

Partnership in Piano Duet Playing

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1. Introduction

In this chapter, we examine factors contributing to the growth of a piano duet partnership. We begin by considering the concept of partnership and outlining salient features in relation to the literature, before presenting our understanding of its importance within our duet work. As with many terms relating to interpersonal dynamics, the term “partnership” carries a broad range of meanings in different academic contexts. We have chosen this term as our focus for a few reasons, all relating to the image of the participants as musical “partners”: firstly, it places emphasis on the specifically *dyadic* nature of the duet relationship, due to the fact that, by definition, it involves only two people; secondly, it implies a high degree of mutuality, equality, and shared ground (in comparison with the broader image of performers as “collaborators”, for example, which can encompass a wide range of interaction types); thirdly, it hints more strongly at the empathetic and affective dimension of the working relationship, the way that shared musical experiences can give rise to a sense of “merged subjectivity”. In this chapter, we highlight the significance of these facets of collaboration within the specific context of the piano duet format and trace their emergence in our own experience as duet partners. Within this text, then, we use “collaboration” to refer to any co-working (“collaborative”) relationship or situation, and “partnership” to refer specifically to a dyadic collaboration that is highly mutual and that carries a strongly positive affective dimension. In using the term in this way, we are drawing on the legacy of writers such as Vera John-Steiner (2000), whose classic text on creative collaboration described particularly mutually supportive and equal dyadic collaborations using the language of partnership. For John-Steiner, transformational partnership arises out of “multiple perspectives, complementarity in skills and training, and fascination with one’s partner’s contributions” (John-Steiner 2000, p. 64), and creates “the potential of stretching one’s identity . . . through the interweaving of social and individual processes” (*ibid.*, p. 188).

The idea of partnership has been identified as beneficial to many domains including business, education, social work, and voluntary sector organisations, particularly in terms of the integration of provision, finance, resource, and sharing of expertise, risk, and personnel (Cameron 2001; Boydell and Rugkåsa 2007). Much of the literature in these domains focuses specifically on institutional partnerships, particularly the intersections between public services and the private

sector that are central to neoliberal models of government; the focus of this research is thus primarily on identifying the attributes essential for successful and sustainable cooperation. For Mohr and Spekman (1994), these include commitment, coordination, interdependence, and trust, as well as the quality of communication, information sharing and participation, and appropriate conflict resolution techniques. Successful partnerships also need an agenda that is “transparent and respectful of different viewpoints” (Edwards 2005, p. 48); they must be underpinned by “belief in the creative potential of joint working towards purposive change”, “vision and imagination”, consideration of “power and representation”, the “absence of organizational and personnel barriers”, and “operational understanding and role clarity” (El Ansari et al. 2004, pp. 279–80). Niels Åkerstrøm Andersen memorably characterises partnerships such as these as “possibility-creating machines” which “can be used as accelerators for partners’ development” (Andersen 2008, p. 147) whilst acknowledging their fragility: “they have to be continually created and recreated, which increases the risk that they become dissolved” (ibid, p. 139). This concept of the partnership as a “possibility-creating machine” proved highly relevant to our own experience, and we will return to it later.

Dyadic partnerships of individuals (for example, in coaching, academic supervision, sports, and nursing) may also show the attributes detailed above. In these contexts, partnership focuses on the contributions of the individuals towards a shared goal (Reed 2011). Role definition may be undertaken (Petre and Rugg 2004) and each participant is viewed as “a respected, autonomous individual with something to contribute to a joint venture” (McQueen 2000, p. 726). Here, the attributes highlight “trust, honesty ... respect, ability to know what the other is thinking and is wanting, negotiating skills, dependability/reliability ... power sharing and equality” (Reed 2011, p. 57). Gottlieb et al. (2006) emphasise the importance of “person-centred goals” and “the creation of a dynamic process that requires the active participation and agreement of all partners in the partnership” (ibid, p. 8).

Within the literature, it seems clear that partnership is understood as an active process; it requires a commitment to individual and joint development, and sensitivity towards specific attributes and working procedures which may negotiate potential fragility and tensions, enabling the construction of a valuable and lasting relationship. Surprisingly, although there are frequent references to partnerships in musical performance within material relating to concert promotion, there has yet to be a comprehensive academic exploration of the concept of musical partnership. In the context of pianist and singer/instrumentalist duos, Moore (1962) elevated the perception of the pianist from subordinate to partner, while Katz has since argued that “collaborator” is more representative of the relationship (Katz 2009). Within piano accompaniment/collaboration, Roussou identified five roles for the pianist:

“co-performer, soloist, coach, accompanist and collaborator” (Roussou 2013, p. 511), relating both to “functional” aspects, which “ensure the success of the musical partnership”, and to “socio-emotional behaviour”, which facilitates confidence and security (ibid., p. 514). Similarly, Blank and Davidson (2007) highlighted the importance of the socio-emotional relationship in their study of partnerships in piano duos (two pianos), noting the importance of non-verbal communication between the two players as well as of dialogue and openness to each other’s ideas. They found equality between players in decision making concerning repertoire and administration, shared goals, the flexibility of adoption of either “leader” or “follower” roles, and noted that duos can develop “affective” relationships which “can lead to very powerful and long-lasting partnerships” (ibid., p. 245). Our research explores these issues in the context of our own piano duet partnership, focusing especially on how a partnership might develop over time.

