

Transactional Culture of the Portfolio Career Chamber Musician: A Case Study

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1. Introduction

In the European tradition, musicians have traditionally worked in intimate and domestic to large-scale and public settings. During the Early Modern Period (1500–1800), music was defined by its social function: church, theatre or chamber, the latter name describing the music created for performances located in a palace or large house and sustained through a system of patronage (Halle Rowen 1974). Chamber musicians were employed to entertain family members and guests. Sometimes, the patrons also decided to show off their musical skills to an audience. Vocal and instrumental chamber music evolved, sharing specialised traits that suited a more intimate performance space. Groups and the musical pieces they performed began to be referred to by the number of players and the instruments played, e.g., piano trio (for piano, violin and cello) and string quartet (two violins, viola and cello). The musical forms employed also became standardised: pieces commonly comprised four movements, which engaged specific speeds and harmonic relationships (Baron 1998; Keller 2010). Like any other genre, chamber music has developed over time, with combinations of instruments, numbers of players and musical forms being modified and the performance settings and audience types becoming more diversified (Wilschut 2018). Since the 19th century, the professional chamber musician has come to represent the epitome of collaborative musicianship, requiring consummate expertise to achieve cohesive performances. Achieving this objective requires technical and expressive fluency, subtle timing coordination and musicianship that is constantly responsive to the needs of the present moment. In terms of employment, chamber musicians today usually take freelance work offered by institutions and organisations, and the private patronage of an individual sponsor is a rarity. The systems of employment usually necessitate musicians joining pre-existing ensembles or working to develop and sustain a core ensemble. They must also become proficient in promoting and disseminating their musical products through performance and other public opportunities, such as social media posts (Bennett and Hennekam 2018). There is an increasing trend for centres such as regional or national concert venues to have specialist rooms that offer a more intimate ambience suitable for smaller groups (see Eltham 2012). Chamber ensembles are valued by venue management as they are usually less expensive to engage than larger ensembles (Roodhouse 2010).

The research presented in this chapter draws on case study data collected from chamber musicians performing at the Melbourne Recital Centre, located in Victoria, Australia. The researchers' aim was to explore how modern-day professional chamber musicians, the venues that engage them and the audiences that attend their live performances operate. By observing and analysing the transactional communications of three chamber ensembles and through interviews, the project sought to identify how chamber musicians negotiate around potentially differing values related to artistic skill and endeavour, public engagement and entertainment, prestige and financial viability. While "interaction" (direct involvement with someone else) is often discussed in relation to musicians and their practices, for the purpose of this chapter, we selected the term "transaction", as it focuses attention on the Latin root of the word to *transigere* (to bargain, settle a matter or accomplish), thereby highlighting acts of giving and receiving and embracing a need for compromise for successful performance. From this perspective, the working practices of musicians encompass a complex web of transactions. The current research also enabled an exploration of how these chamber musicians find employment, how their ensembles are booked by a particular venue, how they plan their programs and how the performances function as transactions between musicians and their audiences.

In framing chamber musicians' experiences in terms of the transactions they engage in, the chapter is contextualised particularly within the existing research literature on chamber group development, which reflects the dynamic and evolving dimensions of musical ensembles and their relationships with audiences and venues. This offers insights into the micro- (interpersonal) and macro- (organisational/cultural) experiences of professional chamber ensembles, by exploring the ways they grapple with the musical and social demands of the profession, and manage contacts and communications. The chapter concludes by discussing how the current conditions for those involved in chamber music might fruitfully consider their future, particularly in terms of audience development. It also includes a preliminary discussion of the potential short- and long-term effects of COVID-19 on the transactional culture of the future chamber musician.

2. Chamber Music and Transaction

If culture is "a shared system of values, norms and symbols" (Louis 1981, p. 246), music certainly constitutes a rich part of it. While culture is developed through and contained by societal, organisational and institutional structures, it varies according to who it is experienced by, and where and when it is experienced (Hall and Hall 1990). Thus, regulated social transactions (developed over time) reflect micro- (e.g., interpersonal) and macro- (e.g., social systems) relationships. These complex transactions can be understood as a "patterned transference of material . . .

and immaterial (status and power) items between individuals and groups” (Patel and Rayner 2015, p. 288). Each social exchange involves values, meaning making, attraction, merit, respect, benefit and cost, etc.

Research studies of chamber musicians and their practices highlight the responsive nature of transactional experiences. For instance, a recent ethnography of the Artico Ensemble—a group comprising a singer, bass clarinetist, clarinetist and pianist—shows how musicians constantly modify practices, so that even when the same program is repeatedly performed, differences in audience and venue demand different behaviours from the performers (Wilschut 2018). Thus, as shown in the context of sports (Crawford 2004), music performance transactions operate in a loop-like system: musicians applying knowledge, appraising, evaluating and acting between themselves, in continual response to the audience. As van der Schyff and Schiavio (2022) stated, “Distributed across personal and environmental domains (bodily, social, material, technological)”, transactions both “stabilise and evolve over various time scales—from impulses and adaptations, to how creativity unfolds over rehearsals, negotiations, and multiple performances” (van der Schyff and Schiavio 2022).

