together “despite differences in epistemological viewpoints, domains of expertise, and social positions” (Chaffin, Imreh & Crawford, 2002, p. 247). Accordingly, the difference they were most aware of was that “the norms of psychological research positioned Gabriela as a subject rather than an active agent in the research” (*ibid.*, p. 262). The inadequacy of the research model offered by conventional psychological research with its clear hierarchy of roles between the researcher and the subject is further illustrated by the fact that in the

⁵ See Doğantan-Dack (2008, 2011a, 2011b).

⁶ Some examples include Hallam (1995), Rostron and Bottrill (2000), Burland and Davidson (2004), and Griffiths (2011).

⁷ See, for example, Cannella and Lincoln (2011) and Shelemay (2008).

literature on psychological studies of performance the performer's voice is almost always anonymized: we do not know the names, or at least the real names, of the performers involved. In the case of quantitative studies of recorded performances, the performer as the owner of the knowledge and insights represented and disseminated through the recorded performance, i.e. the performer as agent, disappears altogether. There is, in my view, a knowledge–political issue at stake here: this kind of research, while certainly having the potential to contribute new knowledge about the activities of performers and the nature of musical performances, does not represent the performer as an equal partner in the production of knowledge and in the formation of the dominant disciplinary discourse. The area of live performance offers performers wishing to undertake research and contribute to performance studies a valuable opportunity to enter the academic disciplinary scene in their own terms, using their native discourse; after all, without their expert contribution in this area, the artistic issues involved in live performance-making would remain unarticulated. The insider's view on what happens in a musical performance – and why – can be brought to light only through a discourse that takes account of and thrives on the situatedness and the very subjectivity of the aesthetic judgements made by the performer in relation to his or her performance.

The other reason why live performance research is valuable is that it opens up and widens debate about the reflective component of artistic research projects by calling into question the research status of the live event. It is sometimes asserted that a live performance constitutes research and therefore does not require additional reflective material to declare or defend its research status. I do not wish to go into somewhat tangential details here as to why I believe, firstly, that not all musical performance is *ipso facto* research, and secondly, that a live performance in the Western classical tradition is not, while it happens, a research activity.⁸ What is important is that for the performer-

⁸ I have put forward various arguments for my position in the aforementioned papers. In summary, as to the first point, the fact that performers rigorously think about what they do, that they experiment on a daily basis with the music they play, and that they are involved in complex cognitive and affective operations and implicit theorizing, is not in my view sufficient to render the resulting performance a research activity. To hold such a view would collapse the distinction between research and virtually any other kind of activity that involves expertise and skill. A necessary condition for research is the dissemination of the new knowledge in a format that can be accessed and built upon by other researchers in the discipline. Consequently, not all performers are *ipso facto* researchers. As to the second point, I argue that live music performance cannot involve any reflective component by the performer in the way we understand it to be a crucial aspect of any research activity: as a defining feature of research, reflection always offers the researcher the possibility to change, improve, transform, expand and rework his or her ideas and manner of presentation *before* the research outcome is made publicly available. This possibility is simply not present for the performer during the making of a live public performance in our contemporary culture. Different cultural contexts, however, might allow the live performance to become a site for 'research': we know that on at least one occasion Liszt was so dissatisfied with one of his performances in public that he played the same piece a second time there and then. The audience clearly did not object (Hamilton, 1998). The aesthetic context and expectations in such a case are so different from our present-day circumstances for live performing that we might as well be talking about different performing practices. There is also a further reason why I believe a live performance is not a research activity: the nature of the decision-making processes the performer is involved in during live music-making is very different from the *decision-making-cum-problem-solving* processes of research, and I will have more to say about this in the following pages. I should emphasize here that other processes which are part of the totality of musical performance practice, such as the preparatory processes that take place in practice sessions and rehearsals, can indeed be identified as research activities since the temporal structuring of these

researcher, exploring live performance necessitates reflecting upon the nature of the reflective component itself, contemplating the most appropriate means of documenting the event, and presenting the thought processes surrounding the performance.

I would now like to go back to that spring evening in 2010 – to the Caddebostan Cultural Centre in Istanbul – where I performed with the Marmara Piano Trio a concert consisting of a Tango by Albéniz, Shostakovich’s second piano trio Op. 67 and Schubert’s second piano trio Op. 100. What was behind the musical and social content that members of the audience witnessed that evening and appear to have enjoyed, based on the evidence of the kind words they recorded in our *Audience Notebook*?⁹ Dunsby once wrote that “Actual performance is the tip of an iceberg of the performer’s practice and rehearsal” (Dunsby, 2002, p. 233). My aim here is to prepare the ground for developing an understanding – from artistic and musicological perspectives – of what went on that evening in that particular venue, and to discuss how we as performer-researchers can illuminate what we hear – and also see – in a documented live performance.

