

Expanded practice: Facilitating the integration of visual media, theatricality and sound technology into music performance

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The turn away from, or expansion of the traditional conservatory model of university music performance education (Don, Garvey, and Sadeghpour 2009: 81) necessitates the broadest possible musical frame of reference. One approach is to build upon traditional notions of musicality by embracing sound technologies and other extra-musical elements such as video and theatricality. These approaches are particularly relevant to a 21st century world where a holistic artistic vision and flexibility in the delivery of musical ideas can be key to the pitching, delivery and reception of creative projects. They also invite the student to imagine, beyond their individual instrumental abilities, work that engages an audience in three-dimensional, embodied and immersive spaces. This chapter suggests teaching strategies that enhance the facilitation of such approaches to performance as well as thinking through the distinct pedagogical needs of students presenting this kind of work for feedback and examination. The notion of expanded practice also dovetails into the contemporary reality of portfolio careers, where collaboration across disciplines can be crucial (Gaunt and Westerlund 2013: 2). These skills also translate to teaching music at all levels, from the school musical to 21st century conceptions of the networked classroom (Savage 2005).

Background

The Oxford Dictionary of English provides two senses for the verb *perform* (2010). The first encompasses carrying out or fulfilling an action, task or function. The second sense refers to entertaining an audience. In the context of music performance there are a range of factors that lie between fulfilling the function of a competent instrumentalist or performer on the one hand, and entertaining an audience on the other. The work described in this chapter addresses concrete strategies to encourage student performers to expand and augment their existing performance practice with a toolkit of creative strategies and methods of presentation.

The subject in which these approaches were developed came about as a pragmatic response to the pressures of rationalising a larger suite of music subjects into a condensed form of the undergraduate music degree of which they were a part. It also carried on the values of an earlier subject in which students from four contemporary arts degree programs in dance, drama, music and electronic arts were required to collaborate on a single creative project. A lot was learnt from that experience, for example

the resistance of some students to enforced collaboration on the one hand, and the positive impact and stimulus of cross-art-form and cross-media practices on students' creativity and learning on the other. As a third-year subject, *Expanded Music Performance* was also designed to fulfil the requirements of progression through both music technology and performance specializations. This presented challenges in terms of providing pathways for student performers who choose to develop their specialist technology skills and those who would prefer to avoid technology wherever possible. The compromise was to specify that performance outcomes must utilize electroacoustic and/or multimedia and/or theatrical elements, with a view to allowing students to define the scope of their own expansion and to follow their interests as emerging creative practitioners. This 'and/or' approach offers little constraint on the scope of the creative outcome, whereby each student in the cohort conceives and performs their own 15-20 minute set. The instrumentation, personnel and equipment utilised for any given student's project is up to them, though this is vetted through formal proposal and workshop processes, both of which are assessed.

Industry Relevance

Contemporary music has become an increasingly visual medium. From the launch of the dedicated music video channel MTV in the early 1980s to the subsequent dominance of the internet video streaming services such as YouTube, an increasing majority of music today is consumed in the context of visual material (IFPI 2017). Similarly, the staging concepts pioneered by acts such as Pink Floyd in the 1970s, incorporating film, surround sound, lighting effects and dramatic staging have become mainstream in today's touring concerts. The parallel transition of electronic dance music from the nightclub to the concert stage has seen the emergence of the art of the VJ and sequenced and audio-responsive lighting systems augmenting the otherwise performatively and visually unassuming presence of the lone DJ on stage. A contemporary example of this approach can be seen in the work of Brazilian composer Amon Tobin (2016). From the mid-1980s onwards, the importance of Broadway-style ensemble choreography, costuming and staging has found its place in the world of mainstream pop music both in live performance and in video. A high-profile example of this is the *Mrs Carter Show* tour by Beyoncé Knowles-Carter (2013). Outside of the world of pop and rock, the presentation of live orchestral movie soundtracks and live ensemble improvisation to film has also seen increasing popularity on the concert hall stage and further demonstrates the demand for visually augmented musical performance. Steve Reich and Beryl Korot's live multi-screen video and chamber music work *The Cave* (1993), is an early example. Finally, various strategies to incorporate the music composed for video games in a live performance context have developed since the turn of the century, from music performed live by orchestras to games being screened, to the "chip-tune" phenomenon of artists using 8-bit technology for new compositions and performances, to the broader incorporation of various types of screen media and aesthetics in the concert music of composers such as Nicole Lizée (2016).