2. Chamber Performance and Interpersonal Dynamics

The nature of the evolving duet partnership documented in this chapter was strongly influenced by the interpersonal setting. The participants already knew each other fairly well (as colleagues in the same music department, and for some time prior to that as a teacher/student dyad), and there was also a deliberate decision from the outset that the duet partnership would be formed not with any specific performance in mind but rather as a space for enjoying learning repertoire together and reflectively exploring issues around the development of the partnership. As a result, the primary goals of the partnership were relational and internal to the two researchers. This setting is distinct from most discussions of partnership in the literature on management, business, and sociology, where dyadic relationships are “typically directed at the accomplishment of some common objectives or goals” (Ferris et al. 2009, p. 1379), with the implication that these objectives are fixed and external to the group—for example, a project or negotiation to be completed or a pre-established working environment with ongoing tasks or deadlines. Moreover, dyadic relationships in these settings often revolve around what might be termed transactional interactions: in other words, they are driven by each participant’s desire to maximise the mutual benefit for the dyad in its end goal whilst preserving individual interests. The metaphor of the “psychological contract” is widely used to describe these relationships (see, for example, Ferris et al. 2009, p. 1381), and this metaphor naturally brings with it concepts of mutuality, obligation, and entitlement, as well as a clear orientation towards an externally defined end goal.

There are numerous reasons why musicians choose to play within chamber ensembles, and many of these fit naturally within the transactional, goal-oriented model of partnership described by Ferris and others—for example, contexts of professional performance or recording, worship and ritual, educational assessment,

teaching and coaching, community outreach, or directed self-improvement. Other motivations may include enjoyment, widening knowledge of repertoire (Burt-Perkins and Mills 2008), elevating individual standards of playing (Ford and Davidson 2003), and developing communication skills transferable to other areas such as instrumental teaching (Burt-Perkins and Mills 2008). However, chamber music performance also offers the potential for a notably different model of interpersonal interaction—one oriented not around the maximisation of individual and mutual benefit but around the desire to transcend individuality per se, to explore “merged subjectivity” (Rabinowitch et al. 2012) and ways of communication that are non-transactional and focused on process rather than product.¹ Indeed, even in settings driven by clear external end goals, the dynamics of interaction within chamber ensembles are often more complex than simple transactional models can describe, because of the centrality of the affective dimension in music making; as Elaine King notes,

ensemble musicians share a particular bond—a love of music and the desire to play it—which underpins the dynamic relationship between them. In effect, therefore, ensemble musicians, whether amateur, student or professional, are potentially involved in a *close* working relationship that mirrors the experiences in everyday lives among partners, families and friends. (King 2013, p. 253; emphasis original)

This is particularly the case in amateur and domestic contexts, where external goals of public performance or the attainment of a recognised standard of expertise are less important than the mutual enjoyment and relational enrichment produced by shared aesthetic experiences. It is noteworthy in this regard that, since its inception, the piano duet genre has been especially associated with domestic settings, in particular through the opportunity it provided before the era of recording for amateur music-lovers to participate actively in their enjoyment of canonical works (Christensen 1999). Not only that, but the physical setup of the duet environment (two players at one instrument) is particularly conducive to explorations of merged subjectivity, as noted elsewhere (Haddon and Hutchinson 2015; Oinas 2019). Certainly, the experience of partnership formation documented here illustrates the way in which ensemble music making in a reflective setting can create a trajectory of interpersonal growth—moving gradually from individual, explicit, and conscious communication towards collective, implicit, and instinctive acts of musical creativity

¹ Sometimes, these different potential motivations for ensemble interaction can collide. See, for example, the account in Burt-Perkins and Mills (2008), in which a chamber group formed to play music for enjoyment struggled with the transition to the more goal-oriented context of conservatoire-level performance assessment.

which are highly fulfilling. Our findings illustrate several specific components of this trajectory.

3. Method: Rehearsal and Reflective Writing

During a four-month period, the two pianist-researchers met eight times to rehearse a duet arrangement of Beethoven's Symphony no. 2, using the edition by Schirmer, first published 1894, anonymous arranger. Discussion of ideas for research took place during the first session; a process of documentation and exploration ensued through a shared reflective diary which commenced by email after the first rehearsal, with both pianists writing individually, sharing their writing, and reflecting further after each rehearsal.

Through an extended process generating over 15,000 words, the diary enabled immediacy of data entry following rehearsals, freedom of expression, and the possibility for dialogue, clarification, and expansion. Writing enabled us to "articulate and elaborate ideas, to clarify viewpoints and attitudes, to discuss abilities and feelings, to affirm ideas, behaviours, processes and the project itself, and to witness progression of a musical project as well as individual and joint understanding" (Haddon and Hutchinson 2015, p. 142). Additionally, we felt that "early recognition of the privilege of open access to the thoughts of the co-participant motivated investment and reinvestment in the activities of writing and rehearsal" (ibid.). This enabled "mutual recognition and appreciation of the value of both the project and of the participants" (ibid.), and echoes the values of commitment, respect, and shared belief outlined above as essential to effective partnerships.

Analysis of the use of learning journals in music education reveals benefits for higher education music students including goal identification; goal influence on practice, articulating issues of responsibility and modes of student-teacher relationships (Carey et al. 2017), as well as problem solving, group dynamics in band formation for popular music students, reflective capacity building, and instrumental technique (Esslin-Peard 2017). However, the process of reflection with teacher oversight (Carey et al. 2017) or moderation of e-journals presents tensions between freedom of expression and potentially writing to please others. Commitment to developing a "safe space" (Fernsten and Fernsten 2005) for the process is essential. In our case, our reflection was not moderated by any outsider but was constructed through a dialogic process of reflection, sharing, and responding. This dialogic journal (e.g., Roderick 1986; Roderick and Berman 1984) allows for a greater degree of honesty, as well as providing the space for the parameters of the partnership to be continually renegotiated, in line with Andersen's concept of the fragility of the "possibility-creating machine". This process is not without vulnerability. Writing without an external facilitator in a non-supported process required us to consider issues of sensitivity, empathic attunement, analytic tactfulness, and writing styles;

as we became more comfortable in this process, our diary entries became longer, more detailed, and many ideas were raised and discussed in depth. Following a period of maintaining a critical distance from the writing and from further rehearsal, we analysed the diary material from the perspective of empathy (Haddon and Hutchinson 2015). We subsequently decided to explore another theme evidenced in the writing, that of partnership.

