

Interpersonal Aspects of Musical Collaboration for Collaborative Pianists

by

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ABSTRACT

Collaborative piano education tends to discuss techniques of collaboration as primarily a musical skill. However, common understanding within the field regarding a collaborative pianist's ability to work with others offers another aspect to this assumption.¹ It goes without saying that pianists' interpersonal skills largely affect with whom they will work, and how efficaciously pianists and their partners will work together.

Correspondingly, how pianists work with others can directly affect the success or failure of the musical collaboration.

The first intention of this paper is to explain why interpersonal skills are integral to the creation of quality musical outcomes and so-called musical togetherness; it specifies interpersonal aspects innate and unique to a pianist's experience. Next, this paper defines two crucial components of collaboration – empathy and active listening – and discusses how pianists can build these skills into their personal practice and rehearsal. It continues with an examination of the interpersonal implications of studio arrangement, body language, and verbal language from a pianist's perspective. This paper concludes with ideas for how to test for these skills during the collaborative piano audition process, a class syllabus showing how these skills can be incorporated into the collaborative piano curriculum, and suggestions for further research about interpersonal aspects of collaboration.

¹ From hereon, “collaborative pianists” will be referred to as “pianists,” unless specifically referencing aspects of the collaborative piano profession or the difference between solo and collaborative pianists.

DEDICATION

To Frank and Aaron Cota.

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DELINEATION OF RESEARCH

The topic of this paper is an examination of interpersonal aspects of musical collaboration for collaborative piano duo partnerships.² While both members of a duo are equally responsible for maintaining a collaborative relationship, my research will focus on the pianist's perspective. The purpose of this paper is not to assert that collaborative piano is the only profession that requires strong interpersonal skills; rather, I seek to apply psychological research in specific ways pianists will find useful. For example, many collaborative pianists work from a personal studio or rehearsal room; this paper discusses specific aspects of room and furniture set-up that directly affect interpersonal dynamic. Likewise, this paper's discussion of body language considers a pianist's unique seated position behind the piano. These are just two examples of how my research will be tailored to be uniquely of interest to pianists. Of course, some of this paper's topics will be useful for other types of musicians; a psychological explanation of how cueing works is helpful to all collaborative musicians. However, this does not negate the importance of the discussion for pianists, who by nature of their instrument and early training may have no experience in cueing prior to advanced study. While this paper may be particularly useful to aspiring collaborative pianists, its discussions are applicable to collaborative pianists of all levels.

My intention is not to create a definitive guide or etiquette book as to how a pianist should behave in rehearsal. This would be impossible to do as each duo and interpersonal situation is as infinitely unique as it is multifaceted. Rather, my hope is to ignite a much-needed discussion among collaborative pianists about important interpersonal aspects of

² This paper will only discuss duos consisting of a pianist and one other partner, not trios, quartets, etc.

the job. I would like to reiterate how pianists can create a higher quality musical product by giving careful attention to their interpersonal skills and the development of their collaborative persona.

CHAPTER 1

LITERATURE REVIEW AND BACKGROUND

Literature Review

In *Music and Empathy*, Elaine King and Evgenia Roussou discuss a definition for empathy, synchronism, and emotional contagion as observed in chamber music; interestingly, they include an entire chapter within the broader empathetic discussion entitled: “The Empathetic Nature of the Piano Accompanist.”³ The vast majority of professional collaborative pianists whom they interviewed for this chapter said that empathy was a very important, even crucial aspect of musical collaboration. While the pianists interviewed in this chapter suggest general ways in which empathy is helpful during the rehearsal process, they do not outline specific and practical ways as to how a collaborative pianist can be empathetic.⁴

In “Being Together in Time: Musical Experience and the Mirror Neuron System” Katie Overy and Istvan Molnar-Szakacs discuss empathy, the science behind “Shared Affective Motion Experience (SAME),” and how it facilitates synchronism. Overy and Molnar-Szakacs also explore the use of SAME as an alternative form of communication for individuals with autism, a disorder marked in part by significant social difficulties; in this

³ Elaine King and Evgenia Roussou, “The Empathetic Nature of the Piano Accompanist,” in *Music and Empathy* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2017), 267-281.