Each of these developments in the presentation of contemporary music has relied on increasing levels of collaboration with artists specializing in the various aspects of video production, staging, lighting, costume design, choreography, programming etc. It may be argued that it is unnecessary for musicians to develop capabilities in areas outside of their area of expertise as in a professional context these will be handled by experts. However, it is our belief that by engaging with these aspects of performance in a practical, low-risk context, student musicians can more fully gain an understanding of the creative aspects and technical challenges associated with the overall presentation of their music. This form of practice-based project learning can create more powerful and transformative experiences for musicians as they grapple with the details of staging their work and engaging audiences. This approach also allows students with existing interests and skills in areas such as visual design, video, theatre technical production, musical theatre, dance and other areas to exploit and develop their skills or undertake productive and creative collaborations with other students that can extend them into new creative territory. Students are also encouraged to see the Expanded Practice subject as an opportunity to collaborate with artists with expertise in mediums other than music. Students may position themselves as conceptualising and coordinating projects far beyond the scope of their individual talents and experiences, exerting a degree of creative control to realise a holistic vision.

Teaching and Learning Strategies

There are three principle teaching and learning strategies deployed in the subject. The first is a series of interactive lectures presented in the early part of the semester. The second strategy involves hands-on tutorial-workshops developing specific technical skills in staging and presentation, working with visual media, and electronic music systems. These run in parallel to the lecture series. The final stage, taking up the second half of the semester involves student-driven performance workshops in which student performers present fully-staged work-in-progress for feedback and evaluation by their peers. Peer feedback in these sessions provide essential training in giving and receiving constructive feedback and are also a valuable source of collaborative ideation. The subject culminates in a series of concert performances over several nights.

Case study analysis

The lecture series employs, among other material, the presentation and analysis of case studies in the form of concert videos. Exemplars are chosen that can demonstrate aspects of staging, costume, choreography, use of music technology, and visual elements. Often the most interesting aspects of these materials are in the mechanics of maintaining audience engagement through the overall structuring and timing of the show and in the interstitial linking elements including segues and verbal interaction with the audience.

One approach to conducting a case-study analysis is to break a performance down into its structural elements. A model for this is given in figure 12.1 “Elements of a performance”. This model helps students to identify and consider the temporal, visual/spatial, conceptual and audible aspects of their developing ideas for performance presentation.