A concept that further demonstrates the complexity of transactional culture is that of *affordances*, or the possibilities for action in a given environment. This concept was first described by James Gibson (1966) and includes action in both natural and human-made environments, with different affordances arising depending on the person’s background, training and physiology. These affordances may differ within an individual as a result of different stages of development, histories or circumstances. Therefore, for chamber musicians, the music they play affords multiple opportunities for interpretative decision making based on the knowledge, expertise and preferences of the players. Moreover, the personal circumstances and physiology of the ensemble’s musicians will generate multiple and changing affordances as they transact with each other to bring the performance to fruition. Affordances will also arise in interactions with the audience who bring their own capabilities, circumstances and history to the event. Similarly, the acoustics and other physical attributes of the concert venue, together with transactions and interactions with its management, will all give rise to a range of possibilities for action, each of which may have performance consequences.

In the context of the current chapter, the transactions that underpin chamber musicians’ experiences, particularly those related to exploring performance opportunities and their affordances, are examined. These illuminate a series of highly individualised balancing acts that keep musicians open to expanding their skills and repertoires. Above all things, engaging with venues and audiences to optimise interest may keep the performers motivated and in employment.

2.1. *Making a Living*

Over the past two decades, changes in practices relating to taxation, music licensing laws, recording and other technological developments alongside arts policies have led to volatility in both earning potential and employment opportunity for musicians (Bartleet et al. 2019). Elaborate business, social and operational transactions have been necessary for musicians to fulfil their career goals, including economic sustainability (Klein et al. 2017). A recent study found that musicians' employment portfolios contained more than 560 different job titles, the most common, 25%, being "instrumental musician", with 10% being "private music teacher" (Bartleet et al. 2019). Of those musicians surveyed, 70% had worked for more than 10 years, and nearly one in three had practised as professional musicians for more than 20 years, giving an indication of the commitment musicians have to sustaining their careers, even though they experience highly variable and evolving circumstances.

Musicians report a love of their craft and the creative and emotional expression it affords, alongside personal identity fulfilment (McPherson et al. 2012). In the study by Bartleet et al. (2019), musicians reported that live performance was their most common paid activity, and it offered them the greatest motivational incentive, personal reward and satisfaction, even though the amount of money they earned was generally not sufficient to offer financial security. Live performance opportunities were also key to musicians renewing their skills and developing new peer networks and creative collaborations. Live performance was also critical for exposure, audience building and linking with various employment networks, such as concert venues and festivals.

It is perhaps not surprising to discover that Bartleet et al. (2019) found strong indicators of resilience in musicians' creative and financial endeavours. Musicians developed skills in both their music-focused and music-facilitating roles, as well as building their ability to promote, plan and negotiate concerts effectively. To find performance work, performers need to demonstrate that their work is valued and supported. To achieve this objective, they must deploy diverse and agile skills in marketing, promotion and social networking. The attainment of both musical and facilitative skills by musicians has been perceived as a sound risk management strategy (Bridgstock and Cunningham 2016).

Higher educational institutions that train elite classical musicians do not typically offer training to address the enterprise and entrepreneurship skills required to secure an income as a musician. However, Bartleet et al. (2019) underscore the pressure on musicians to assuage risks, including being prepared to move to seek employment, and to work highly irregular hours with a wide range of employers (also see Bennett 2016a, 2016b). Additionally, there is a need for musicians-in-training to have up-to-the-minute skills in self-recording, promoting and distribution for digital platforms such as YouTube and Spotify (O'Reilly et al. 2014; Haynes and

Marshall 2018). Equally, although resilience is often an attribute of those who successfully manage these diverse demands, there are many others for whom these multiple requirements lead to stress, anxiety and unfurling physical and mental wellbeing problems (Innes 2021). Certainly, the mental and physical stresses and strains of playing music are increasingly addressed by teaching institutions, with subjects such as music psychology entering the conservatorium and higher education curriculum (see Kreutz et al. 2008; Osborne et al. 2014; Williamon and Thompson 2006), but the stresses and strains of irregular low-paid work, often in evenings, is less frequently addressed (Bridgstock 2013; López-Íñiguez and Bennett 2020).

By exploring the relationship between chamber musicians, a particular venue and its audience, the case studies presented in this chapter permit the investigation of some of the diverse skills and strategies required to cope with these issues and earn a living. However, prior to the presentation of the case studies, it is necessary to understand the specific musical and interpersonal skills demanded of the chamber musician to achieve interpretative and expressive excellence.

2.2. Musical Skill and Interaction

For a chamber ensemble to cohere musically, there needs to be a shared level of skill, with the musicians also needing to be able to come together and draw on common signs, symbols and behaviours to coordinate their ideas on timing and expression (Davidson 1997). Shared affordances relating to musical knowledge along with developed aural and visual skills, including the alignment of body movements and gestures, all contribute to make the musical product mutually understood and communicated. The balance of long-term knowledge and the capacity to manage moment-by-moment modifications bring about the alchemy that makes each musical interaction unique.