4. Data Coding and Analysis

After discussing potential approaches to coding, we decided to jointly code and thematically analyse the data by hand, using an iterative, recursive process in which themes emerged from the data (Braun and Clarke 2006) rather than imposing pre-constructed themes or codes. Subsequently, we coded portions of the diary separately before meeting to compare codes. This process was repeated to enable clarification and agreement. While our insider perspective raises potential concerns of objectivity, Murphy et al. suggest that “rather than regard being an insider as a threat to the rigour of research, the partnership model celebrates it as a sharing of interactions and interpersonal opening to each other” (Murphy et al. 2016, p. 16). Reflexivity was supported by the critical distance between data analysis and rehearsals; the dyadic collaboration enabled checks on the individual interpretation of material. This process affords insight into the qualitative understandings held by the participant-researchers of their shared construct of partnership. Where diary extracts are quoted below, ‘M’ and ‘E’ are used to distinguish the participants (primo played by M and secondo by E in this context).

5. Findings and Discussion

5.1. Dialogic Journal: Productive and Protective Function

The decision to combine rehearsals with an ongoing dialogic journal via email served to accelerate the formation of a creative working musical partnership, in which we acted as “co-participants” and “co-constructors of educational experience” (Roderick 1986, p. 308). Our journaling allowed us to explore different approaches towards communication both within and outside the rehearsal space, and it allowed whatever took place in the rehearsals to be re-evaluated both individually and jointly at a later point. This reflective process served both a *productive* and a *protective* function within the dynamic of the evolving partnership. The diary enabled us to discuss practical ideas and challenges relating to rehearsals and provided an additional avenue for communication that was deliberately more detached from the rehearsal process itself, both temporally and physically. In this way, it could act as protective insulation against many of the immediate pressures associated with rehearsal communication, such as concerns about the progress of a group,

or individual ability. Moments of possible conflict or insecurity within rehearsals could be resolved quickly by means of the “side channel” of the shared reflections; collaborative processes could be constructed, and the productive and protective functions created an enhancement of the rehearsal process.

The process of coding identified four strands of activity underpinning the development of the duet partnership, each of which traced a distinct trajectory as the partnership became stronger:

- Identifying *joint and individual responsibilities*, with a trajectory of increasing comfort in the complementarity of our roles;
- Exploring different *communication* strategies, with a trajectory of increasing dependence on embodied musical knowledge rather than explicit verbal dialogue;
- Establishing *freedom to experiment*, with a trajectory of increasing confidence in creative instinct rather than conscious analysis in problem solving;
- Taking *shared creative ownership* of the duet process, with a trajectory of increasing security in adapting the score to our own purposes.

These strands were interwoven throughout the diary entries, and in each case, there is clear evidence of shifts in the nature and purpose of these activities as the partnership becomes more established—sometimes gradual and sometimes more epiphanic, arising from a particular activity or discussion. Each will be considered in turn; quoted material is extracted from the shared diary entries.

5.2. *Joint and Individual Responsibilities*

From the outset, there was a clear sense of mutual commitment to the shared enterprise. Diary entries show that following Session 1, we both referred positively to “evolving a duo partnership” [E] and to its “appeal” [M], and this clear desire to invest in the process remained throughout the diaries. The initial shared impetus of “evolving a partnership” was paired with the specific activity of learning Beethoven’s Symphony no. 2; the fact that there was no specific performance date in mind enabled us to focus on establishing a collaborative partnership rather than on preparing a polished product. Nonetheless, these starting points did lead us to articulate more specific areas which could be developed jointly or individually. In the first session, we both suggested areas to work on together: gestural cues, stylistic authenticity and colour [E], dynamic control, pedalling, and legato touch [M]. Alongside these shared concerns, individual development goals emerged during the initial rehearsals as we became more aware of our individual role within the partnership. E, playing secondo, noted, “I need to work on stamina and being able to create a richer and fuller sound to support . . . I need to get out of my comfort zone a bit”, whereas M, playing primo, felt that “my *tremolandi* were clearly not nearly rhythmic enough . . . and several

chordal/passages were very uneven or else not legato enough" (Session 1). The act of playing together thus inspired individual work: as M noted, "certain technical difficulties became very evident in playing together which I'd not noticed on my own" (Session 1), and this led to altered practice methods, including replicating the duet seating position and working without pedal.

Individual goals were thus ultimately focused on the collective perspective. To this end, M wanted to "try and ensure that I could imagine the other part at least to some degree whilst practising because that had such a big bearing on issues of interpretation, dynamics, etc." (Session 1). Sometimes an individual area of responsibility emerged directly as a result of the construction of a shared goal. For example, after the first session, M observed that "sometimes I wanted more pedal, but didn't want to just grab it myself. [. . .] Actually, not having access to it did make me think a bit more about a legato touch at the top". Further reflection after Session 1 led to M's observation that "once I realised that you were tending to work with a drier pedal-touch than I might have, I just took that as a given and tried to adjust my playing to compensate". Therefore, within this partnership context, the shared goal of thinking more creatively about pedalling required M as primo player to think anew about his approach to touch, as part of ceding control of the pedal to E. This division of responsibilities—E pedalling and M responding—was itself not taken for granted; later rehearsals experimented with alternative role divisions, as discussed further below, and this led to an informed understanding of the ongoing responsibilities within the partnership.

