

# *Research-led Performance: Report on an Ongoing Project*

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The main focus of the Institute of Music at the Fondazione Giorgio Cini is the music of the twentieth century; and the goal of its lectures, conferences, seminars and publications is to foster the historical reconstruction and theoretical elaboration of this complex phase of artistic creativity. In addition, the Institute conserves the papers and other materials from the legacy of 20 Italian composers and 7 musicians or musicologists. Such a substantial patrimony has prompted the traditional archival work – techniques of cataloguing, strategies of conservation, publication of metadata etc. –, an enterprise which is always accompanied by the scientific investigation of the sources. The *Research-led Performance* project originated within this field. It responds to the question of what is the best way to guide source-based research towards musical practice, bringing historical knowledge to sectors that by their very nature are focused on the improvement of practical procedures. We searched for a way in which the sources may ‘sound out’, acquiring an acoustic appearance which can both complement and enhance the knowledge accumulated during the examination of the documents.

A further impulse to the formation of this project arose from the observation that, whereas philological studies have notable repercussions on the performance of the music of earlier centuries (for example, the use of several pizzicato instruments for the basso continuo, or the impact of the studies of variants of tradition in

Italian opera), they seem not to affect the rendering of musical works of the twentieth century. One reason may lie in the learning time which scores of such disruptive novelty demand of their interpreters; until now there may have been objectively little space for philological curiosity on the part of the performers. The lack of conjunction between source studies and performance practice, on the other hand, may be the consequence of an aesthetic belief. Since the time of Schoenberg and Stravinsky, the idea has gained ground that, as today's composers have a total mastery of the means of graphic representation of music, they are able to record on paper their musical ideas in a clear and unequivocal way. From this comes the confidence that the score speaks for itself and does not need any special input on the part of its interpreter; performance is conceived as 'reproduction'. This attitude clearly emerges in a note that Schoenberg wrote in the 1920s in preparation for a treatise on musical performance: 'The highest principle of all reproduction of music would have to be that what the composer has written is made to sound in such a way that every note is really heard, that all the sounds, whether successive or simultaneous, are in such relationship to each other that no part at any moment obscures another, but, on the contrary, makes its contribution towards ensuring that they all stand out clearly from one another'.<sup>1</sup> In the last of his Harvard lectures Stravinsky expressed a similar point of view: 'The idea of execution implies the strict putting into effect of an explicit will that contains nothing beyond what it specifically commands'.<sup>2</sup> Schoenberg and Stravinsky are not only the two figures of reference for the compositional techniques of the entire twentieth century; they are also behind performance traditions that have endured over time – think of the Kolisch Quartet, the conductors Hans Swarowsky, Michael Gielen and Hans Rosbaud as well as, on the other camp, Nadia Boulanger, Ernest Ansermet, Roger Desormière and Pierre Boulez.

I am convinced that the possible repercussions of investigations into the creative process should be discussed in mixed groups of musicologists and performers. The primary goal of source studies is to recognise the questions of compositional technique that represent the starting point for a certain work; thus, archival research creates the basis for the exegesis of a work as an individual object. However, a single work is also a part of a broader creative process, i.e., it represents a stage in the evolution of its composer; hence, the philological inquiry reveals important elements not only of the work analysed but also of the composer's poetics (understood as the sum of all his/her works or as the synthesis of his/her artistic life). Finally, the complete *oeuvre* is situated within a larger context: the network of the composers of a specific generation. In musicological research something occurs which reveals similarities with the task of performers: as the performer sharpens his/her interpretation of a work every time he/she deals with

another piece by the same composer, so the musicologist penetrates deeper into the aesthetics of a composer the more works he/she analyses and more sources he/she consults. In both practices, this pattern can be projected onto a higher level: a historical period or a group of distinct but interconnected individuals.

In 2014, I expressed these thoughts to Peter Dejans at the Orpheus Institute in Ghent; the ensuing exchange of ideas led to a collaboration between the two institutes, which was a determining factor in the birth of the *Research-led Performance* project. In Ghent, I found a comparable dialectics of the competences which I had previously witnessed in the Darmstadt Summer Courses for New Music.<sup>3</sup> In the twenty-first century, the coherent application of ‘artistic research’, an area in which the Orpheus Institute is the European leader, has shown that a cognitive process can be activated through the performance itself, unfolding before and beyond any possible translation into the language of musicology. There are insights which come about during performance, which may have important consequences for historical research or for the analysis of a piece – analysis, in fact, means always to understand the communication forces of a piece. The leading idea of *Research-led Performance* is complementary to ‘artistic research’: performance practice not only triggers theoretical processes but also gradually absorbs the results of the philological investigation and theoretical reflection. In this way a circle is generated: historically informed performance produces issues which go beyond the knowledge accumulated during the philological inquiry and the analysis of the score. After weeks, and sometimes months, of hard work on the primary sources, it is almost natural that the feeling of ‘possessing’ the work grows in the musicologist. The workshops of this project have helped us to escape this illusion and to relocate the musical questions to a level of vitality and presence which is not otherwise attainable.