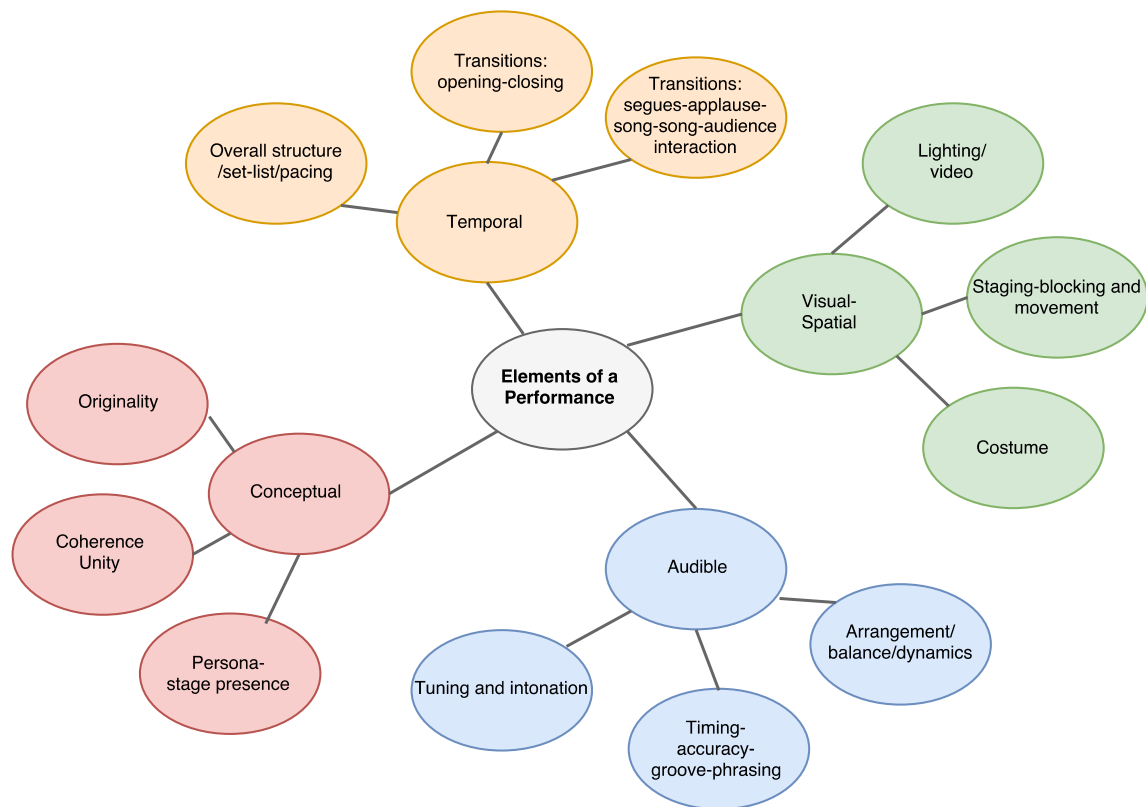


Figure 12.1: Elements of a performance

The model shows musical technique, included under the heading “audible”, as one element amongst others and not necessarily the primary or sole concern of the musician-performer. The audible or musical aspects of the performance become the core from which a performance may be expanded. The expansion may move in the direction of an overarching conceptual frame for example in the form of a narrative or unifying theme; visual elements in the form of video, props, costumes or staging elements; or temporal structure in the form of linking dialogue, set selection and formal design, audience interaction, etc. The audible may also be the location of expansion itself through the integration of novel sonic materials, electronic instrument design, or the spatial presentation of sound.

Any case study can be examined and evaluated in terms of the aspects identified in this model and used as a springboard to imagine new and engaging forms of performance. This approach provides a shared vocabulary of strategies and a means to develop self-evaluation and workshop-based critique and appraisal of developing student work.

All three co-authors are active as performers, composers or both. In addition to commercially released examples, case studies drawn from the lecturers' own output allow for a deep examination of process, aesthetics, rationale, problem-solving and lessons learned through experience. Lectures are devised with the aim of informing the broadest range of the expansion of practice and musical interests of students. Case studies offer opportunities to discuss each of the elements of performance identified in figure 12.1, but will also concentrate on one of the defined areas of electroacoustic, multimedia or theatricality. Some examples describing the use of case studies are given below.

Electronic music performance

Students specialising in electroacoustic performance come in to the subject with a preliminary grounding in concepts such as synthesis, algorithmic music, interaction design, hyper-instruments, and performance systems interfacing¹. A stream of tutorials is offered on the popular music production software *Ableton Live* (2018). *Live* enables musicians to customize the software and integrate video, performance interfaces and synchronized control of external systems such as lighting through MIDI and other digital control protocols.

A case study of the work of Annie Clark, better known by her stage name St. Vincent, allows in-depth analysis of the technical means of electronic music production in her live shows using *Ableton Live*. Examination of her use of choreography, staging and stage persona is enabled by analysis of concert videos such as the 2014 *St. Vincent Live on Letterman Webcast*, available on YouTube. Luckily, an excellent training video detailing the use of *Ableton Live*, has been produced by Lynda.com in collaboration with Clark's musical director Daniel Mintseris (2014). This video includes discussion of the role of a performing music technologist, collaboration with the other artists and an in-depth analysis of the technical and musical design of the show.

This form of integrated case study makes the connection in a practical and creative way between the merely technological means of production and the overall performative impact of the show. The use of asynchronously available video material also extends the impact and accessibility of the lecture and tutorial delivery into the home-studio and rehearsal environment where much of the musical ideas are

¹ See Chapters 5 and 11 of this volume.

worked through. This form of blended learning promotes student's use of social media into a more strategically oriented resource for professional and creative development.