The process of negotiating joint and individual responsibilities in the first few rehearsals allowed both participants to recognise and accommodate mutual strengths and weaknesses, interpretative as well as technical, and to observe variance and difference, which are important foundational considerations for partnership. Following the first rehearsal, E observed that "M tends towards much louder and full-toned playing than I do. [. . .] M is a much more gestural player than I am", whilst M noted that "our phrasing did tend to vary: I seemed to work over longer phrases, but didn't articulate smaller gaps as well"—a distinction which E attributed partly to "M's greater recent involvement in orchestral playing". A key issue for both of us was the desire to establish a consistent joint approach without limiting individual freedom unnecessarily. M's lengthy response to E's comment about gesture following Session 1 illustrates this well:

When I think about it, I see that I am a more gestural player than you . . . [so] what I thought were totally instinctive lead-ins were perhaps actually you just reacting sensitively to my unconscious but actually perhaps quite visible leading gestures? In which case, whilst that has a certain pragmatic benefit (i.e., we tend to be together most of the time), it does potentially constrain your freedom to take the lead at times where it would

be beneficial, simply because my more overtly gestural manner might end up taking over without me meaning it to. So I'd definitely be interested in exploring subtler cues.

This comment also illustrates the value of the reflective process itself in articulating joint and individual responsibilities. The conversational nature of the diary entries and responses enabled both participants to examine aspects of their interaction more closely and to address possible barriers to collaboration in a measured way. This process rendered the changing nature of interactions visible as the rehearsals continued: once joint and individual areas of responsibility were established after the first few rehearsals, they receded into the background and became a more instinctive part of the partnership—differences of interpretation becoming the basis for constructive discussions *within* rehearsals, for example, rather than tacit elements to be unpicked afterwards via reflection. As M observed after Session 4, “by this stage in our playing together I actually really enjoy the differences between [E]’s interpretative approach and mine—often I find that what I’d choose to do myself is made much more interesting when it interacts (or occasionally collides) with her choices”. This progressed towards E noting after Session 6 that “it’s not so much the sense that we’re working towards a common goal, but that we both have more freedom within the relationship now to express our potentially different thoughts about how we will achieve that goal”. This revealed a developing sense of security in the shared process: “however we try to express these feelings, the other person will respond, add to and enhance the verbal discussion or performed musical communication . . . the partnership is strengthened through exploration and experimentation . . . there’s a degree of security and freedom that’s developed as a result of that, and which feels like a strength which we will continue to nurture” (E, Session 6).

The trajectory of process articulated in the diary entries shows that initial commitment was sustained through identifying and working on joint and individual areas and developing a collective perspective: one which enabled individual and instinctive freedom underpinned by the security of response from the co-player. Concerns about initial responsibilities moved through creative exploration towards shared ownership in which divergence was viewed as an opportunity to establish frames of reference and their boundaries, supported by specific communication strategies.

5.3. *Communication Strategies*

The exploration of different approaches towards communication, within and outside the rehearsal space, was a central component in the development of this duet partnership. During the early stages of collaboration, post-rehearsal reflection through the shared diary enabled open lines of communication, both musical and

interpersonal. In terms of musical communication, M noted in response to E's first diary entry that several of her observations drew his attention to musical issues that "I'd really not noticed . . . not something I would have consciously recognised if you hadn't pointed it out", expressing the hope that through the process "I'll become more consciously aware of musical decisions that I am often making instinctively at the moment". E commented in response that the reflective process "can only be beneficial to a developing understanding that informs and supports what happens when we're actually playing". This sense of positive openness was particularly important when discussing areas for improvement revealed by a rehearsal: the diaries gave an opportunity for the other player's perspective to add reassurance to any uncertainties about technique or sound, and often provided a means for one player's concerns to form the basis for joint work in future sessions. For example, E noted after Session 1 that "M tends towards much louder and full-toned playing than I do . . . and probably felt a bit under-supported at times", expressing a desire to "create a richer and fuller sound to support him"; in response, M affirmed the observation of the differences between the two players, but cast it in opposite terms:

I really agree with what you said about volume/fullness of tone, although I saw it from a different angle: I wouldn't say that I felt under-supported (not consciously, anyway), but once you pointed out our generally *mf*+ dynamic range, I did feel liberated to drop it down several notches, and was very pleased (even at this early stage) at how much of an improvement it felt expressively to have more lower dynamics to work with.

One person's concerns could thus easily become a point of creative development for the partnership, enabled through the enlightening and affirmative perspective of the other player. This likewise fostered a sense of security within the communication process and produced a virtuous circle whereby we both felt increasingly empowered to articulate musical ideas and concerns honestly and openly. As the partnership became more established, these conversations increasingly shifted from within the reflective diaries (where any possible areas of conflict and misunderstanding could be pre-emptively resolved) to the rehearsals themselves: later diary entries are less concerned with revisiting aspects of each participant's playing from the previous rehearsal and more occupied with considering the nature of the working process.

One facet of this evolving sense of security and openness was the gradual negotiation of different communication roles within the partnership, tied to the respective strengths of the two players. In the early diary entries, there is a clear sense of treading carefully as we try to establish the parameters of our communication, particularly in the light of our former teacher-pupil relationship (M had taken piano lessons with E some years previously). E had noted after Session 1 that "we did both apologise—M more than me, and sometimes when it was me who'd gone wrong!",

and M suggested that these apologies could convey “vestiges of the old teacher–pupil relationship—‘oops, I should have practised that a bit more?’”. Following Session 2, E commented that “M is definitely more diplomatic than me and is more likely to suggest that he modifies his approach rather than I modify mine. [. . .] I guess through writing this I can say clearly that he shouldn’t hold back from commenting on what I’m doing, especially if he doesn’t like it!” E identified one moment in the rehearsal where:

I definitely went into “teacher mode” . . . and made a few technical suggestions . . . it didn’t feel like a bad thing at the time for the left hand trills which hopefully might help make them as good as the right hand ones, but I probably should have waited because I’m sure he would have sorted them out on his own!