Now, because such a performance resists translation into a conceptual object of understanding in the absence of a tangible phenomenon that represents it, a necessary starting point for any contemporary research on live performance is an audio-visual documentation of it. In a certain ontological sense, of course, this kind of representation turns the live performance into a recorded one, so that we are actually able to study only the recorded event and never the live performance itself. The methodological way out of this apparent impasse is to contextualize the live event through multi-modal means so as to implicate its liveness. As artistic research in live musical performance is in its early stages, each of us involved in this kind of research needs to discover and contemplate various research methods for their efficacy and value. The method should allow room for the situatedness and the subjectivity of the artist-researcher’s claims to knowledge, and validate the assertion of his or her artistic value judgements. One method that can be profitably used in this connection, and one I adopt in this article, is narrative autoethnography, an emerging approach that has recently gained currency and popularity in qualitative research. Pelias (2004) has suggested that the purpose of autoethnographic narrative writing is resonance, to create ‘me too’ moments for readers. Importantly, this method allows the emotional aspects of the experience to be conveyed as part of the knowledge itself; this proves to be a desired methodological feature in researching a highly emotional activity such as live music performance from the inside. While autoethnographic narrative focuses on the writer’s or, in this case, the artist–researcher’s own experiences, it is different from autobiographical narrative in that there is an attempt to balance the details of the subjective experiences and evaluations by reference to the experiences of the others involved in the research processes, and to existing research, in order to contextualize the personal. I now focus on one particular movement from Schubert’s second piano trio Op.

processes allows the performer to interrupt the unidirectional flow of the music, to stop and reflect on what she or he has just played, and to experiment with the music.

⁹ “A magnificent concert; the pieces and the interpretation are superb. Many thanks.” “Everything was so beautiful, hope has blossomed in my heart.” From the *Audience Notebooks* of the Marmara Piano Trio, 7 April 2010, available at <http://www.marmaratrio.com>.

100, the slow movement – Andante con moto – as performed by the Marmara Piano Trio in Istanbul on 7 April 2010.

I make no attempt to generalize dispassionately. My statements are coloured and prejudiced by my own concepts and experiences (David Smith, sculptor).¹⁰

As I watch the video of my performance with the Marmara Trio in Istanbul with the intention of reflecting on it in research terms ([Video 1](#)),¹¹ I start wondering how an empirical musicologist or music psychologist might analyse and make sense of the sounds of this performance. What if they measure the acoustical data in term of currently measurable expressive parameters and perhaps fit the result into such contexts as performance traditions in chamber music or listener responses? What kind of knowledge would this analysis reveal about what happened musically – and perhaps socially as well – in that particular performance that evening? Would they be able to reach an understanding about why we chose a particular tempo, adopted a particular phrasing, or how the performance impacted the performers emotionally? Most significantly, what kind of conclusions would they draw regarding the values that we held – and exercised – in shaping the sounds of the music there and then in real time? If such questions are to be answered, the insider's perspective is essential; hence, it is to the values – and value judgements – that motivated this particular live performance that I now turn.

I would have liked to make a career out of playing nothing but slow movements (Radu Lupu).¹²

I know many pianists – young and aspiring as well as older, established ones – who tend to recoil from the slow movements of the sonatas they play. A sparse musical texture that involves a memorable melody and unfolds in a slow tempo can present worrying if not frightening musical material to mould in performance: lacking the sustaining power of wind or string instruments, the piano challenges the pianist through its mechanical limitations, burdening the moment of delivery of a melody particularly in slow tempos. However, once a pianist unlocks the secrets of sustaining the sounds as if in singing – of making the piano sing – the performance of slow movements becomes a pleasure. Finding the right tone and level of intensity to deliver a melody on the piano requires much embodied exploration: sitting at exactly the right height, using the right kind of technique (which may be different for each pianist), and adjusting the pedal in accordance with the acoustics of the particular performance venue are crucial factors in determining the ideal sonority. Ultimately the pianist has to find out for him- or herself what works, based on the mental image of the sound he or she desires.