Interestingly, some of the simpler approaches to electronic music performance have stimulated some of the more successful musical outcomes. Brief case studies of single techniques have been valuable, for example, a brief analysis of concert videos of Miles Davis from the period from around 1971-1973 (for example, a Vienna Town Hall Concert of 1973) when he was both using a wah-wah pedal and exploring aspects of his personal image through clothing and costume has stimulated a number of wind-players to explore their instrument's extended expressive and performative capabilities through live signal processing. This has allowed what in a rock context is usually an accompanying instrument to take on the lead or solo role in a more dominant and performatively engaging manner. This is an example of where the idea of expanded practice can lead, uncapping the latent performance aspiration of a musician who has been otherwise constrained by the performance conventions associated with their instrument and/or genre. The use of various types of pedals, including looping devices as well as the more standard range of distortion, delay, reverb and other signal modification (flanging, phasing, octave displacement etc) provides a range of options for students less inclined towards the use of digital software, with applications that range from a one-person presentation of song material to long-scale improvisation and ensemble performance.

Sound and Image

As a case study, Eleanor McPhee shows how composer and theorist Michel Chion's work (1994) applies to her own audio-visual project, *The Moving Picture Show*. This project uses silent films produced from 1912 to the end of the silent era in 1929, accompanied by live music from a nine-piece chamber orchestra and Foley sound effects. It uses sheet music collections from the Theatre Royal in Bradford, Yorkshire in northern England and the State Theatre in Sydney, Australia. The aim of the case study is to introduce Chion's theories as ways of thinking about and analyzing music as it works with film and to show how these fairly abstract theories have become concrete musical choices within her own performance practice.

An issue raised by studying these films and the associated music collection is choosing music that allows the audience to embrace the world of the film. Effective musical accompaniment can provide an emotional bridge into an historical film genre that may otherwise prove to be inaccessible to present day audiences and this is an issue that is also relevant to students creating a performance that incorporates some form of visual performance with music. Keeping this idea of music as an emotional bridge in mind, Gorbman (1987) suggests music can be used as a kind of mediator. She says that music can mediate between film and older dramatic traditions, between spectator and the circumstances of projection – so the space the screening is in, the flatness of the screen itself – and the fact that film,

especially old films, can seem ghostly. With these issues in mind, and using the *Moving Picture Show* as a case study, students are encouraged find or create music that fulfils these criteria: 1. is recognizable for an audience; 2. closely fits with the mood and emotional content of what is being shown on screen; 3. is thematically associated with characters and places; and 4. considers the role of improvisation. These strategies encourage students to carefully consider their choice of repertoire and to consider the application of Chion's categories of horizontal and vertical audio-visual relations (Chion 1994: 35-65).

While creating sound that is subordinate to image is an option, as is a filmic realisation of some perception of the emotional or narrative content of music or songs, students are also encouraged to consider the idea of juxtaposition - what happens if the relationship between sound and image is not what we would expect? Problematising the relationship between sound and image focuses students on the idea that this relationship need not be fixed. In fact, live performances mean that it can be difficult to fix cue points between image and sound exactly. Some latitude for each live iteration of a multimedia work to vary somewhat can be a healthy way to conceive of it; this is even more the case if the visual component is rendered or manipulated live in some fashion.

Improvising can be an effective strategy as it allows performers the flexibility to respond immediately to the onscreen narrative. It can also provide an efficient strategy for developing new original material in the limited context of a semester-long project. Students are also well-resourced with collections of Photoplay music or mood music scores from the 1920s (Goldmark 2013, Rapee 1970) which can be a good starting point.

Another multimedia case study is provided by the work *Various Difficulties*, a collaboration between Ryszard Dabek (images) and lecturer John Encarnacao (sound). It is a work that is "fixed" - rather than a performance. Dabek and Encarnacao have committed to an alignment, of sorts, of image and sound as a work with a title and location on the web (Dabek 2011). However, the working relationship that resulted in the piece is one of live improvisation with sound and images alike. It is a work that could be performed, with the combination of images in the work able to be reconfigured in real time, and the same is true of the sound. This aspect - fixed versus performed - is worth unpacking with students, as it uncovers the aesthetic choice that is at the heart of any film, TV show or music video where certain sounds and images have been chosen from a range of possibilities.