⁴ Ibid.

way, it is supposed that SAME experienced between musicians can be used as social therapy.⁵ It is ironic that the sophisticated set of social skills group music-making demands can also be used to improve general social skills.

In “Empathy and Creativity in Group Music Practices: Towards a Concept of Empathetic Creativity,” Ian Cross, Felicity Laurence, and Tal-Chen Rabinowitch share group musical exercises designed to teach children the empathy necessary for group music-making. These exercises engage imitation, entrainment, disinterested pleasure, flexibility, ambiguity, and shared intentionality.⁶ Although this article was written for children, I think it is representative of something needed for collaborative pianists – exercises and practical tips designed to help pianists practice and increase empathy within a musical context.

While the previously mentioned literature deals with the crucial connection between empathy and collaborative music-making, it is interesting to note that many of the major books on collaborative piano do not emphasize this issue. For example, in his book *The Complete Collaborator*, Martin Katz discusses many aspects directly connected to empathy but does not deeply trace them back to their empathetic origins; there is an entire chapter written on breath but little is mentioned about its connection to empathy and synchronism. Likewise, in two other pedagogical books for collaborative pianists, *The Art of Accompanying and Coaching* by Kurt Adler and *The Art of Accompanying: Master Lessons*

⁵ Katie Overy and Istvan Molnar-Szakacs, “Being Together in Time: Musical Experience and the Mirror Neuron System,” *Musical Perception: An Interdisciplinary Journal* 26, no. 5 (June 2009): 489-504, doi: 10.1525/mp.2009.26.5.489.

⁶ Ian Cross, Felicity Laurence, and Tal-Chen Rabinowitch, “Empathy and Creativity in Group Musical Practices: Towards a Concept of Empathetic Creativity,” *The Oxford Handbook of Music Education 2* (2012): 1-21, doi: 10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199928019.013.0023.

from the Repertoire by Robert Spillman, a great deal of focus is on diction, style, program-building, and repertoire. While this is invaluable information, a textbook on collaborative piano can also include a significant emphasis on the interpersonal aspects of the work.

The research and information presented in this paper becomes poignant after collaborative pianists deeply consider and understand why interpersonal skills are an important part of their job; thus, the first intention of this paper is to draw attention to, and explain, the interpersonal complexity of collaborative duo rehearsal. The multiple reasons these interpersonal skills are important are often unnoticed because they are traditions of the field, habitual in the daily lives of collaborative pianists and the musicians with whom they work. Because attention in rehearsal is often drawn to musical goals, one could say interpersonal aspects are hidden in plain sight, overshadowed by sound.

Definition of Collaboration

To begin, collaborative pianists must consider the descriptive first word of their job title: “collaborative.” Most people have a vague idea that collaboration is a good thing, and may think of it as “working together toward a common goal.”⁷ However, textbook-defined, true collaboration is not necessarily common in day-to-day life. In fact, true collaboration is only one of four main ways in which people work together. Psychologist

⁷ Debra Mashek, “Collaboration: It’s Not What You Think,” *Psychology Today*, February 22, 2016, <https://www.google.com/amp/s/www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/relationships-intimate-and-more/201602/collaboration-its-not-what-you-think?famp>.

Debra Mashek defines the four ways of working together: networking, coordinating, cooperating, and collaborating.⁸ In order to fully appreciate the true meaning of collaboration, one can note how collaboration's requirements compare to the other methods.

The first method, networking, simply requires an exchange of information. The second, coordination, calls for a little bit more: an exchange of information, but also, some degree of trust and modification of personal behavior. The third, cooperation, requires all of these components at greater levels, but with added organizational commitment and space-sharing. Finally, the fourth and highest-ranking method is collaboration; collaboration involves the greatest level of trust, space-sharing, and commitment. Mashek points out that “the qualitative difference between Cooperating and Collaborating is that collaborating partners demonstrate a public enthusiasm for—and commitment to the value of—learning from each other to become better at what they do collectively.”⁹ True collaborators value their partner's success just as much as their own, and go above and beyond to share the risks and responsibilities of a group project.¹⁰

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Ibid.

