

Investigating Musical Performance

How do musicians deepen and develop their learning about performance?

The Investigating Musical Performance [IMP]: Comparative Studies in Advanced Musical Learning (2006-2008) project was a two-year comparative study that investigated how Western classical, popular, jazz and Scottish traditional musicians deepen and develop their learning about performance in undergraduate, postgraduate and wider music community contexts. This multi-site, multi-methods research project drew equally on the strengths and expertise of four higher education institutions: the Institute of Education, London; the Royal Scottish Academy of Music and Drama, Glasgow; Leeds College of Music; and the University of York.

- 'Other-than-classical' musicians (jazz, popular, traditional) have common developmental biographies. Western classical musicians tend to have a different profile. This difference can be both strength and weakness. → HE and FE music departments should promote a more holistic view of what constitutes a musician and provide many and varied opportunities for cross-genre collaboration, learning, shared performance and rounded performance excellence.
- Gender is important in learning approaches. Male and female musicians exhibit group differences that cut across musical genres. → Music curricula need to be more sensitive to the ways that gender and genre impact on musical learning, and to be differentiated to address biases that can have negative influences on musicians' learning trajectories.
- Musical self-efficacy and perceptions of expertise increase with wide experience, particularly in a portfolio career of performing and teaching. → Helping others to learn improves personal performance.
- Musical performance anxiety is common, especially for female and Western classical musicians. → Strategies for dealing with performance anxiety should be part of the formal preparation of all musicians, irrespective of genre.
- An ideal institutional culture is inspirational, facilitates academic, professional and personal development and fosters a supportive community of learning, whilst allowing the development and pursuit of personal interests. → The foundations for a successful performance career are built on students' informal and formal learning experiences, networking, group activities and sustained support for transitions from tutors.

The research

Six research questions underpinned this research:

- How do classical, popular and jazz musicians and performers of Scottish traditional music deepen and develop their learning about performance in undergraduate, postgraduate and wider music community contexts?
- Does this learning (knowledge, skills and understanding) change over time during their studies and, if so, how and why?
- Does this learning change after graduation and, if so, how and why?
- How do professional performers, both students and tutors, report that their performance is affected by any experience they might have of teaching?
- What are the strengths and weaknesses of current learning-to-perform practices?
- What can the data say about the theory of how expertise develops, within or beyond music?

The multi-methods research design embraced a specially created survey instrument for n=244 participants (including n=170 undergraduates), distributed on two separate occasions towards the end of two academic years (2005-2006 and 2006-2007); with n=87 participants responding in Year 2. Complementary data were obtained from semi-structured interviews with individual case studies (n=27), focus groups (n=8), participant email diaries and digital video analyses of instrumental lessons (n=9). Case study participants were selected to ensure a representative range of experiences and backgrounds from those who had completed the questionnaire survey. Research foci included:

- Musical biographies (e.g. variables related to the effects of age, gender, musical genre, instrumental type, and experience, including experience of teaching);
- Psychological and social-psychological issues related to performance experiences (e.g. performance anxiety, self-esteem, self-efficacy, musical identity, and the development of expertise);
- Attitudes to, and experiences of, learning including the influence of social and environmental learning contexts such as the transition from undergraduate to professional career. The main findings have been clustered under two themes below :



The effects of group membership concerning musical genre, gender and professional status

- Both diversity and commonality and across musical genres were observed (Creech et al., 2008[a]; Welch et al., 2008[b]; Welch et al. under review; de Bézenac & Swindells, under review). For example, classical musicians emphasised the drive to excel musically and technically and prioritised notation-based and analytical skills, whilst other-than-classical musicians attached greater importance to memorisation and improvisation. Classical musicians attached greater relevance to giving lessons and solo performances, whilst their other-than-classical colleagues favoured making music for fun and listening to music within their own genre. Nevertheless, all musicians believed practice and preparation were important.
- The evidence suggests significantly different developmental profiles for classical and other-than-classical musicians (Creech et al., 2008[a]). Classical musicians tended to have begun to engage with music at an earlier age and were influenced musically by parents, instrumental or vocal teachers and formal groups. Other-than-classical musicians tended to be slightly older in their formative musical encounters and typically reported that they were most influenced by well-known performers and informal groups.
- Different types of musician have different conceptions of themselves as performers. Classical musicians were found to rate themselves higher in terms of their performance skills and quality (Papageorgi et al. in press). Other-than-classical musicians had lower self-efficacy than classical musicians (Welch et al. 2008[a]). They also had idealised views of expertise that related to well-known performers in their chosen genre (Creech et al., 2008[a]). When individual classical musicians discussed the playing of established figures, their comments focused on particular features of the performance behaviours rather than the other-than-classical view of feeling a need to emulate the complete individual style.
- Male musicians attributed higher significance to the drive to excel musically in terms of achieving success. Female musicians attributed higher importance to coping skills, even though they rated their own coping skills significantly lower than did male participants (Papageorgi et al., in