A study of the Gryphon Trio (pianist, violinist and cellist) revealed that coordination was dependent on various kinds of subtle intrapersonal cues and interpretations of them, with body sway being the most pervasive (Chang et al. 2019). Similarly, a study of two pianists preparing for a concert of duets revealed that high-level musicianship was coupled with a range of non-verbal gestures, eye-contact and verbal discussion, though the latter was very restricted (Williamon and Davidson 2002). As they approached the performance, the pianists increased eye contact and adapted their body movements to accommodate each other, with the more demonstrative pianist curtailing movement and the less demonstrative increasing movement.

It is necessary to establish shared musical goals quickly since rehearsal time is at a premium (Goodman 2000; Blank and Davidson 2003). For optimal transactional flow, prior knowledge of the 'rules' of music, performance and social etiquette is required. As Davidson and King (2004) report, successful chamber ensembles devise a rehearsal plan for the material they will practice, but always show flexibility to facilitate focus on issues that may emerge. A study of the Kreutzer Quartet (Bayley 2011) revealed how specific player transactions occurred at different times during rehearsal. For example, technical talk, such as deciphering the score and its notation, came early on, with interpretative musical concerns becoming more dominant as the rehearsal progressed. It is also advisable to plan to deploy a range of rehearsing methods, such as working on key structural sections to establish a sense of the compositional arc; rehearsing sections in and out of sequence; and undertaking run throughs to situate tricky moments, build stamina and a sense of trajectory for the whole piece (see Davidson and King 2004).

It is evident that the high-speed processing of complex information and mastery of knowledge and skills is required in chamber music performance and that rehearsal is vital for planning and consolidating skill ahead of performance (Kneebone 2009). In fact, rehearsal is a key site to bring together individual contributions to iron out technical problems, develop shared musical ideas and consolidate expressive aspects; rehearsal can also be regarded as preparation for future unpredictable events during performance. Studying a student string quartet as they practised and then performed revealed how actions that had been well rehearsed enabled quick re-alignment when a performance went awry (Davidson and Good 2002). The immediacy of response required to recover and reunite the team was reported as "being ready to adapt". For example, the first violinist was quickly able to cover for a momentary pitch slip by the second violinist by making a micro-tuning alteration in performance. Researching a popular music quartet, Geeves et al. (2014) revealed how the ensemble came under threat when one player began an unplanned improvisation in performance. Swiftly following the musician deviating from the performance plan, the three other team members used eye contact and gestures to guide them out of the musical problem. This particular example of transactional responsivity within a chamber group highlights the complex distributed cognitive activity across mental, physical and material resources that is involved.

2.3. Intergroup Social Cohesion

Besides the time and strategies required for successful musical goals to be achieved, the group needs to operate as a functioning social unit. Perhaps one of the strongest social aspects in developing transactional fluency relates to building a sense of connection or "affiliation" to the group. An example of an affiliative chamber ensemble can be found in the Lindsay String Quartet, which is presented

as a cohesive musical unit, touring and recording globally for more than 25 years. (Davidson 1997). They had studied together, worked and socialised together and supported one another through difficult periods. Despite a sort of musical equity in the quartet format, they took on very different roles: the first violinist was the public face of the group, speaking at concerts, and working to secure financial support. The other members, also known for their teaching, were perhaps less obviously central to the operation of the quartet.

As work on group function reveals (Douglas 1983), clear roles often emerge, sometimes as a result of struggles within the group. In a group such as a string quartet, cohesion might be facilitated by the instruments being from the same family and making similar sorts of musical contributions; however, there is also interdependence on the maintenance of boundaries. As Murnighan and Conlon (1991) discovered, in string quartets, the fact that there are two violinists can lead to clashes. Additionally, in a group of four, a 2–2 deadlock or 3–1 out-numbering can arise, with either sub-grouping having the potential to play negatively into the overall dynamics. In a string quartet studied by Davidson and Good (2002), a clash in leadership between the two violinists shaped the rehearsal dynamics between players. Detailed analysis of the verbal exchanges of the string quartet members revealed a complex, longstanding web of interpersonal relationships that underpinned and shaped the interactive behaviour between the players.

2.4. Audience Experience

Audiences are experts at detecting and interpreting both the musical and social cues of musicians and understanding the interactions between performers and audiences (Broughton and Davidson 2016). Indeed, it can take as little as two seconds to assess the performer's musical intention (Davidson 1991). The audience members can also appraise the degree of social liking, familiarity and cohesion between the musicians (Davidson 1997, 2009; Davidson and King 2004). Modeling the different social constituents, Davidson (1997) noted the possibility for multiple and often concurrent performer–audience relationships: a whole performance group to the whole audience; a single performer or sub-set of the performers to the rest of the performers and the audience; a single member or subset of the audience to the rest of the audience and the performers; within audience experiences.