Table 1. Comparison: Different Forms of Working Together

Networking	Coordination	Cooperation	Collaboration
Exchange of information	Exchange of information	Exchange of information	Exchange of information
	Modification of personal behavior	Modification of personal behavior	Modification of personal behavior
	Trust	Trust	Trust (High levels)
		Organizational Commitment	Organizational Commitment (High levels)
		Space-sharing	Space-sharing (High levels)
			Public enthusiasm for the team

¹¹

Of the four forms of working together, collaboration is the ideal way for a team to accomplish goals while simultaneously achieving personal betterment. It is interesting to note how its requirements are manifested in musical collaboration. While the definition of collaboration includes shared physical space, musical collaboration also involves a shared sound space. In fact, even time is shared, carefully negotiated and managed down to the smallest fraction of a second. Each performance brings risk, and it is often a repetitive risk

¹¹ Ibid.

that a partnership must experience over and over again. High levels of team commitment are required in order to practice, rehearse, and consequently master great works of music. When musical collaboration is analyzed within the light of collaboration's true definition, a pianist begins to imagine how unique and complex it can be to navigate a sphere where sound, space, and time are shared.

Problems in Pedagogy

Furthermore, newly minted collaborative pianists, although perhaps strong musicians individually, are likely not accustomed to sharing the responsibility of these musical elements with others. One can speculate this is partially due to the nature of traditional piano pedagogy; young pianists probably begin their pianistic education as soloists, and may not have the opportunity to hone their skills within a larger musical context such as a youth choir or orchestra, which are common experiences for young singers and instrumentalists. This solitary aspect of early piano pedagogy continues even within universities; most colleges and universities offer collaborative piano degrees only at the graduate level.¹² I would further argue that the commonly used nomenclature and differentiation between solo pianist and collaborative pianist underlines this pedagogical aspect; it points to this because the differentiation in nomenclature is unique to pianists. Note that there is no such common jargon as collaborative soprano or collaborative cellist.

¹² Amy Mertz, "A Career for Pianists in Collaborative Piano," *MajoringinMusic.com*, accessed August 1, 2019, <https://majoringinmusic.com/a-career-for-pianists-in-collaborative-piano/>.

In fact, it is almost humorous to think about this possibility, perhaps because it is assumed that sopranos and cellists are *already* collaborative. However, it makes sense to apply this differentiation to pianists because it is common knowledge that early piano education is predominantly solo.

But the problem lies in the fact that strong, musically-tailored social skills are a large part of what defines a skilled collaborative pianist. So what kind of social transformation will need to take place for a pianist to become a collaborative pianist? While they may already be accustomed to handling multiple voices, textures, and rhythms simultaneously, they must now learn to share these elements with different musical bodies. Although their previous work was largely intrapersonal, or within themselves, they must now learn to manage intrapersonal and interpersonal musical elements at the same time. This is an interesting point, as collaborative pianists are one of the few instrumentalists who must constantly consider, to a high degree, balance of voices within themselves (intrapersonal), while also listening to the balance and coordination between themselves and their partners (interpersonal).

Thus, when pianists, perhaps in their early twenties, decide to go collaborative, they may likely need to play catch up in the area of musical interpersonal skills, and also learn to balance intrapersonal and interpersonal thinking. At first, this dichotomy may be very apparent to them as they are faced with the challenge of managing multiple contrapuntal voices within themselves while also considering the musical elements carried by their partners. As this cognitive intra/interpersonal shift usually occurs when pianists have already reached adulthood, it may require conscious effort to tailor their innate and well-intentioned collaborative personality so that it is functional within the context of a musical

duo. It is at this point that pianists must begin to develop a real working empathy for the interpersonal aspects of how they must participate within a larger musical unit.

Performance Pressure

To top it off, these carefully tailored intra/interpersonal skills must usually be carried out in anticipation of a pressurized performance situation; both members of a duo are acutely and constantly aware of this fact. While the performance may be for a singer or instrumentalist's teacher, colleagues, an audience, or even a recording, there is almost always a white elephant in the room: both parties will soon be facing upcoming judgment in one way or another.