I find that a slow movement creates the ideal opportunity for a pianist not only to display one of his or her most precious artistic possessions, i.e. the skill to achieve an intense cantabile, but also to physically embody, indeed to become a beautiful melody.

¹⁰ Quoted in Collini (1992, p. 137).

¹¹ Video 1: excerpt from the concert on 7 April 2010, Istanbul: beginning of the slow movement of Schubert's Piano Trio Op. 100.

¹² Quoted in *BBC Music Magazine*, August 2010, p. 32.

While offering such an opportunity, the beginning of the slow movement of Schubert's piano trio is also a challenge for both the cellist and the pianist: it is a virtuoso opening calling for highly controlled sound qualities and phrasing from both musicians, who have to appear 'naked', so to speak, in delivering one of Schubert's loveliest melodies apparently inspired by a Swedish folk-song called "The sun is setting". But how slow should it be? How slow is too slow, how slow is just slow enough? I personally would enjoy the artistic challenge a really slow interpretation would pose; while working on the tempo of the movement, I am reminded of some of Glenn Gould's slow tempos where the music starts in a manner that seems unsustainable, despite which it turns into a feast of aesthetic unification of musical time. When learning this movement, I was interested to find out that Susan Tomes associates it with images of snowy winter and sadness, with clear implications for its tempo. She writes:

Years ago when I first got to know it and rehearsed it with Domus, there was a lot of discussion in rehearsals about the right tempo for the slow movement, one of Schubert's finest inspirations. Some were in favour of a very slow tempo to bring out its tragic character. Others wanted a flowing tempo to honour his marking "andante con moto", but an easily moving tempo seemed too flippant for the great sadness in the music (Tomes, 2007, p. 155).

I have to confess that I cannot hear great sadness in this music, and I think I know why – in part at least: it is my synaesthetic perception of keys and pitches that denies me such an experience. First of all, the first note of the melody appearing in octaves is such a deep green that it is anything but sad; besides, the key of C minor is off-white, again not a particularly cheerless colour. I suspect my preference for a slow tempo has musical, even instrument-specific reasons, rather than extra-musical ones, including the desire to enjoy the ringing and shimmering quality of the sounds as the melody slowly unfolds. Being part of an ensemble, however, I am not in a position to impose my own tempo preference on my partners, and I need to negotiate a tempo that is agreeable for all three of us. Before our very first performance of this work on 24 March 2010 at Middlesex University, we gave a workshop there, and one of the issues we discussed at length was the tempo of the second movement, as shown in this transcription of the dialogue between the pianist and the cellist during the workshop in reference to the tempo of the second movement ([Video 2](#)):¹³

Mine Doğantan-Dack (piano): The main performance issue is tempo; and I ... we all heard this played in such widely differing tempos; how do we decide? It can go ... if you can make it work, it can go in any tempo. Shall we try?... I first suggested this in a really slow tempo, but Pal was not happy. I suggested something like this...

Mine and Pal play the beginning of the movement.

Mine: So this was my suggestion. Why were you not happy? Are you happy now?

Pal Banda (cello): No! Because to me it's too slow; it's also not in crotchets but in quavers. And I think once you sing a song too slowly, the listener runs out of breath ... and there's already so few people listening to classical music, there's a lot to lose.

Mine: Yes, from that point of view... But just talking about possibilities, is it at all possible or would you not consider...

¹³ Video 2: excerpt from workshop at Middlesex University on 24 March 2010.

Pal: I did my honest best to make it work.

Mine: I think that was lovely.

Pal: I thought there is another side effect, which is that every note becomes terribly important.

Mine: That is true.

Pal: And the focus is on the little notes and I think if it moves in a slightly faster tempo, then the melody line becomes a little more important than the individual notes.

The discussions and the negotiations we had about the tempo of the second movement of Schubert's trio seemingly had no end: we felt that we could try something new in each live performance and keep discovering the expressive boundaries of the music. Hence, my intention had been to try a somewhat slower tempo during the concert in Istanbul on 7 April 2010, which was in fact our second live performance of this piece: in the first performance, at Middlesex University, I had adopted the tempo that had been negotiated earlier the same day during the workshop. However, the conditions of live performance do not always support one's musical intentions and aspirations. An incident that took place a few days before the concert in Istanbul necessitated a 'tried and tested' approach to tempo during the live event: while giving a master-class in Budapest, Pal's instrument, a Carcassi from 1752, which was actually used in the Esterházy Estate, was accidentally damaged – cracked at the back – by one of the participants. Naturally, Pal was very upset and had to arrive in Istanbul with another cello and, in his words, "make friends with it" in a very short time. While we pianists are by necessity masters of making new instrumental 'friends' within minutes, I realized that this was a laborious endeavour for a cellist: how would the new friend respond to the other instruments in the ensemble, how would it speak in the concert hall? Is it at all audible that I could not take any risks with the tempo of this movement that evening as I had the responsibility of creating a musical environment as familiar as possible when Pal already had a number of unfamiliar and unpredictable factors to deal with?