press). This may relate to why female musicians experienced higher levels of performance anxiety (see below).

- Female musicians had significantly higher self-regulation skills in their approach to instrumental learning (Welch et al., 2008[a]). They also reported more frequent use of self-regulation during preparation.
- Musicians' 'ideal' and self-assessed levels of musical skills and expertise are closely related to their gender, genre and professional experience. Female, classical and undergraduate musicians reported a larger gap between their 'ideal' and personal musical skill levels (Papageorgi, et al., in press; Papageorgi, Creech & Welch 2008). They tend to be less confident and more at risk of having negative performance experiences and suffering from performance anxiety. Female and other-than-classical musicians appear to be more susceptible to having high expectations and lower confidence as professional performers. Whilst undergraduate musicians' responses indicated that they had not yet achieved their ideal level of expertise, portfolio career musicians believed that they had already achieved and surpassed their ideal level, perhaps even appearing overly confident, or that the 'ideal' was some form of 'average' that they individually had surpassed.
- Gender and genre impacted separately on aspects of participants' psychological and socio-psychological make-up and on their attitudes to learning (Welch, et al., 2008[a]).
- All musicians, irrespective of genre and gender, had a very strong musical identity, with their 'musician self' forming a core component of their overall sense of identity (Welch et al., 2008[a]). This was a key positive finding from the study, signifying a shared deep love for music and a common motivation towards being successful.

Development and Learning

- All our types of musician considered practical activities such as practising, rehearsing, taking lessons and giving performances to be relevant to their development (Creech, et al., 2008[a]). Other-than-classical musicians attached more relevance to activities such as networking, organising and acquiring general musical knowledge. They also considered making music for fun and listening to music within their own genre to be more relevant than did their

classical peers. Classical musicians attached greater relevance to more 'serious' musical activities where they took individual responsibility, such as giving lessons, solo performance and engaging in mental rehearsal.

- Mental rehearsal was the least-preferred musical activity. Although some respondents rated mental rehearsal very highly, others appeared to use it only rarely or were unaware of its potential role in learning (Haddon, 2007; Haddon, under review). Musical imagery had multiple applications for those who used it. At York, for example, staff used imagery to a greater extent than students for composition and for general understanding of music, including memorisation, and were more likely to have consciously developed its use. Some staff had developed their imagery as a consequence of physical injury and it may be that shorter playing hours for these staff were compensated for by a greater use of imagery. Students used imagery to a greater degree than staff for rehearsing physical movements and for visualisation of a successful performance.
- Although they had no formal preparation for the role, a significant proportion of undergraduates (averaging 32 per cent) and most graduate/portfolio musicians (average 81 per cent) regularly gave instrumental or vocal lessons, particularly if they studied classical music (Papageorgi & Creech, 2006; Haddon, 2009). A survey of final-year music students at the University of York found that 45 per cent (23 of the 51 students in the year group) regularly gave instrumental or vocal lessons. Semi-structured interviews with 16 students revealed a range of teaching activities including leading workshops, one-to-one lessons and group teaching. However, students learned to teach through experience rather than formal training. They reported benefits to their own learning and performing.
- Performance specific self-efficacy and perceptions of personal expertise increased with age and experience (Papageorgi et al., in press). Portfolio musicians rated their overall performance skills and quality higher than undergraduates did. As musicians mature, they develop and gain more experience professionally, their internal standards of what constitutes an effective musician become elevated, but – at the same time – they also appear to become more confident and develop musically, as they rate themselves higher in key musical skills. Finding pleasure in musical activities was linked strongly to musical-self efficacy across undergraduates (Creech, Papageorgi & Welch, 2008)
- Musical performance anxiety (MPA) is a common experience amongst all performing musicians, especially in solo and small group contexts. Female and Western classical performers report higher distress levels. MPA level tends to be higher immediately prior to a performance, but reduces once it begins. The impacts of MPA relate to its perceived severity during performance but are mediated by musicians'

Major implications

'Other-than-classical' musicians (popular, jazz and Scottish traditional) tend to exhibit significant commonality and homogeneity in many aspects of their developmental biographies, attitudes and practices towards advanced musical learning. Their Western classical peers tend to have a different profile.