The first workshop, *The Guitar in the Work of Mauricio Kagel, Giacomo Manzoni and Fausto Romitelli*, took place from June 27-29, 2016. Dejans had suggested drawing on the reconstruction of Mauricio Kagel’s *Tactil* that Luk Vaes had presented at the Orpheus Institute in 2012. This composition can be seen as an exploration into a ‘generalised’ guitar. We projected this thought into the landscape of the second half of the twentieth century, which is characterised by a kind of cultural doubling of the instrument: on the one hand, compositions which exploit the sonic potential of the acoustic guitar; on the other hand, the electrification of the guitar in popular music, its transformation into a studio of electronic music in miniature. Giacomo Baldelli and Elena Casoli acted as teachers; Seth Josel and Vincenzo Caporaletti demonstrated different styles, as well the techniques of great guitarists in jazz and rock; and Francisco Rocca and Michele Chiappini presented the results of their studies into the creative process of several composers.<sup>4</sup>

The following year, 2017, saw a consolidation of the Institute of Music's collaboration with the mdi ensemble, which had begun with production of the DVD *See the Sound. Homage to Helmut Lachenmann*. This audiovisual product is indicative of the philosophy of the ensemble: the performance of a piece is considered to be the final stage of a learning process. The camera documents the production of the sound in its finest details thanks to different close ups, a technique which proceeds in parallel with the 'enlargement' of the listening perspective via the microphones.<sup>5</sup> This intersection between technology and performance formed the basis for the second workshop of the *Research-led Performance* series, which took place from 19–22 June, entitled *The Production of Timbre: Amplified String Instruments in George Crumb, Franco Oppo, Fausto Romitelli and Giacinto Scelsi*. The musicological sessions were devoted to the sources of Franco Oppo's *Amplify* for two amplified string instruments and Fausto Romitelli's composition for amplified string quartet *Natura morta con fiamme*. Frances-Marie Uitti held a seminar on new techniques for cello and the use of microphones. Uitti and the members of the mdi ensemble are examples of reflective musicians who are conscious of their skills and experience, using them to improve their understanding of the compositions performed; their interest in the origins and the ideas behind the score is a sign of an open mind which never accepts the achieved status of the interpretation as definitive, however excellent it may be. They are ideal partners for our endeavor.

The third workshop, *Flute and Guitar in Twentieth Century Music*, was held from June 27–30, 2018. It resulted from a joint venture with the Bern University of the Arts and the Venice Conservatory Benedetto Marcello. These institutions made available their teachers of both instruments – Martin Fahlenbock and Federica Lotti, Elena Casoli and Florindo Baldissera – who worked with the students on several pieces by composers whose collections are conserved at the Institute of Music. They also took turns performing in the final concert: a vivid representation of the wide spectrum that engagement with a composer's poetics can reveal.

In 2019, two workshops took place: *The String Quartets of Béla Bartók and Gian Francesco Malipiero* (6–8 June) and *Percussione Crea-Azione* (28–30 October). In the first of these, the Quartetto di Venezia prepared two ensembles of young musicians for performances of Bartók's Sixth and Malipiero's Seventh Quartets; analyses of the two works were presented by Francisco Rocca and László Vikárius, who referred to the sources conserved in the Bartók Archive, Budapest. The instrumental teaching of the second workshop was entrusted to the percussion ensemble Tetraktis and conductor Fabio Maestri, and involved works by Niccolò Castiglioni, Giacomo Manzoni and Fausto Romitelli as well as the referential composition *Ionisation* by Edgard Varèse and a new composition by Gianvincenzo Cresta. Massimiliano Locanto and Veniero Rizzardi illustrated the genesis and development of this new

genre in the USA between the two world wars, while Francisco Rocca commented upon Manzoni's sketches for *D'improvviso* and Romitelli's *Chorus*. Percussions are one of the major centers of interest for the composers of the twentieth century. Rhythm and timbre are crucial elements of this compound instrumental family and at the same time the parameters on which the new musical language of the twentieth century is focused. One particular aspect is the role of non-pitched percussions, which exist in a realm between sound and noise; composing for percussions also means an exploration of such a no-man's land. Another important aspect is the possibility of extending the repertoire of instruments ad infinitum – potentially, every object in the world could be treated as a percussion instrument. All this gravitates around the idea of sound composition (*Klangkomposition*), which can be seen as a brand of the musical avant-garde of the second half of the twentieth century. Percussions are also carriers of symbolic values; they represent the sound of musical cultures outside the Western world. There is an implicit semantic in percussion instruments; each of them hints beyond the realm of music, to the world of our life. Finally, playing percussions implies an engagement of the performer with his/her body. The 'action', to which the title of this workshop alludes, is a fundamental component of performance; the interpretation of pieces for ensembles of percussions always has a strong theatrical element; intrinsically, it is an 'instrumental theater'.