One must also acknowledge how the subjective, gray nature of musical collaboration contributes to its interest, but simultaneously, can lend itself to collaborative contention; what one musician judges to be a great performance, another musician thinks otherwise. Thus, in musical collaboration, there is very little clear right or wrong, and this aspect can lead to endless discussion and debate. Likewise, it is impossible to know the results of an impending performance.

How does this relate to interpersonal aspects of rehearsal? The stress caused by performance pressure directly interferes with a person's natural ability to collaborate. The reasons for this are scientific; stress causes the body to release the hormone cortisol in greater amounts. High levels of this hormone can impair the brain's ability to function correctly. Studies have shown that chronic stress can "disrupt synapse regulation resulting

in the loss of sociability and the avoidance of interactions with others.”¹³ Stress also interferes with the brain’s prefrontal cortex, the part of the brain responsible for memory recall and learning. At its worst, chronic stress can actually increase the size of the amygdala, making a person more prone to fight-or-flight responses.¹⁴ In all other words, the stress of performance pressure can threaten to over-activate the antisocial and fearful parts of a musician’s brain, putting them in a state of anxiety that is exactly the opposite of the relaxed and alert mindset good collaboration requires.

Key Points

Duos in the rehearsal process are often so focused on musical goals that they forget to consider important interpersonal aspects of the process. As both members of the duo likely began their studies as children, the unique and interesting social aspects of rehearsal may seem like insignificant traditions to them. After pianists consider the social uniqueness of duo rehearsal, they can begin to note its interesting interpersonal aspects and start to hone their collaborative skills. Duo rehearsal is a unique social situation because:

1. Although the word is often tossed about thoughtlessly, collaboration is a unique and demanding form of working together. It should always be practiced in duo rehearsal, but is not always practiced or necessary in other parts of everyday life.

¹³ Rebecca Bernstein, “The Mind and Mental Health: How Stress Affects the Brain,” TOURO University Worldwide: Health and Human Services, July 26, 2016, <https://www.tuw.edu/content/health/how-stress-affects-the-brain/>.

¹⁴ Ibid.

2. Pianists usually become collaborative pianists later in life. Young pianists begin their education as soloists, and most colleges and universities only offer graduate degrees in collaborative piano. Often, collaborative pianists must learn to function in a larger musical context after they have already reached adulthood.
3. Performance pressure causes people to be less collaborative, and duo rehearsal almost always results in a formal performance or audition; this pressure is omnipresent. It is ironic that duo rehearsal requires such a high level of collaboration to be successful, but at the same time, collaborative spirit is nearly always challenged by pending formal performance.

For all of these reasons, duo rehearsal is a socially unique situation. The next chapter will consider the two basic building blocks of collaboration, and how a thorough understanding of these components can lead to a higher quality musical collaboration and product.

CHAPTER 2

CORE COLLABORATIVE SKILLS: EMPATHY

Empathy is the fuel and currency of musical collaboration. It has been “discussed in relation to cooperative music-making and intercultural understanding, musical group interaction, within the study of ensemble rehearsal and within the learning of popular and jazz musicians.”¹⁵ Bottom line is, it can be observed in all forms of collaborative music-making in a myriad of ways. This begins with a composer’s empathy for performers through idiomatic writing for the instruments and voice, and the performer’s empathy for the composer’s intentions through careful score study and knowledge of style. In this way, empathy can be espied cognitively as players discuss and agree upon performance outcomes and traditions. It can be represented emotionally as players simultaneously react to musical implications and each other’s unique expressions and interpretations. It is visibly observable, as players participate in the gestural mirroring and mimicry of cues.¹⁶ These cues are functional because of the human brain’s complex “mirror neuron” system that is activated when we copy the actions of other people; in fact, this system is thought to be responsible for empathy. Importantly, mirror neurons allow humans to “understand others’ intentions and states of mind,” – crucial when a musician is trying to predict exactly when his partner will begin playing, or to accurately anticipate his upcoming tempo.¹⁷

¹⁵ Elizabeth Haddon and Mark Hutchinson, “Empathy in Piano Duet Rehearsal and Performance,” *Empirical Musicology Review* 10, no. 2 (2015): 140, doi: 10.18061/emr.v10i1-2.4573.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 140-1.