Gender is also important. Male and female musicians exhibit group differences that cut across genres. Musical self-efficacy and perceptions of expertise are likely to increase with experience across a performance career, particularly in a portfolio career of performing and teaching.

Musicians' 'ideal' and self-assessed levels of musical skills and expertise are closely related to gender, genre and professional experience. Female, classical and undergraduate musicians often appear to be less confident.

All musicians attribute high importance to their 'musician self' as a core component of their identity, signifying a shared deep love for music and a common motivation towards being successful.

An ideal institutional culture is perceived to be inspirational, promote a positive learning environment, facilitate academic, professional

and personal development and foster a supportive community of learning, whilst allowing the development and pursuit of personal interests.

The data suggests that there is a solid basis for any curricular innovation that seeks to promote multi-genre musical expertise and rounded performance excellence. Such an approach could provide the foundation for achieving a more creative and fruitful symbiosis and greater collaboration between musicians of different communities and educational backgrounds. Music departments in both further and higher education should aim to promote a more holistic view of what constitutes a musician, and provide many and varied opportunities for different kinds of performance engagement and cross-genre collaborations. They should also encourage teaching staff to be proactive and accessible and encourage students to network and build professional contacts, thus supporting their transition into professional life. Learners should appreciate the value of, and be open to, cross-genre collaborations. They should also take initiatives to form and work in small groups, as well as seek and offer peer support in coping with performance.

performance experience, their susceptibility to anxiety and their coping strategies (Papageorgi, 2007; Papageorgi, 2008; Papageorgi et al.[a], under review). The data suggest that strategies for coping with the demands of performance are often person- and performance specific, because individuals' performance anxiety thresholds vary within different performance contexts. MPA is normal – what matters is how individuals learn to deal with it and the role of peers, tutors, colleagues and course designers in the support process.

- Over time, musicians become more realistic about their ability to achieve 'ideal' musical skills (Papageorgi, Creech, & Welch 2008). This positive outcome was seen as a gap between musicians' 'ideal' and 'perceived' level of skill (Papageorgi et al., in press) which decreased over time, either because they gained experience and perhaps because they understood more clearly what was possible 'ideally'. As undergraduate musicians came towards the end of their studies, their attitudes seem to converge with those of established professionals (no differences found).
 - For undergraduates, the experience of engaging in many and varied performances, support for developing self-discipline and autonomy, membership of peer networks and continued mentoring after graduation all facilitate transition into a professional career (Creech et al., 2008[b]). Transition is a process that offers difficult challenges, but can be made easier by investing in the development of musical versatility and organisational skills, nurturing specific personality characteristics, and providing the context in which a strong and enduring community of practice may evolve.
- Findings suggests that higher education music institutions can assist their students throughout the transition process by exploring the potential for cross-genre peer networks, prioritising mentoring, and fostering a versatile musical self-image for performance students.
- The prevailing institutional culture affects students' approaches to learning and performance (Papageorgi et al.[b], under review). Differences between the three participating undergraduate institutions (Leeds College of Music, University of York and Royal Scottish Academy of Music and Drama) were observed in students' self-assessment, their perceived control over musical skills, the perceived relevance and enjoyability of musical activities, and the experience of performance anxiety.
 - Literal, pedagogical and informal 'spaces of learning' were identified within the HEI environment, such as at the Royal Scottish Academy of Music and Drama (Morton et al., ms submitted for publication). Literal spaces were critical to how students learnt. Pedagogical style determined the boundaries and restrictions placed on the learning map. Informal spaces supported group music-making and enabled students to listen to their fellow students playing, to be creative in arranging music, learn by ear and play in diverse social contexts.
 - Students report that an ideal institutional culture is inspirational, promotes a positive learning environment, facilitates academic, professional and personal development and fosters a supportive community of learning, whilst allowing the development and pursuit of personal interests (Papageorgi et al.[b], under review; De Bézenac & Swindells, under review).