In response, M again highlighted the positive aspect of this interchange:

When you were making suggestions about those trills . . . I found that it felt more like a “lesson” for a moment. [. . .] The thing is, this wasn’t a negative experience for me, because it was genuinely very helpful. [. . .] Perhaps at present I don’t think so naturally about those kinds of technical details, but could instead make sure that I come forward with suggestions about larger shapes, harmonic processes, etc., where they feel helpful?

This exchange established two key foundations for communication between the two participants. Firstly, it gave *permission* for each to comment openly on the other’s playing, without fear that this would disrupt the equality or equanimity of the partnership. Secondly, it affirmed that each participant had a distinctive *role* to play in this kind of communication, just as each had distinctive strengths as a performer: E tended to comment more on localised issues of technique and sonority; M on longer-range harmonic, textural, and “orchestral” features. The “teacher mode” that caused E concern could thus be rehabilitated as an acceptable means of communication within an equal partnership by acknowledging that it was complemented by M’s ability to comment in more detail on other aspects of interpretation. This is reinforced by later diary entries, where the interplay between different kinds of expertise is clear, as M’s entry following Session 5 demonstrates:

There were a few more brief “teacher-student” moments in this rehearsal, with a few bits where I wasn’t sure about a technique, or how to bring out a passage best. [. . .] Towards the end of the session, as we started working on texture in the fourth movement, I was able to make some suggestions myself, so that was nice—I didn’t want to feel like I wasn’t pulling my weight! It was good to have a balance.

Over the course of the diaries, it is possible to see a wide variety of different “modes” of communicative engagement emerging, each with their own character and expectations. The natural shifts between these different communicative modes are vital to the effectiveness and enjoyment of the rehearsal sessions, avoiding the kind of fatigue that might have arisen from a long time spent communicating only in one way or about one aspect of the music (or in a way which foregrounded one participant’s skills or knowledge above the other’s). Table 1 identifies some of the various modes of communication experienced during the partnership and summarises their role and features.

Table 1. Modes of communication in the duet partnership.

Mode of Communication	Role and Features
Performance mode	Modelling a performance; focus on playing through long stretches; M (primo) generally assuming leadership role gesturally; increases in frequency as competence and shared interpretation develops.
Teacher mode	Fixing technical issues; focuses on small segments; E often takes the lead.
Interpretation mode	Discussion of expressive dimension of music, intended effect, etc.; varies between local and long-range focus; E and M share leadership equally but with different emphases.
Experiment mode	Testing out hypotheses about technique or interpretation (e.g., pedalling, rubato, alterations to notation) by trying out varied/extreme versions of them; no pressure to get it “right”; sense of fun and freedom.
Rapport mode	More general, personal discussion and “catching up” on life events outside of music; important for building trust and for understanding of progress; often merges naturally into music making; acknowledgement of shared effort and enjoyment.
Reflective mode	Looking back over the process of a rehearsal in the subsequent diaries and responding to each other’s comments.
Strategic mode	Planning subsequent rehearsals, rehearsal aims, shared outwards-facing goals (performances, presentations, writing).
Professional mode	Delivering a performance, presentation, or piece of writing—these all occurred at the end of the time period of the diary.

Source: Table by authors.

The development of these different modes of communication relied on each player's willingness to explore new strategies of interaction in a positive manner. This, in turn, opened up a space for cyclic processes of problem solving and experimentation within the rehearsal space, whereby an area of interest or concern was identified, then explored creatively (and possibly resolved) using one or more of the modes listed above. It is noteworthy that each mode corresponded to a different way of approaching the music (and other aspects of the duet partnership), as well as to different divisions of responsibility between us. There is even a different level of shared or individual identity—from the sense of shared subjectivity necessary for a fluent performance to the independence evident in discussing each other's lives or comparing ideas about interpretation. The underlying affective dimension of the partnership was crucial to all these different modes since it enabled the "empathic, emotional kind of musical intention" essential to shared musical learning (Schiavio et al. 2020, p. 3). In Vera John-Steiner's terms, it created "emotional scaffolding" that could underpin different kinds of communication, by

creat[ing] a safety zone within which both support and constructive criticism between partners are effectively practiced. Collaborative partners can build on their solidarity as well as their differences; complementarity in knowledge, working habits, and temperament adds to the motivation needed for effective partnerships. (John-Steiner 2000, p. 128)

The freedom with which we could move between these modes (with attendant shifts in our sense of "being" as a partnership) gave flexibility to rehearsals and allowed us to maintain a sense of agency and commitment as the partnership developed.

Again, this process of development followed a clear trajectory. The simplest way to describe the shifts in communication strategies over the course of the rehearsal process would be to say that the "default language" of the partnership moved gradually, over the course of a few months, from text to speech to music. In the early stages of the partnership, a lot of time and energy was devoted to *verbal* discussions of musical ideas. At first, much of the most detailed analysis took place within the diaries, perhaps because of the additional reflective space they allowed, but as the partnership became more established, the rehearsals themselves became the primary arena for communicating about performance. As a result, diary entries for the first three or four rehearsals contain frequent references to quite detailed discussions about specifics of tempo, gesture, dynamics, and specific technical issues. In the later stages of the documented rehearsal process, communication about performance increasingly shifted *away* from words (either written or spoken) and was instead mediated more directly through acts of musical performance, as noted by M, following Session 8:

What particularly struck me is just how “settled” a lot of interpretative issues have become, ones that we did (at one time or another) spend quite a while talking about—they seem to have become quite natural now, which is great, and shows both how helpful the in-depth discussion was, but also how it can then gradually feedback into a more instinctive engagement with the performance experience.

