

Book Review: *Musicians in the making: pathways to creative performance*, edited by John Rink, Helena Gaunt, Aaron Williamon

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Musicians in the making: pathways to creative performance, edited by John Rink, Helena Gaunt, Aaron Williamon. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017; ISBN: 9780199346677 (£47.99)

Musicians in the making: pathways to creative performance is the first in a five-volume series, *Studies in musical performance as creative practice*, published by Oxford University Press. The other titles in the series are: *Distributed creativity*, *Music and shape*, *Global perspectives on orchestras*, and *Music as creative practice*. The series has its origins in a large research project which ran from 2011 to 2014 at the Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC) Research Centre for Musical Performance as Creative Practice (CMPCP). The project's main aim was 'to investigate how the "creative voice" of individual musicians develops over time' (p.xxi). The series is a definitive outcome of the project, and is a major achievement for British music education publishing.

The project's research questions included:

- How can the knowledge and skill acquired in the teaching studio, practice room and classroom be used to maximum benefit in performance?

- What learning and teaching techniques are most conducive to transmitting the musical skills and knowledge required to surpass the routine and predictable in musical performance?
- Should 'creative performance' necessarily be considered the main artistic goal for each and every performer? (p.xxi).

In the preface to *Musicians in the making*, the editors acknowledge the difficulty and complexity of these questions; in attempting to answer them they engaged with a wide range of authors, including many internationally renowned researchers, performers, and academics. Of particular note are the ten 'insights' that individual performers and performance teachers share from their own personal lived experiences. They come from a diverse mix of musicians, including former Principal of the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland (RCS), John Wallace, and international concert pianist, Melvyn Tan. Pianist and conductor Ricardo Castro provides a quote which, as a teacher, particularly resonates with me:

It is essential to give children and young musicians the feeling that they have the right to be creative. Otherwise they become robots, repeating other people's work. And if they are only copying others, it becomes almost impossible for them to feel necessary or relevant to the community (p.136).

These personal testimonies are welcome in an academic text; their inclusion gives life and vitality to this volume, and perhaps make it more appealing to a broader audience than some of the other, more academic, volumes in the series.

Musicians in the making consists of 16 chapters, organised into three parts:

1. Creative learning in context.
2. Creative processes.
3. Creative dialogue and reflection.

There is no shortage of fascinating material to discuss, including: creative spontaneity, interpreting a composer's intentions, and developing a greater awareness of audience responses. I have chosen three chapters by authors who will be familiar to readers in Scotland. Firstly, in 'A musician's journey', John Wallace traces his own path as a musician, from being given his first cornet aged seven and joining the local Tullis Russell Mills Junior Band, through his formative years at Buckhaven High School in Fife, which he describes as being 'an underground arts factory filled with a powerhouse of inspired individuals' (p.1). Of his cultural background, he writes: 'Music suffused everything: it was part of our family, it pulsed through the veins of our community. It wasn't a polite, civilising add-on: it was the glue of society. It held us together' (p.2). He describes his tenure as the Principal of the RCS (from 2002–2014) thus:

Making work and play-making in a conservatoire like Scotland's means being surrounded by musicians, actors, dancers, technical designers, scenic artists and film makers every day, at every age and stage. Immersion in a conservatoire reminds me of the society I grew up in (*ibid.*).

Whilst being inspired by Wallace's testimony, I find myself in despair about the current austerity measures in the UK, and what the cutbacks to schools and music services across Scotland mean for the next generation of musicians who are

sadly missing out on the breadth and depth of experiences he describes.

In 'Reflection and the classical musician', Mary Hunter and Stephen Broad examine 'the notion of reflective practice' (p.253), and how this can assist the classical musician in reconciling the competing demands of making interpretative choices, whilst also remaining true to a composer's intentions on the written score. The chapter is based on self-reflections from a sample of students at the RCS and interviews with professional musicians. The authors discuss the distinction between 'reproduction' and 'realisation' of a classical score: 'Too much invention and you're out of bounds, but too literal an understanding of historical obligation and you're equally wrong' (p.268). They note a possible generational shift towards younger performers taking more responsibility for, and being more confident in, making interpretative decisions 'as a more explicitly discursive process, a dialogue with the material and the content' (p.267).

In 'Towards convergence', Celia Duffy and Joe Harrop discuss the increasing convergence between musicianship studies and academic studies in higher education learning environments. They asked a range of early career professionals, as well as professors of academic and performances studies across institutions from the UK, USA and New Zealand, 'whether and how academic studies might influence performance, inform performers' choices or even lead to more creative performances' (p. 272). They choose a working definition of a creative performance as one that is 'independent, individual, challenging, thoughtful, risky, enlightening and disturbing, offering new light on the music' (p.272), and describe the 'Style in performance' module delivered at RCS as 'an environment in which critical, informed experimentation (rather than "getting it right") was encouraged' (p.278). The authors acknowledge

the difficulty of bringing about a more unified approach to these previously compartmentalised disciplines, but suggest:

Integrated teaching strategies may at least nudge some student performers into thinking twice when confronted with academic studies or an academically informed viewpoint, before protesting 'but I need to practise!' or 'I just feel it this way'. Others will relish the integrative intellectual and creative challenge of musical praxis (p.286).

These two chapters demonstrate some of the ways in which reflective and informed thinking, and the convergence of academic studies with performance studies, can indeed lead to 'pathways to creative performance'.

As in the above examples, there are (perhaps inevitably) some areas of overlap between the chapters; whilst this adds to the richness of the topics discussed, other equally valid topics such as jazz improvisation are perhaps less well represented in this volume. However, *Musicians in the making* is an invaluable repository of fresh, imaginative, deep, and critical thinking about the training and professional lives of music performers and teachers. In addition to its value to scholars and researchers, it will appeal to anyone concerned with the creation and performance of music, the training of musicians, and an interest in creativity and the creative process.

About the review author

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