Study across multiple case studies and performance contexts has revealed that when attending a live music concert, an audience member (irrespective of genre) is most typically actively seeking a meaningful experience. In such situations, the performer–audience encounter is often shaped by a cycle of “experiencing-preserving-revisiting” (see Burland and Pitts 2014, p. 175). If audience members experience positive and “meaningful” initial encounters, they will seek to re-experience or extend the memory of that involvement. “Meaningfulness” comes

from a range of “in-the-moment” experiences shaped by the interaction of situational (physical and social features of the performance, including the size of the audience), personal (physical and emotional state; temperament and disposition) and musical and performance factors (experience of musical structures and the performers’ interpretation of them). Together, these can culminate in strong emotional responses (Gabrielsson 2010), sometimes manifesting as peak, transformative experiences (Karlsen 2014). Social identity impacts can include creating a sense of community belonging (McPherson et al. 2012). Where an initial exchange is negative, there is little or no desire for continued involvement as an audience member. If the quality of experience deteriorates on repeated exposure to performances, involvement will also wane.

A study of music festival attendees (Karlsen 2014) not only revealed that personal, situational and musical factors influenced repeat attendance, but also identified a range of contributory mediative factors. Mediators included the apprehension of the musicians’ enjoyment, contact with the musicians, well-known or familiar music, use of humour by the performers, the quality of the work performed and the atmosphere generated (Karlsen 2014, pp. 118–19). These combined factors led to a sense of communal sharing, and it seems that reinforcement among audiences, performers and the programmed content enabled “telling, re-telling and celebrating” (Karlsen 2014, p. 124). Such experience is not exclusive to music festivals; a concert series, regular touring and other repeat opportunities enable such memories and allegiances to develop.

While fandom is typically associated with teenage pop culture, there is strong evidence that followers of classical music are also keen to familiarise themselves with the performance, recordings, social media and personal information of their preferred artists (Burland and Pitts 2014). In exploring the Lindsay String Quartet, Davidson (1997) noted how the strong relationship established among the performers, the audience and a specific venue setting led to a strong following. Over many years, “the Lindsays” developed the Music in the Round Series at the Crucible Theatre’s Studio in Sheffield, UK. A distinguishing feature of their performances was that between pieces and movements of works, the quartet members would talk to the audience, explaining the music, how they approached various musical decisions and technical challenges. An anecdote about their personal experiences of grappling with these matters was often thrown into the discussion. The leader, Peter Cropper, was particularly adept at conversing with audience members, asking them for feedback and talking in quite a familiar manner. The venue’s “in the round” format and limited seating capacity of only 400 afforded these opportunities. As a result, it was almost impossible to buy tickets for the Lindsays’ concerts. This formula of success is clearly appealing to the venue, the performers and the audience. As discussed by Dobson and Sloboda (2014), audience members are eager to feel engaged and involved in

the performance and seek out the live conditions above the passive experience of listening to a recording.

2.5. Summary

The explored literature shows that musicians create a work structure for themselves, and, in the case of those who play music suitable for the chamber format, forming an ensemble is a key component of their portfolio practice. Chamber musicians collaborate with organisations and venues to develop and sustain their ensemble's identity and to gain employment. Collaborative intragroup transactions—both musical and social—are critical to the ensemble's cohesion and emerge from developing shared affordances. Besides intragroup dynamics, how the musicians entertain, inform and move their audiences musically and interpersonally seem vital to building a loyal fan base and secure future engagement with the concert platform. We reflect on these core elements in our case study.

3. Case Study

The following case study involving the members of three ensembles, a significant chamber music venue and several audience members investigates the role of each in creating a chamber music event. In this way, and in focusing on chamber musicians' intragroup transactions, as well as their interactions with audiences and venues, the interdependencies and interrelationships among the three are revealed.

3.1. Venue

The Melbourne Recital Centre (MRC) is one of Australia's premiere live music venues, hosting up to 700 concerts, and engaging with around 400 Australian ensembles and 100 international ensembles annually (MRC Annual Report 2018–2019). This means that more than 210,000 people attend the venue annually. The MRC comprises two concert spaces: The Elisabeth Murdoch Hall, a 1000-seater hall that hosts all styles of performance, from soloist to symphony orchestra, and the 150-seater Primrose Potter Salon, which hosts workshops and lunchtime, rush hour and evening concerts for soloists and chamber ensembles. Both the hall and the salon are internationally acclaimed for their acoustics, designed by the award-winning acoustic engineering firm Arup in 2009. While the size of the ensemble often dictates which venue is used, artists do transition from smaller to larger venues on the basis of demand and growing audience base.