E noted similarly:

Today we didn’t do a lot of talking until afterwards when we discussed the session and looked at a couple of small points. There’s a lot that kind of can’t be said, in a way, because it’s musical communication that is too fleeting to pin down, or if you tried to, you might not really want to define it, or would get bogged down in thinking why something worked, or not.

There is a link here with a more general principle about ensemble coordination and musical interpretation which Murphy McCaleb has outlined persuasively in his book *Embodied Knowledge in Ensemble Performance* (McCaleb 2014). McCaleb critiques the tendency in much existing research on ensemble coordination to map ideas from linguistics naively onto musical performance: he observes a “tacit assumption that performers operate in a manner similar to those involved in conversation” whereby “information is “pushed” from one person to another through intentional action on behalf of the sender”—a paradigm that “is rooted not in musical performance but in social interaction” (McCaleb 2014, pp. 41–42). McCaleb argues that this viewpoint unhelpfully privileges verbal, propositional kinds of knowledge *about* music, when in fact his own studies of ensemble rehearsal suggest that the players are primarily concerned with more procedural knowledge of *making* music, a knowledge that takes shape ultimately through action rather than words. As he puts it, “music may serve not only as a mode of interaction but also as a form of knowledge . . . In discussion [within rehearsals], performers look for metaphors to describe what is *already understood* as musical content” (McCaleb 2014, p. 57).

Verbal communication within rehearsals is thus best viewed as a means of reaching towards musical experiences which are understood as a form of knowledge in themselves; given the highly multimodal nature of musical experience itself,² it is hardly surprising that performers should find themselves reaching towards multiple different modes of communication in rehearsal in order to capture and share their own musical knowledge. Moreover, the embodied, active nature of musical knowledge encourages a similarly embodied, active approach towards

² For more on the multimodal nature of music perception, see Johnson and Larson (2003), Larson (2012), and Zbikowski (2009).

shared experience. In other words, a musical partnership is at its most effective when it relinquishes the concepts of “message”, “sender”, and “receiver” enshrined in linguistics (with their attendant connotations of individuality, distance, and propositional knowledge), and instead embraces ensemble performance as an *action* that performers take together, in the context of a working partnership rooted in mutual understanding and trust.

5.4. *Freedom to Experiment*

The distinction between verbal and musical knowledge also reflected another important dimension of the rehearsal process. From the third rehearsal onwards, one of the most frequently recurring themes of the diary entries (and rehearsals) is the tension between instinct and conscious awareness in processes of interpretation. In almost every core area of duet performance—pedalling, rhythmic coordination, phrasing, dynamic balance, etc.—we frequently found ourselves caught between the desire to make thoughtful decisions as a partnership and the realisation that this level of conscious awareness could also potentially get in the way of fully committed, expressively rich interpretations, by forcing a level of detachment from the immediate physicality of performance. This issue could be applied to all kinds of performance, of course, but it is particularly relevant within the context of a musical partnership (particularly a piano duet), with its radical sense of mutual interdependence and shared leadership (Oinas 2019). The issue of coordination was an early example of this tension, as M described after Session 2:

I feel like I learned something very early on about over-thinking things! After the previous session, and our discussions about gesturality, etc., I decided to try and be more understated, because I didn't want my gestures to get in the way of natural musical expression—but the result was that at first our ensemble was a lot less secure than the time before, and I also felt quite constrained in my playing. Once we talked a bit about the gestural side, and agreed that we'd both noticed this, I decided to revert more to my previous style, and that seemed to work a lot better. I think essentially I do just tend to move around a lot naturally in playing, and trying not to “overdo” this ends up with my playing suffering as a result of the sense of physical constraint.

One way in which we worked to harness this tension in a productive way was by processes of free experimentation. When there was uncertainty about a technical or interpretative decision, instead of attempting to find a conscious “right answer”, we deliberately sought out more extreme possibilities to test and reflect on. In the case of gesture, we explored “whether we always need a big ‘lead-in’ or whether we can be more subtle about some of them. And the extent to which our gestures are

‘matching’ or independent” [E]. A further example of experimentation from early in the process arose following difficulty with pedalling. M wrote after Session 2:

At one point, I felt like I wanted some pedal in a decorative passage but that it was impractical (because it was too fast) for [E] to pedal it for me; so we tried swapping and me having the pedal . . . I felt a bit on tenterhooks as I was using it (and quite timid with it as a result) because of the big effect it has on secondo articulation.

Just as the experience of switching pedal roles made M more instinctively aware of the interconnections between the two duet parts and shifted his attention from his own desire for more pedal towards a greater awareness of its effect on the secondo line, so too E found that the experiment increased her own sense of the performance as a shared process at an instinctive rather than conscious level, “my playing felt extremely weird with [the pedal] out of my control . . . I realised more powerfully what it feels like to need pedal and not have it”.

A similar experiment was applied to expressive timing in the second movement of the symphony, following a discussion during Session 4 about the appropriate level of rubato:

. . . we played the last page with permission to do as much as we fancied . . . to exploit the boundaries felt liberating, and also to discover that we could allow ourselves to think differently about ensemble and not worry so much about being precisely and uniformly in time with each other [E].