I was now connected with and dependent on David, John, and Michael for a good performance. How strange! If I played out of tune, they played out of tune; if they stumbled, so did I; and if I managed to play beautifully, we would all share the credit... My future was their future; theirs was mine (Arnold Steinhardt, first violinist of the Guarneri String Quartet).¹⁴

The social dynamics among the co-performers in an ensemble are as important as the musical dynamics for a successful performance, and each live performance is in fact an opportunity to further develop and strengthen the social bonds between the co-performers. Psychological research provides abundant evidence that for any collaborating group of people to work well, there needs to be a sense of trust and support between them, as well as a sense of belonging in the group (Douglas, 1993). The chemistry of an ensemble in live performance is different from the group dynamics experienced during rehearsals. Live performance is the site where the trust and support between the co-performers get tested, confirmed and re-confirmed, and acquire their true practical meaning; the willingness and the ability to create an emotional comfort zone during the live event when co-performers

¹⁴ Quoted in John-Steiner (2000, p. 191).

need it is crucial for the success of the performance. Watching the video of the performance we gave in Istanbul, I'm reminded of our performance of a few weeks earlier, which had taken place under very different conditions: the venue and the instruments were highly familiar as we regularly give workshops and master-classes at Middlesex University ([Video 3](#)).¹⁵

One of the issues to address in researching live performance is the relationship between the artistic practice and new knowledge: how do performers attain new knowledge on stage, and how can this knowledge be theorized? In this connection, I have been particularly interested in exploring the relationship between the *affective* component of live music-making and knowledge acquisition. The kind of knowledge acquisition on stage is markedly different from the conceptual model of knowing where the knowing subject and the object of knowledge remain distinct, and the subject beholds the object of knowledge clearly and distinctly (i.e. in a Cartesian manner); in a live performance, by contrast, the passing of the threshold from not-knowing is highly emotional and takes place as the subject merges with the object (the piece as well the particular live context) so as to grasp it from within, as it were. During the live event, the performer makes decisions based on his or her *belief* in a phenomenon that does not yet exist, that he or she hopes to bring about by surpassing what has been achieved in the practice room, by sometimes taking risks and acting *wisely* enough just at the right moment following the subjective evaluation of the expressive potential of a given moment. If new knowledge emerges, this happens through decisions made wisely, or unwisely, during the live event. In this sense, artistic knowing moves beyond traditional concepts of knowledge and understanding associated with research, into *wisdom*, which involves acting with just the right aesthetic decision at the right moment so as to produce the desired aesthetic effect.

There is also the issue of the relationship between knowledge and affective commitment to the object of knowledge: in an interview with David Dubal, pianist Claudio Arrau once said that in live performance he suspended all critical judgement of the piece he was playing because "you have to be in love with it as you play it; at that moment it has to be the most beautiful music you've ever played. If I want, I can criticize it later" (Dubal, 1984, p. 20). All performing musicians have the experience – at least once during their careers – of playing a piece that they are not particularly attached to; indeed, there is some research indicating that in ensemble contexts, performers make a distinction between the value they attribute to the performance occasion and to the music they perform (Pitts, 2005, p. 63). In other words, performers may value the opportunity to perform but not particularly love or enjoy the music they play. In the case of the slow movement of Schubert's trio, each of us in the group feels that these two dimensions always come together very strongly: wherever and whenever the performance might take place, we always feel it is a treat to perform this movement, and indeed the entire work. While it is a highly important issue for the theory and practice of artistic research, to my knowledge there is very limited research literature on how exploring a phenomenon one is emotionally

¹⁵ Video 3: excerpt from concert on 24 March 2010, Middlesex University: beginning of the slow movement of Schubert's Piano Trio Op. 100.

committed to influences the knowledge produced.¹⁶ How is the musical content of a performance affected when the performers feel a deep affection and commitment to the music they play? Is this audible in the sounds of the music they make? And does it matter for live performance research? To avoid misunderstanding, I should note that the affective relationship we have developed with this movement is not simply the result of a naïve adoration for a lovely – and very popular – melody: it is rather related to the artistic opportunities the music offers for creative embodied interaction with each of our instruments, i.e. to the way the music connects the artist and the instrument. I believe that the deep affective commitment we feel towards this movement should be part of any approach that attempts to explain the musical and social content as well as the aesthetic impact of this movement in any performance we give.