In the case of *Various Difficulties* the aesthetic field that informs, and helpfully limits the possible musical and visual choices is described as having to do with Dabek's interest in memory, particularly the traces of earlier times inscribed in certain kinds of architecture. This is presented as aligning with Encarnacao's interest in primitive electronic musical instruments, in particular the marriage of a small early '80s Casio keyboard and its onboard radio, with guitar effects pedals. The process of collaboration

is also unpacked, whereby an initial viewing of some of the footage, pre-editing and layering, gave Encarnacao an idea of where the music might go. Three new pieces of music were created from two improvisations using the Casio/pedals array that had been archived, from which Dabek chose what he felt was the most appropriate. Viewing the finished work it is apparent that although the sound and image each proceed along their own trajectories, there are times where the image is cut to the music. Thus neither the sound nor image is accompanying the other; rather there is a sense of dialogue, even if to some degree the image-maker had the final say on this, having received the finished sound to edit to.

A number of working strategies emerge from sharing this process with students. First, as musicians, it is quite acceptable, and sometimes very appropriate, to work with materials you have already generated that can be reconfigured through improvisation and technological manipulation. Similarly, a musician might think of working with sound technology as using the tools already at their disposal, rather than a learning curve focused on a piece of software. It is also promoted as good working practice to generate more material than is needed. Rather than produce the exact number of minutes of material that will be performed, it is likely that a better product will result from being able to choose the best or most suitable material from more than is necessary. This goes hand-in-hand with a generosity of spirit in collaboration. Allowing the film artist to choose from three pieces of music demonstrates a trust in his judgement and an ongoing commitment to the collaborative project.

Music and theatricality

One of the difficulties of achieving the objectives set out in the subject design was the ability of the staff teaching into the subject to deliver the specialist expertise that might be necessary to do justice to each of the modes of expansion. In the case of theatrical techniques, one solution was to provide guest lectures from artists with specialist expertise. When this was not possible, we relied on our professional experience in the theatre or early training experiences.

Fundamental theatre literacies such as an understanding of staging conventions including naming parts of the stage, typical curtain and masking arrangements, the roles of stage managers, key creative personnel and crew, stage lighting systems and other practical aspects of theatre practice provide a foundation for thinking through and discussing practicalities of project design. These literacies should be useful in any performing career and have obvious benefits for those students intending to pursue high school teaching, considering the organisation of performance events that can be part of that role. The design of the performance venue in which the subject was taught, which includes both a thrust stage and proscenium, provided great opportunity to consider the influence of architecture on staging design and the relationship with audience. This led to useful discussions of historical aspects of theatre design and approaches to stage production.

Elements of theatrical presentation such as costume, blocking and movement, simple choreography, and staging elements such as props, sets, risers and projected scenery could each take up an entire lecture/tutorial session, an amount of time that was not available. As each of these elements opens up possibilities worth exploring, the solution was to analyse video recorded examples to identify and discuss instances of these features. Two contrasting examples proved useful.

The Ted Swindley musical *Always ... Patsy Cline* (1997) offers an example of a simply staged two-hander musical and biographical tribute to the popular country singer Patsy Cline (1932–1963). The advantage of an example such as this is that while the musical content may not appeal directly to a broad student audience, the technical and imaginative scope of the project is well within the reach of student performers. Various production videos exist on YouTube demonstrating aspects of the dramatic presentation including an overall narrative arc supported by scripted elements, character development, period costume and set, physical and performative relationship between instrumentalists and solo performers and the effective selection and sequencing of musical items.

In contrast to the relatively conventional theatrical format of *Always ... Patsy Cline*, students are also introduced to the crossover musical/performance art concert video of Laurie Anderson's 1986 stage production *Home of the Brave*. Laurie Anderson's work provides a useful historical reference point for discussing the blurred genre boundaries of the performance art movement of the 20th century. RoseLee Goldberg's survey text *Performance Art: From Futurism to the Present* (2011) provides many more stimulating examples. Anderson's work links to other crossover theatre makers and musicians of the '80s and '90s including Robert Wilson and David Byrne.