This experiment illustrates a growing sense in the emerging partnership that conscious discussions about interpretation could be overtaken by more instinctive, improvisatory decisions from either player—with the result, paradoxically, of an often *greater* sense of ensemble cohesion and precision. This resonates with the concept of planned and emergent forms of coordination and the ensuing process of navigation from uncertainty to flexibility in achieving coordination (Bishop and Goebel 2020): E noted that “whenever I consciously thought about playing really well in time and watching, it was always less successful than just going with the flow” (Session 4); M independently felt after the same session that “the more we “try” consciously to listen to one another, watch each other, “follow” each other, etc., the less successfully we do so; on the flip side, the more we immerse ourselves in the music . . . the easier it seems to be to stay together, presumably via subconscious cues which are more quickly reacted to”. The result was a change both in rehearsal process and in performance strategy, as M noted a month later after Session 7:

I was . . . struck . . . by how much more time we spend playing than talking now— usually, it’s little details we note before trying things again, but we

do seem more willing now to get a rough idea and then experiment with it in performance, rather than having to work out exactly what we want in words and only then try to realise it. [. . .] It also means that we seem more relaxed now about changing things spontaneously in the course of a performance.

The security fostered by other aspects of the developing partnership bore fruit in an approach towards experimentation that could afford to take risks in the interests of open exploration, without pressure from imminent performance deadlines. This again demonstrates the relevance of Andersen's (2008) description of partnerships as "possibility-creating machines", whereby the "object of exchange . . . is primarily possibilities, including possibilities for the self-development of the individual partner" (ibid., p. 142).

5.5. Shared Creative Ownership

One area in which this sense of emerging possibilities was particularly evident was our approach towards the duet score of the Beethoven symphony. From very early in the rehearsal process, we started thinking about the implications of the shift from orchestra to piano duet, and "the extent to which we can 'make [the transcription] our own'" (E, Session 1). Our initial diary entries anticipated "discussion of editions and extent to which we will view this as orchestral reduction/piano in its own right" (E, Session 1). M reflected after Session 1:

I don't think I've really given enough thought to what this version of the piece "is"—I'd just been treating it by default in quasi-orchestral terms . . . I do like the starting-point that the orchestral aspect gives us—i.e., a collection of ideas about how we might colour different passages differently, etc.—but certainly we should feel free to develop these how we want.

This interest also sets up projections for the future within the partnership and actualising this became possible after reflecting on individual preferences and competencies. After Session 2, E wrote: "Today revealed more of our individual instinctive preferences—Mark at one point said something about "full-blown romantic" whereas I'd say I'm coming at it from a more classical HIP style". M wrote likewise, "it was really good to be able to talk through things like phrasing, because it helped me to understand better why we'd naturally tend to do things a bit differently". Later on, after Session 3, E wrote that "the discussion of pianistic and orchestral makes me think that we may have different feelings about the duet version of the symphony, which is interesting, and not a negative thing at all, as it opens up discussion and therefore leads to experimentation".

Building awareness of individual backgrounds and preferences is acknowledged as valuable to aid understanding of individual perspectives in a partnership, and

through this process, we shared listening suggestions of symphonic recordings as well as discussing the origins of our individual understandings of sound qualities. We identified various areas where we felt constrained by the arrangement and dissatisfied with the aural outcome, particularly in relation to texture, timbre, and tessitura. Our process of experimentation here reflected the pedagogical concept of “possibility thinking” outlined by Anna Craft, cited in (Cremin et al. 2006): a process at the heart of creative learning which “is exemplified through the posing, in multiple ways, of the question ‘what if?’ and . . . involves the shift from ‘what is this and what does it do?’ to ‘what can I do with this?’” (Cremin et al. 2006, pp. 109–110). If partnerships are “possibility-creating machines”, it is because they enable this kind of “possibility thinking”, and thus empower participants to find creative solutions to underlying problems. In the case of our duet partnership, through jointly asking “what can we do with this?”, we began processes of experimentation exploring low-level alterations of dynamics, such as exploration of the quieter levels of playing; we then investigated creatively varied ways of playing *sforzandi* and worked on note lengths (Session 2). In the diary, we acknowledged this as part of a process of “developing our collective feeling” (E, Session 2) which enabled us to “come up with the beginnings of a unified conception for some quite close details and also for longer-range shapes” (M, Session 2). However, this process also involved taking a more flexible approach, for example, experimentation in specific places with doing “our own individual expression to make a more undulating and intriguing expression” (E, Session 3):

Allowing ourselves to experience this kind of diversity actually seems to give us a kind of unity—maybe by realising that what might seem like beyond the bounds works really well and therefore gives us a green light to do our own thing within the partnership. So, by embracing diversity we can be more unified! (E, Session 3)

This highlighted our enjoyment of different approaches. After Session 4 M wrote, “often I find that what I’d choose to do myself is made much more interesting when it interacts (or occasionally collides) with [E’s] choices”. This led to the observation that a “strengthened compromise” between individual choices might result from a process where instead of trying to find a “middle ground” we “try and go all out on our own way, and see where we differ through that—then use that to move towards a shared interpretation which we can both stand behind” (M, Session 4). Although as a partnership, we valued the idea of “unity” in our playing and interpretation because of the sense it created of a shared aesthetic experience, this notion of “unity” was framed within an understanding that our interpretation was constantly evolving: we were not aiming to replicate fixed interpretive ideas but rather aiming to establish a relationship in which we could be increasingly agile, creative, and responsive.

Within Session 3 we also began a process of textural refinement, starting with our mutual dislike of long *tremolando* passages and feeling that they were a formulaic rather than musical solution to orchestral textures converted to duet format. We began exploring “the more pianistic qualities of the duet arrangement, being free to alter it occasionally where this helps that come through” (M, Session 3). It also seemed apparent that “at times the textures which come out are still a bit “too much” for the sonority of a piano (at least over extended periods of time) and may need a little cleaning up here and there!” (M, Session 3). In particular, our first play-through of the finale was “quite dispiriting in terms of sound—it just felt very turgid, thick, and undifferentiated” (M, Session 5) due to doubled thirds and octaves, and sections of continuous, loud passagework. Following discussion of how the original duet arranger might have been conceptualising the orchestral sound that they were familiar with and contrasting that with our experience of historically informed performance practice,

we started to cut elements of the texture and to change dynamic phrasing so as to pare it back a bit. The effect was transformative—all of a sudden it felt like it had much more space to breathe, more room for variety in dynamic and articulation, and more rhythmic vitality. (M, Session 5)

These instances of experimentation liberated our playing and encouraged us to place no limits on areas for exploration and creative engagement. They reinforced the sense of our ongoing rehearsals as a creative process to be enjoyed, independent of any overarching “product”. They highlighted our increasing sense that the rehearsal environment had become a “safe space” (Haddon and Hutchinson 2015, pp. 149–50), one in which myriad possibilities could be explored without fear of judgement or embarrassment.