Further information

Further information about the project, including a full list of journal and other publications, as well as conference papers, is available at <http://www.tlrp.org/proj/Welch.html>. A companion TLRP Research Briefing covers the project's work on Musical Performance Anxiety. It may be downloaded from <http://www.tlrp.org/pub/research.html>.

Key project publications in international journals include:

Welch, G., Papageorgi, I., Haddon, L., Creech, A., Morton, F., de Bezenac, C., Duffy, C., Potter, J., Whyton, A., & Himonides, E. (2008). Musical genre and gender as factors in Higher Education learning in music, *Research Papers in Education - Special Issue*, 23(2), 203-217.

Creech, A., Papageorgi, I., Duffy, C., Morton, F., Haddon, L., Potter, J., De Bezenac, C., Whyton, A., Himonides, E., & Welch, G. (2008[a]). Investigating musical performance: commonality and diversity among classical and non-classical musicians, *Music Education Research*, 10(2), 215-234.

Haddon, E. (2009). Instrumental and Vocal Teaching: How do music students learn to teach? *British Journal of Music Education*, 26(1), 1-15.

Creech, A., Papageorgi, I., Duffy, C., Morton, F., Haddon, E., Potter, J., de Bézenac, C., Whyton, T., Himonides, E., & Welch, G.F. (2008[b]). From music student to professional: The process of transition. *British Journal of Music Education*, 25(3), 315-331.

Papageorgi, I., Creech, A., Haddon, E., Morton, F., De Bezenac, C., Himonides, E., Potter, J., Duffy, C., Whyton, T. & Welch, G. (2009). Perceptions and predictions of expertise in advanced musical learners, *Psychology of Music*, in press.

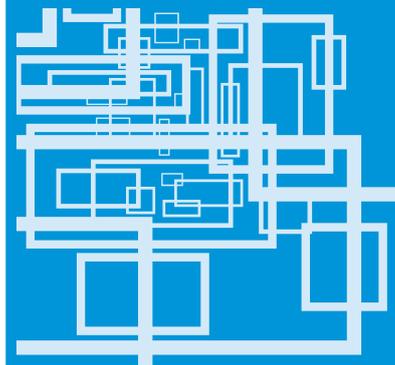
The warrant

Our web-based, PDF survey instrument was piloted and refined before the main phase of data collection. The survey was distributed on two separate occasions towards the end of two academic years (2005-2006 and 2006-2007). Respondents were 244 musicians, 55 per cent of which were male and 45 per cent female; n=87 participants responded in Year 2. Complementary in-depth data were obtained from semi-structured interviews with individual case studies (n=27), focus groups (n=8), participant email diaries and digital video analyses of instrumental lessons (n=9).

All research activities were designed and undertaken in line with the British Education Research Association's Guidelines (2004). The activities within each host institution were scrutinised by their local Ethics Committees to ensure that best practice was being followed.

The project has produced new evidence relating to the processes that underpin teaching and learning within higher education music contexts. The significant academic achievements of the IMP research are shown by 14 academic publications in international scholarly journals, two Teaching and Learning Research Briefings, 31 conference presentations (include keynotes in Finland, Hong Kong and Italy) and a draft book proposal. The research activity facilitated the early academic career development of all five Research Officers across the four HEIs and enabled social science methods to be applied and interrogated in performance arts contexts. The impact on HE teaching and learning policy and practice is ongoing. This includes invited staff development sessions for several UK HEIs and professional organisations.

Teaching and Learning Research Programme



TLRP involves some 90 research teams with contributions from England, Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales. Work began in 2000 and the Technology Enhanced Learning phase will continue to 2012.

Learning: TLRP's overarching aim is to improve outcomes for learners of all ages in teaching and learning contexts across the UK.

Outcomes: TLRP studies a broad range of learning outcomes, including the acquisition of skill, understanding, knowledge and qualifications and the development of attitudes, values and identities relevant to a learning society.

Lifecourse: TLRP supports projects and related activities at many ages and stages in education, training and lifelong learning.

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Improvement: TLRP develops the knowledge base on teaching and learning and policy and practice in the UK.

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