In recent years, we applied the concept of *Research-led Performance* to repertoire which is only indirectly linked with the collections of our archive. The program for 2020 announced the workshop *Istantanee. Collective Improvisation in Europe: Styles and Techniques*. It was intended to further the research into the role of improvisation in different periods, which began with two conferences: *Con la mente e con le mani. Improvisation from 'Cantare super Librum' to Partimenti*, coordinated by Massimiliano Guido and Peter Schubert (2013) and *Musical Improvisation in the Age of Beethoven and Open Forms*, coordinated by Angela Carone and myself (2014).<sup>6</sup> Two composers represented in our archive, Domenico Guaccero and Egisto Macchi, had been active in the lively improvisation scene in Rome in the decade from 1965–1975. As well as the sources in our collections, studies of this period can take advantage of musicians active in the improvisation ensembles, who can bear witness to the backgrounds and events, report on instrumental techniques and aesthetic principles, and demonstrate models of extempore playing. Together with a group of musicologists, who had already researched these topics, we invited John Heineman, Evan Parker and Giancarlo Schiaffini to share their experiences with us, however the pandemic made this meeting impossible. Later on, from 17–20 March 2021, we opted for an online format – an almost insurmountable challenge to capture the musicians' instantaneous actions and reactions. The

workshop thus achieved an experimental character, both in terms of the content represented, and in the way it was organised; and it is thanks to the enthusiasm and determination of the teachers and students involved that we were able to attain such remarkable results.<sup>7</sup> The original format of *Istantanee* was re-proposed from 13–15 September 2022 with drummer Roger Turner replacing Evan Parker and a large group of musicologists coordinated by Ingrid Pustijanac and Veniero Rizzardi. We dedicated this event to the memory of three musicians of the Gruppo di Improvvisazione Nuova Consonanza who had recently passed away: Mario Bertoncini, Ennio Morricone and Ivan Vandor.

A second workshop planned for 2020 to mark the 250<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Beethoven's birth, *The Beethoven Sonatas Op. 31: Genesis, Analysis and Performance*, also had to be postponed. It took place instead from 14–17 December 2021. The link with the Institute of Music is a historic instrument, a fortepiano built by Mathias Jakesch in Vienna, probably in 1823, which is preserved at the Fondazione Giorgio Cini. Playing on this instrument already means establishing a relation with a historical source. The world-famous virtuoso Andreas Staier undertook the task of teaching a small group of young keyboardists with different degrees of familiarity with historical instruments; the comparison between Beethoven's age and our own worked particularly well thanks to the performance of selected passages of Beethoven's triptych alternately on the Jakesch fortepiano and a Fazioli grand piano which also belongs to the Institute. Moreover, source-based research was also present in the lectures of Hans-Joachim Hinrichsen, Giorgio Sanguinetti, Martina Sichardt, Janet Schmalfeldt and myself, who discussed documents relating to Beethoven's creative process, nineteenth-century treatises on musical form and early recordings of performances. The structure of this most recent workshop is a further demonstration of the expanse implied by the concept *Research-led Performance*. Historical knowledge and performative creativity can be related to each other in several different ways; the most productive attitude excludes both an understanding of archival work as a self-referential exercise and a notion of performed music as the simple embellishment of an academic forum.

## Notes

- 1 Arnold Schoenberg, 'For a Treatise on Performance', in Arnold Schoenberg, *Style and Idea*, ed. by Leonard Stein, London: Faber and Faber, 1984, p. 319.
- 2 Igor Stravinsky, *Poetics of Music in Form of Six Lessons*, translated by Arthur Knodel and Ingolf

Dahl, Cambridge Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1947, p. 122.

- 3 The model of an open exchange among the different professional areas of music was introduced by the director Wolfgang Steinecke in the *Interpretationskurse* of 1954, involving Eduard Steuermann, Rudolf Kolisch and Theodor W. Adorno, and was applied over the years with some changes.
- 4 This first workshop is well documented at <https://youtu.be/2kZYaUCcOPY>.
- 5 See the trailer at <https://youtu.be/R4rnXHDkvFE>.
- 6 See *Studies in Historical Improvisation. From Cantare super librum to Partimenti*, ed. by Massimiliano Guido, Abingdon: Routledge, 2017; *Musical Improvisation and Open Forms in the Age of Beethoven*, ed. by Gianmario Borio and Angela Carone, Abingdon: Routledge, 2018.
- 7 The three sessions of the 2021 workshop are available in their entirety on YouTube: <https://youtu.be/ug1Jkit1aGI>; <https://youtu.be/GVBGXu7CWVc>; <https://youtu.be/CnMXKn7V6KA>.