This case study focuses on artists working in the *Local Heroes Series* (LHS) in the Primrose Potter Salon. The series aims to “provide a platform for Victorian and Australian ensembles by subsidising presentation costs, providing a guaranteed fee and support in promotion and audience development” (MRC Annual Report 2018–2019, p. 11). The series aligns strongly with the MRC's strategy to offer a venue

where “bold music makers and passionate audiences make profound connections that resonate for a lifetime” (MRC Annual Report 2018–2019, p. 18). The objective of LHS is to promote live music to audiences by presenting artists and commissioning musical works, thus focusing on place (the MRC), people, platform and program. While these strategic goals include programming that reflects the broad geographic, economic, social and cultural diversity of the state of Victoria, the LHS focuses mainly on classical chamber music (though there are exceptions to this). It was advertised on the MRC’s website in 2020 as: “bringing together Melbourne’s best artists in a year-long festival of chamber music. . . . [From] strings to piano, early music to contemporary and art song to tango, there’s something for every musical taste” (Melbourne Recital Centre 2020).

3.2. The Ensembles in Focus

While there were more than 50 ensembles featured in the 2019 program, three ensembles that offered three concerts that year and had performed in the LHS series for seven consecutive years were selected for close study to gain insights into how they built audiences and developed performance approaches. We explore their interactions and transactions in working with the venue to develop and support both their concerts and broader careers over a considerable timespan. Consistent with the ethics permissions obtained from the University of Melbourne to carry out the research, all ensembles and participants were anonymised using pseudonyms for the names of the ensembles, and numerical codes were applied to each respondent, with P signifying performer and A denoting audience member.

The GM Quartet is an all-male ensemble established more than 15 years ago. It is committed to bringing new music (music composed post-1945) to its audience, and arranging music for the guitar quartet format. SQ Quartet is an all-female ensemble comprising long-established friends in search of opportunities to play their favourite main string quartet repertoire (Beethoven, Schubert, Shostakovitch, etc.), and is known for its sensitivity towards historically informed practices. CK and Associates was selected as it offered a slightly different format, focusing on CK as a well-established Australian pianist who is known for his solo concert and radio work. He has run three concerts per annum within the LHS for the past 7 years, bringing in guests to perform various key works from the chamber repertoire, including piano quintets and piano trios.

These case study data were first collected throughout 2019 and included the following: contextual information provided by the venue and the ensembles via email; field observations of the performances; and focus group discussions with performers, venue staff and audiences. We attended one third of the entire LHS, engaging with the venue, artists and audiences to experience the concerts live and to be able to discuss the impact of the series from the perspective of earning a living,

offering opportunities to invigorate the strategic principles of place, people, platform, and programming developed by MRC (ibid., p. 18) and for public experience.

While demographic details have been withheld due to the ethical conditions of the research and efforts to maintain individuals' confidentiality, a total of eight venue staff, nine performers from the three ensembles and 15 audience members contributed to the data presented in this chapter. Performers and venue staff were purposively sampled. Convenience and snowball sampling techniques were used to recruit audience members to take part in post-concert focus groups. Participating audience members received complimentary concert tickets for their participation in the study. Data were prepared (transcribed where necessary) and analyzed using Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis, providing the practical examples in this chapter.

4. Case Study Results

In this section, we highlight the emergent themes from the literature, which are discussed in relation to the case study ensembles through four main topics: making a living in Melbourne, musical cohesion, intragroup/social cohesion and audience.

4.1. Making a Living in Melbourne

Consistent with music performance more broadly, across the three ensembles, all performer-participants earn their living via portfolio careers. The GM Quartet members make their main income from working in teaching, but all are strongly committed to their ensemble, focusing their effort towards the LHS as an opportunity to present their best work, as well as creating programs that both challenge and excite them. They regard these concerts as high impact for their status as an ensemble, thereby reflecting their reliance upon the prestige associated with the world-class MRC to boost their careers, and highlighting how the success of venues and chamber groups is interdependent.

The SQ Quartet comprises professionals who also play in other ensembles, supplementing their performance-focused portfolio with some teaching. For all members, the quartet is an activity fitted in and around other commitments. They acknowledge that developing the profile of the quartet beyond its current series of performances is not in their purview. The LHS offers important paid work, and diversification of their performance portfolios. It also enables them to brand the quartet as a distinctive entity when promoting themselves as individuals or members of other ensembles in other forums such as broadcasting and recordings. As one member noted when asked about expanding the quartet's work to touring:

I kind of feel like that's not the most achievable thing . . . there's no money, like, there are no, almost no chamber groups in Australia that survive. (SQ Quartet P1)

For them, the ensemble is not a route to financial stability; rather, each member enjoys the diversification and many different and varied forms of performance.

In the case of CK, LHS gives him ongoing presence in the public eye. He comments:

Having one concert doesn't give me that much. It's having—I suppose on a career level—having a series there just gives me some sort of regularity of appearances in Melbourne . . . So having a series sort of gives me a regular vehicle to play in one place . . .