6. Conclusions

The components detailed above present elements crucial to the building of partnership. The foundations of joint aims and commitment are supported by co-created evolving cycles of action and reflection, which accommodate divergent experiences and perspectives. These are underpinned by an understanding of the self and of the other player, including preferences, strengths, weaknesses, and circumstantial aspects, all of which contribute to minimising conflict and maximising meaningful development of partnership, for example, through productive and enjoyable rehearsal time. In the early stages of playing together, our intention was not to specifically focus on creating a successful and long-standing partnership: this is likely to reflect the situation of many dyads choosing to play together for enjoyment who seek to explore this potential and to extend their own knowledge of music and performance abilities. Through articulating this process, key elements are

revealed; we find that much of our experience resonates with the characteristics of partnership identified at the start of the chapter. Nevertheless, it is also emphasised that “there is no single, agreed definition” of partnership; partnership is “fluid” and needs work and time to develop (Harrison et al. 2003, p. 5). Therefore, while our experience may inform, confirm, and affirm the experiences of others in similar contexts, it is not our intention to present a prescriptive route for others to follow.

Our findings also show congruence with aspects of social familiarity investigated by King (2013) in relation to chamber ensemble rehearsal. The close working relationship which we experienced was in its infancy, although supported by a high level of social familiarity. Our accounts of the rehearsal process indicate that although we experienced instances of “hesitancy” involving “discourse and rehearsal activity characterised by broken-up conversation, a high frequency of verbal exchanges within talking segments, rapid discussion of musical ideas and short bursts of activity—lots of stop and starts in playing and talking” (King 2013, pp. 262–63), we also achieved a “flowing frame” of “discourse and rehearsal activity characterised by relatively long utterances, sustained focus on particular musical issues or longer playing segments” (ibid., p. 263) and mutual praise in our early rehearsals. This is similar to King’s description of the transactional style of established duos rehearsing unfamiliar music. In our case, it is likely that the dialogic diary, as a side channel, provided an acceleration of progression towards the “flowing frame” by acting as a container for “hesitancy” dialogue, which suggests that the values of the dialogic journal are worth further investigation.

Analysis of dialogic diary entries has identified various elements which contribute to establishing secure foundations and sustaining engagement and commitment in this piano duet partnership. The use of the shared diary was vital to the development of a partnership which could function as a “possibility-creating machine” (Andersen 2008, p. 147). It enabled processes to be revealed which concern individual qualities and joint possibilities, trajectories of foundational elements that underpin creative exploration, and the value of the secure space for collaboration. Duet playing provides opportunities to enhance technical and musical understanding and to engage in role sharing and role switching, with benefits for empathy, interpersonal skills, and attention as listeners to ensemble, balance, and dynamics; beyond this, it is also possible to conceptualise it in terms of partnership through the “creative potential of joint working towards purposive change” (El Ansari et al. 2004, p. 279). This process of collaboration has also affected how we operate in other musical areas of our lives as teachers and performers by giving us a model that we can use to encourage our own peers and students to embrace reflection as a part of their musical and personal development. As M noted after Session 3:

It's really beginning to strike me how much of an impact these sessions are having on the way I think about ensemble playing. I don't know how much stems from the freedom and level of discussion in the sessions themselves, and how much from the reflection we do around them, but over the last few weeks I've really been thinking about a lot of elements of accompaniment and of my own playing in a different way. [. . .] It's also got me thinking a bit about the kind of creative dynamic there might be in my own piano teaching, especially at higher levels. [. . .] So it's clear that this duet partnership is having an impact on a whole load of other areas of my musical life, which is really encouraging.

The process has also provided an impetus to consider the role of self and other within the partnership. While concerns to enable partner equality highlighted our desire to facilitate communication and responses (verbal, musical, and empathic) in a shared learning process, as educators, we consider the potential benefits of a partnership model of collaboration as a highly positive alternative to a transmission-based model within instrumental learning. However, a transformative culture deploying collaborative possibility thinking, activation of creativity, and shared goals also requires a safe and supportive space. The contribution of the dialogic journal appears not only to have deepened the individual and joint understanding of the processes at work within these months of rehearsal but also to have strengthened the safe space in which these were happening. Further research could explore dialogic reflection to examine its role in the development of partnership, in addition to developing a greater understanding of the mechanisms of responsibilities, communication, and experimentation within a dyadic musical partnership.

Finally, for education to be transformative, it requires "practices that trigger the learners to challenge or question personally held perspectives and assumptions, which necessitate reflection and discussion and which have the capacity to allow the learners to reconceptualise previously held convictions or beliefs" (Sellars 2014, p. 27). These practices may develop through the processes detailed above, including collaborative and individual reflection, the exploration of multiple modalities of communication, and experimenting with divergent interpretations whilst celebrating shared experiences. Fundamental to all of these processes is the solid bedrock provided by a model of partnership that is founded on empathy and shared enjoyment, which provides the "reciprocal and interdependent relationship" (Coutts 2018, p. 295) necessary for possibility thinking, and enables collaboratively responsive rather than replicative approaches to musical performance. In our view, this model of partnership is central to the armoury of the chamber musician in the twenty-first century.

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