The ideal way to go about making a performance or a work of art... is to assume that when you begin, you don't quite know what it is about. You only come to know as you proceed (Glenn Gould).¹⁷

In order to arrive at what you do not know
You must go by a way which is the way of ignorance (T. S. Eliot).¹⁸

While watching the video of the concert we gave in Istanbul, I note that our performance of the second movement of Schubert's trio, which works through a certain agitation at the beginning, totally relaxes by the time we reach the coda, and I am pleased with the tranquility we achieve at the final cadence: the kind of tranquility that creates the impression of hearing the audience listening ([Video 4](#)).¹⁹ I recollect becoming aware at that moment during the performance of not having noticed for a while the unfamiliarity of the new cello: as the slow movement unfolded, the instrument must have merged subtly and inconspicuously with its performer in my consciousness so that I was no longer hearing Pal and his new cello separately as I did earlier, but as one unified artistic body making music. This affective shift in my orientation must have come about as a result of the combined effect of Pal's artistry and the focused attention of our audience. I was now poised – together with my partners – at that still point where memory of the light third movement and the imposing finale we were about to play met with my desire for something magical that would perhaps take place: to borrow a term from practice theorist Susan Melrose, we

¹⁶ One recent study that explores the role of the performers' experienced emotions in performance (Van Zijl & Sloboda, 2011) concludes that none of the performers involved in the research constructed a performance without reference to their own emotions, and that there is a complex relationship between the emotions found to exist in the music and the performers' experienced emotions. The authors note that "The findings of the present research seem to be a preliminary pointer to an under-studied phenomenon that deserves more attention if we are to gain a fuller understanding of music performance as a creative practice" (p. 214). Another study that addresses the phenomenology of emotion in musical performance, albeit without reference to the relationship between affect and knowledge in the making of a live performance, emphasizes that as "emotions play a significant role in learning, conceptualizing, and performing music" more research is needed "to begin to understand 'the emotional frame of mind' that generates recall, certain motor patterns, and communicative potential" (Persson, 2001, p. 279).

¹⁷ In Page (1984), p. 287.

¹⁸ From "East Coker", section 3, in Eliot (1943).

¹⁹ Video 4: excerpt from concert on 7 April 2010, Istanbul: ending of the slow movement of Schubert's Piano Trio Op. 100.

were in the middle of a fragile “angel-time”, we were chasing angels. As she writes:

Expert practitioners cannot be sure they have “caught [an angel]”, except on those occasions when the decision made is applauded in the time of the emergent event... This is a curious epistemological burden... Angel-time as well as its knowledge-status is fragile, and the means of its recognition, before the event, by professionals, always involves a half-desperate hope, a calculation, always a gamble.²⁰

How would our performance of the rest of Schubert’s trio have differed if only we knew of the surprise awaiting us, if we could only predict that physical fatigue would disappear together with any remnants of emotional pessimism at the end of the finale? We simply could not know without living through this particular programme in this particular order, and without ‘walking through fire’ with the new cello for a while. Now that we know, the next time we perform the same programme our experience of it will be different.

One of the most significant contributions of artistic research projects to contemporary performance studies is the increasing awareness they bring regarding the artistic principles, methods and values that drive and sustain musical performance: an awareness that “the relationship between studying performance and doing performance is integral” (Schechner, 2002, p. 1). Within the totality of all the activities that define ‘performance practice’ in the Western classical tradition, it is in the processes of live public performance – “musicology’s perpetually absent objects”, as Carolyn Abbate called them (Abbate, 2004, p. 514) – that the artistry of ‘doing performance’ is most fully represented. It is, therefore, within these processes that I continue to explore the fundamental principles of artistic musical performance.

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²⁰ Melrose, S. (2003). The eventful articulation of singularities – or, “chasing angels”. Keynote Address, dance symposium “New Alignments and Emergent Forms”, Roehampton University of Surrey, UK (<http://www.sfmelrose.u-net.com/chasingangels>)

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