While the fees for the LHS performances were commensurate with Musicians' Union rates, and at three concerts per annum, were considered important regular slots in the work portfolio, it is the branding aspect of the series, with its potential for attaining further economic benefit that is critical to CK and his fellow ensemble members. These broader performer goals are strongly supported by the MRC. The artistic planning team note that the series is based on the following:

A chamber music focus—small and intimate

Enabling artists to build skills

Supporting local artists to develop an audience base

Opportunities to engage with other MRC programs

(regional touring, special events). (LHS 2020)

To provide such opportunities, however, the MRC must use strategies to ensure the ongoing success of LHS, including devising participant selection criteria. When auditioning groups for the series, MRC appraise:

Focus on professional, with a high level of musical achievement

Clear artistic vision for the group and the proposal

Good support material

Suitability for our spaces—tech, size, etc.

Previous sales at MRC (where applicable)—have they developed their audience?

Connection with audience—Facebook stats, social media presence, our experience with artists from previous seasons

Potential/suitability of work. (LHS 2020)

4.2. Musical Cohesion

Without question, when observing the performers in action and discussing the LHS with them, musical goals and synergies were key points of emphasis, revealing the nature of high-level musical skill, which manifests a deep and impassioned engagement with and strive for musical progress. Indeed, in the interviews, first reactions were typically an appraisal of the quality of the playing.

The GM Quartet spoke with enthusiasm about their feelings of happiness with the sound balance and standard of performance. One of the players noted:

I really think that the thing that we're still trying to really fine tune in rehearsals, and certainly on stage, is . . . to get this thing [the ensemble] to be a very slick well-oiled machine . . . getting that felt sense of what's going to happen or how someone is feeling the next phrase. (GM Quartet P1)

When asked to think about what had changed in the ensemble from a year ago, the response of another member was revelatory:

I think a more relaxed group . . . I think, musically, there's much more cohesion. (GM Quartet P3)

This comment indicates that intragroup communications, both musical and social, were transactional rather than interactive. Indeed, critical to the Quartet's progress was a sharing of musical techniques, skills and resources. The distribution of work across ensemble members in the preparation of the concert seemed to bond them, again demonstrating the transactional nature of their relationship. Different members either arranged, composed or sourced music which they felt would work well for the ensemble.

The members of the SQ Quartet highlighted the uniquely rewarding, yet highly competitive, aspects of the string quartet repertoire:

Quartets are so nice to play, . . . it's like you're a soloist but you've sort of got friends there. (SQ Quartet P1)

Like the guitarists, ensemble playing was seen as an opportunity to hone their craft:

Every time you play you hope that you are sort of getting better . . . on the way to being more comfortable and better. (SQ Quartet P2)

This mitigated the potential for combative types of behaviours. Nonetheless, ensemble members were also required have developed transactional-style

communication skills to negotiate the challenges associated with this aspect of string quartet performance. The success of the SQ Quartet's endeavours in this regard was evident in CK characterising the LHS concerts as offering a tremendous opportunity for sharing music with others.

Testifying to the MRC's ideal for venue-ensemble communication to be transactional and inclusive, the artistic programming team of the MRC felt that a distinctive feature of the LHS was to:

Allow for artist-led programming

Repertoire that reflected balance, diversity, vibrancy

Some focus on Australian music

Some music by female composers. (LHS 2020)

In the concerts offered by the three ensembles discussed here, the first two factors were addressed in each concert, with each of the other two addressed in at least one performance across the year. Additionally, all participants referenced the deep possibilities of musical and social sharing inherent to transactional styles of communication, which their spirit makes all the more achievable.

4.3. Intragroup and Broader Social Communication

This theme was clearly articulated by ensemble members, with a sense of connection or association through interpersonal transactions demonstrably vital to the progress of their work. In the GM Quartet, they were keen to note that across their work on the series, there was:

More harmony. Like, not in a musical sense, but I think between us. (GM Quartet P3)

This included:

More subtle communication, I guess, rather than big, overt cues. We're getting better at reading body language. (ibid.)

Another member of the GM Quartet noted:

The more concerts we've done, I think we've really felt as . . . certainly as a group, much more comfortable in our skin and in the room there. (GM Quartet P4)

The final phrase of this disclosure found significant concurrence with the observations of venue staff, who all commented on how increasing venue familiarity led the performers to develop and offer a more relaxed and interactive performance.

As observers watching the ensembles interact with venue staff, the building itself, the venue before and after the concerts, and with us in interviews, the closeness and deep familiarity they shared was evident. Further confirming the transactional nature of ensemble communications, and indeed demonstrating the effectiveness of such an approach, this ranged from jokes, “knowing” looks and glances, to comments or advice shared amongst one another. In conversation, one member would defer a question to another, or recommend a specific individual to speak about a topic as it was their area of strength. There was definitely a sense of camaraderie and mutual support.

On stage and between items, whether spoken or not, there was an interpersonal connection between performers and audiences, which was particularly noticeable in the two quartets. For example, the four guitarists took it in turns to introduce items and would discuss amongst themselves to confirm information. Alternatively, they would sit quietly smiling and agreeing with their colleague who was talking to the audience. The players were aware of this important dynamic, as a member of the SQ Quartet noted:

I think the audience pick that up, because a few people said to me about the rapport between [us], how much they enjoyed that. So I think that the fact that we all felt good, then, in turn, they felt good. (SQ Quartet, P1)

Thus, rapport is regarded a product of transactional relationships.