As a case study, *Home of the Brave* opens up a range of theatrical musical and audio-visual devices that expand the performance beyond the material presented on the CD album which was the basis of the soundtrack. The video offers a smorgasbord of production ideas that can be clearly demonstrated during an in-class analysis. These include musical, sonic or structural elements such as: use of an overture, dramatic contrasts in pacing between segments, use of humour, covering scene changes with dialogue and audience interaction, development of characterisation and unstable identity using vocal signal processing, subverting liveness by mixing pre-recorded playback of spoken elements and live-action video with segues into live presentation, use of scripted spoken word, linking audio and video material between numbers, electronic body percussion, clever use of live percussion in an otherwise electronic track, extended instrumental performance and extended electronic instrument design.

Notable visual and staging elements include integral projection including live action and animation, use of costume and mask, simple quick costume changes, simple synchronised choreography, simple body-

worn illumination, synchronised lighting cues, hand-held props such as fans, rear-projection, shadow play and puppetry, and comic oversized percussion elements. In addition to these production ideas, Anderson provides excellent examples of collaboration with noted artists such as William Burroughs, Peter Gabriel and Sang Won Park. This approach encourages students to consider the skills of their networks of friends and associates as sources of inspiration and as possible collaborators. This approach to practical networking is an essential skill for professional development.

Whereas, *Always ... Patsy Cline* offers a highly focussed, integrated and thematically unified approach to production, Anderson exhibits an eclectic post-modern everything-in aesthetic. Other approaches drawing on the theatrical are possible including a more deconstructed approach that chooses just one or two elements to help configure the staging of a musical performance. Theatrical conventions can be subverted by deconstructing narrative through isolation of particular elements such as location, character, mood, idiom such as sci-fi or gothic resulting in a stage presentation with a poetic sensibility that invites freer interpretation for the audience. Several students have been highly successful in developing refined approaches such as these.

The program of case-study based lectures and technical tutorials provide students with opportunities to suggest and discuss project ideas which result in a formal written proposal early in the semester. Feedback on the proposals allow students to develop their work to the point where it can be presented as work-in-progress during a live staged workshop.

Workshops

Students are assessed on both their workshop presentation and on giving feedback to their peers. In their workshop presentation students must provide evidence of the creative process that they have undertaken to arrive at the material presented. They present a substantial component of their expansion of practice in either theatrical, audio-visual, or electronic dimensions or some combination of these. This is necessary to provide peers and assessors material to provide feedback on and it gives performers an opportunity to try out their ideas on stage. In addition to these aspects the underlying musicality of the performance is also assessed. As a base-line there is an expectation that students are able to “perform” their role as musicians, instrumentalists or vocalists in addition to delivering a “performance” that entertains and engages the audience through the extended means explored in their work.

The role of assessing their peers is another key professional skill that the workshop process enables students to develop experience in. Students are coached on giving feedback using simple formulae such as “the best thing and ideas for development”, or “two stars and a wish”, for example “I’d like to give you a star for your awesome singing and a star for the choice of songs but I wish you had removed the text from your video and made it fade out at the end”. In this situation students must consider aspects

of both giving and receiving feedback as a means to engage in productive creative work. Expertise in this area is highly prized in professional practice.

Conclusion

The adaptation and revision of the traditional conservatory model of university music performance education has necessitated a broader musical frame of reference. The third-year subject, *Expanded Music Performance* is designed to facilitate the integration of visual media, theatricality and sound technology into work that addresses the realities and diversity of contemporary performance practices. The subject is built on the assumption that to learn to perform, students must combine their abilities as competent instrumentalists or performers with a capacity to entertain an audience. The work described in this chapter outlines concrete strategies that encourage student performers to expand and augment their existing performance practice with a toolkit of creative strategies and expanded methods of presentation.

Three principal teaching and learning strategies are deployed: interactive lectures based on case-studies of performance works by the lecturers and others; hands-on technical tutorial-workshops; and student-driven peer-evaluated performance workshops. Case-studies are contextualised by relevant theories to help develop students' critical literacies in performance. A broad repertoire is presented, both to expand students' creative horizons and to help them identify creative practices that resonate with their own musical interests. Serendipitous connections arise between the musical interests of lecturers and students in an environment that is oriented towards professional development and co-constructed learning.

These approaches are highly relevant in a 21st century professional world where a holistic artistic vision and flexibility in the production and delivery of musical ideas can be key to success in a contemporary portfolio career where collaboration across disciplines can be crucial.

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