4.4. Audience Experience

The study confirmed that musical genre affects audience attendance. Moreover, there appeared to be a correlation between the type of audience member, the ensemble and its musical offerings. With the GM Quartet, the experimental, novel and challenging musical offerings seemed to be what the audience was seeking most of all.

I sort of like that random event as well. (A1)

I was more about—I didn’t know any of the music—I had never heard any of it before, so I was surprised that I got into a few of the pieces more than I anticipated that I would. (A2)

For those who attended the classically focused concerts, a marked preference for musical experiences that were familiar to them was frequently observed. They were likely to attend to hear a specific composer or work, or because they followed the artists. For both the SQ Quartet and CK and Associates, this was highly evident.

In speaking about CK’s concert, one audience member stated:

Yeah, I guess . . . I attended because I've listened to some Brahms in the past and I really enjoyed Brahms. I like Brahms as a composer . . . just the composer yeah and the instruments. I like stringed instruments. (A3)

Another audience participant speaking about SQ Quartet commented:

I thought it was a very appealing programme actually. Mainly because it was a quartet, yes . . . Yes, and the composers. Particularly Haydn. I knew that that was going to be fantastic. (A4)

While classical music audience responses certainly indicated that satisfying the attendee's pre-existing musical preferences was helpful to building ensemble-audience rapport, audience members often displayed an openness to accepting something different within a program of otherwise favoured items. Although this point was made in many of the interviews, it is epitomised in the following single quotation:

Yeah, I also liked the Philip Glass piece, although I like American minimalism in general. I also liked the first toccata from the last piece, which was the first movement that they played. I kind of liked the jarring nature, but I think I went into this concert feeling pretty energetic, just as my mood when I went into that concert. I was feeling pretty like, I could probably run a lot right now. It was [the music] very relaxing, and I have to admit at first I was like, okay, this is a change of gear here. So, when that more jarring, crazy energetic music came at the end, I felt like, oh, this is more my speed right now. So, that was nice. (A5)

Further to these favourable experiences of familiarity, and just as the researchers were attentive to the transactional communication between the players, so too were members of the audiences. One audience member stated:

I was really compelled to watch how they interacted . . . like musically interacted with each other. (A1)

Another audience member spoke about the guitarists' gestural communication:

I was very intrigued by watching the different players' faces and their playing styles. Two were facially quite expressive, and two were quite neutral. So I don't know why, I was just watching their faces quite a lot to see—just sort of comparing them I suppose. (A6)

This intimacy of proximity was also apparent in the comment of an SQ Quartet audience member, who stated:

It's the intimacy and I love just watching the eye contact and I just love chamber music. (A7)

Intimacy was explicitly attributed to venue design and size by an SQ Quartet player, again revealing the interdependencies among ensemble, venue (in this case its physical attributes) and audience that is characteristic of chamber group concerts:

I think it's that venue . . . Like, it is quite an open but intimate venue so you do feel like you're more . . . part of the performance. And I think that the fact that you [artist] spoke just makes people feel a bit more at ease and less formal. (SQ Quartet P3)

CK was also acutely aware of the audience and the need to help them feel connected, balancing spoken information flow with playing.

I think it is [important]. People often say that they would like some sort of communication with the performer. Some people talk too much, and I'm very wary of going on and on and on. But I think it's important, and I haven't come across a situation where people don't like it when somebody's talking.

CK's audience members noted:

He was very engaging and he was really trying to contact people and it was nice. He was revealing some little things about himself . . . (A8)

I thought it was really good the way he introduced them [the pieces and the co-performers]. He didn't ramble on and it didn't seem insincere or too practiced. It felt very natural and I thought it added some good insights into the piece and the process, so yeah I liked it. (A9)

Demonstrating the benefits of developing followers for chamber musicians, one audience member stated:

I know so many of them and it's printed. I'll go online, "yep, I know them"—the artists. If I don't, I'll look them up and then I'll spend until 3 in the morning listening to them on my iPad. (A7)

5. Discussion

The literature and case study data have presented evidence of the micro- (interpersonal) and macro- (organisational/cultural) experiences among professional chamber musicians, the venues that engage them and the audiences in attendance. The chapter has shown how all invested parties view values related to artistic skills and endeavours, public engagement and entertainment, prestige and financial

considerations. Additionally, as outlined in the transactional approach to business (Patel and Rayner 2015), “knowledge, appraisal and evaluation”, or to use other terminology in the current chapter, “skills, affordances and evaluations” are critical to ascribing value in all transactions. The data presented have shown that plans, actions and responses feed the scope, quality and outcomes of music performance ecology.

Emergent themes include the delicate balancing of economic, esteem and diversification values for both performers and venues in planning and accepting the ensemble and its approach, as well as the works to be performed. Musical cohesion, as well as interpersonal social interaction, offers a further point of emphasis at all levels and across all stages of planning and executing the performances. Pivotal factors surrounding the audience experience include depth of emotional experience, a balance between familiar and novel encounters, informality and experience of social inclusion. There was evidence of individual preference towards certain performance elements.

It has been shown that specific and often subtle transactions shape the motivations, planning and execution of ensemble performances. While different stakeholders inevitably have different and varied experiences, their transactions contribute to the virtuous cycle of the embedded environmental, social, cultural, material and technological factors and the actions afforded, which constitute chamber music performance. The “art of ensemble performance” seems to be a distributed process, dependent on critical transactions for all stakeholders. Indeed, in our exploration of the transactional culture of chamber groups, the interdependency of venues, audiences and ensembles in terms of their musicking experiences and behaviour was particularly noticeable.

Of course, following the data collection and during the period of writing this chapter, the COVID-19 pandemic ravaged the world. One of the financially most deeply affected sectors was the arts, with live events being cancelled globally. To offer insights into the prospects for the music ensembles and MRC entering the 2021 concert season, and as concerned researchers, we followed up with participants to understand how these challenges were affecting them.

The musicians were surprisingly sanguine, although this should perhaps not be unexpected at all. As shown in this chapter, chamber musicians’ performance opportunities vary greatly from week to week and year to year, and so they are no strangers to dealing with uncertainty. Moreover, with portfolio careers involving diverse skills and the capacity to build strong interpersonal relationships, afforded by the transactional skills inherent to success in their chosen career, they are well placed to pivot towards fortuity rather than calamity in their approach to the challenges COVID-19 posed and continues to pose. While their concert income had evaporated, those with teaching portfolios became occupied with adapting their

skills to online delivery and acquiring new technical skills in video conferencing and recording. Others took the opportunity to consolidate their personal practice, learn new repertoires or arrange new music. Indeed, for some, taking the time to “smell the roses” and enjoy being with their families was an unforeseen and positive consequence of strict travel and social-distancing restrictions, including curfew. Therefore, while home isolation meant much less performance work and an associated drop in income from that source, it also opened other horizons with both tangible and intangible benefits.

For the venue in particular, a skeleton staff developed strategies and actions to sustain business, as well as to offer support to musicians. This included a series of digital concerts and online competitions (with entrants submitting entries recorded in their home settings). For them, it kept something of the ethos of the venue alive, offering an opportunity for the performers and engagement for audiences in a new forum. Indeed, transactions that are adaptive and creative enable stakeholders to seek routes to realise “COVID-19 Normal”, a future in which the culture of ensemble performance can continue, moderated using socially distanced live performance without intervals and online variants suitable for potential lockdowns.

This chapter has not only shown how vital transactions are to chamber musicians, but also how they exist in an embedded environment and are dependent on the individual’s skills and the affordances they share with stakeholders. Moving forward, and as we grapple with the challenges of COVID-19 in the sphere of musical performance, the chamber musician may find this model of their music performance ecology useful as a reflective tool to aid in understanding the nature of the transactions they participate in (see Figure 1).

While our case study involving one venue and three ensembles provided valuable insights and confirmed the value of transactional communication, future studies replicating our methodology but involving different and multiple venues, and expanding to other types of chamber ensembles within the western art music arena, would provide further nuance and enable meaningful comparisons to be made.

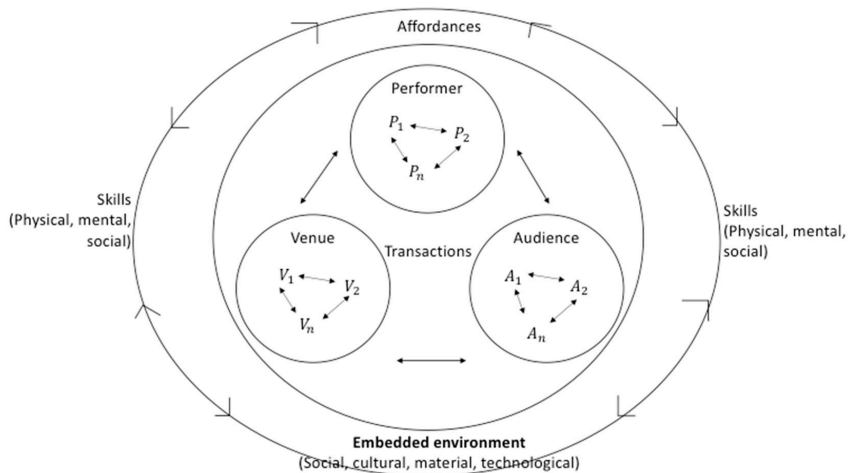


Figure 1. This image shows the transactions among musicians, venues and audiences that are guided by physical, mental and social skills, within an embedded social, cultural, material and technological environment and its affordances. A vital part of this model is dynamic–synergistic flow of informing and transforming factors. (This figure is inspired by van der Schyff and Schiavio (2022) and Davidson (1997)). Source: Graphic by authors.

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