While empathy can be analyzed through many lenses, master negotiator Kurt Voss discusses it from a practical, day-to-day standpoint. In his book, *Never Split the Difference: Negotiating as if Your Life Depended on It*, Voss writes about a form of empathy he coins “tactical empathy” – understanding the reasons behind another person’s emotions, and letting them know you understand.¹⁸ By using tactical empathy, one is able to more precisely understand another person’s experience, and consequently, work better with them. It might seem that tactical empathy is simply being nice, but Voss is careful to note the distinction between empathy and sympathy; while empathy simply involves noticing another’s experience, sympathy includes noticing that experience, agreeing with it, and trying to help that person feel better if they are unhappy.¹⁹ Tactical empathy has nothing to do with being nice; rather, it implies using empathy as an interpersonal tool.

I would like to introduce another specific and practical form of empathy – instrumental empathy – or tactical empathy between collaborating musicians.²⁰ Instrumental empathy involves considering the experiences of other musicians. Importantly, it includes understanding the visceral sensation of playing another instrument – its technical demands, idiomatic strengths/challenges, and performance traditions.

¹⁷ Alison Motluk, “How the Brain Detects the Emotions of Others.” *NewScientist*, May 12, 2008, <https://www.google.com/amp/s/www.newscientist.com/article/dn13874-how-the-brain-detects-the-emotions-of-others/amp/>.

¹⁸ Kurt Voss and Tahl Raz, *Never Split the Difference: Negotiating as if Your Life Depended on It* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 2016), 50-2.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁰ From hereon, both instrumentalists and singers will be referred to as instrumentalists, unless specifically referencing singers or aspects of singing.

Instrumental empathy includes many musical components, and can also be viewed through the previously discussed cognitive, emotional, and gestural lenses. It is especially useful and necessary in partnerships between musicians of two different instrumental families; for most collaborative pianists, these types of partnerships are frequent occurrences, as working with wind players, brass players, string players, and singers all involve crossing into another instrumental family. As stated in the previous chapter, most pianists will only begin deeply exploring this area as adults. Thus, it is important for collaborative pianists to educate themselves in empathy's "value as a way both of overcoming perceptions of [instrumental] dissimilarity, and of accepting others' difference."²¹

One main difference between the piano and many other types of instruments is sound production; string players, singers, and most kinds of wind players all have the ability to ease into the onset of a note, while pianists must initiate notes at extremely specific, percussive points in time. One could say that onset for the former listed instruments is extremely multi-faceted, both in terms of the palette available as well as the sound production's technical components. Tuning is also a constant and complex variable for most other instruments, one that pianists do not have to consider. This dissemblance in onset and tuning between pianists and the majority of their partners creates a fundamentally different musical experience for each member of most duos – an instrumental divide. In order to do their part to bridge these differences and encourage synchronicity between their partners and themselves, pianists must employ instrumental empathy and interest in order to understand their partners' complex sound production and world.

²¹ Haddon and Hutchinson, "Empathy in Piano Duet Rehearsal and Performance, 140.

But perhaps the most sensitive difference for pianists and wind players, brass players, and singers is that of breath. Wind players, brass players, and singers must breathe in order to produce a sound; for physical and musical reasons, pianists should breathe, but it is not a direct component of the instrument's sound production. It seems unfair that one member of a close partnership (the wind player, brass player, or vocalist) must bargain for breath while the other member (the pianist) has no need for air – but strangely, has direct control over it! At the least, pianists should simply notice these realities. At best, they can be extremely empathetic and sensitive to their partner's need to breathe and adjust their own playing accordingly.

Pianists' empathetic and nuanced understanding of another musician's need to breathe will directly affect the quality of their collaborations; however, the act of breathing with their partners will further increase their instrumental empathy and sensitivity in a process of eternal return. Research shows that “the process of breathing deeply and bringing awareness to the body is called a ‘state of interoception’ [and that] people who induce interoceptive states are more empathetic than those who aren't as aware of their internal functioning.”²² One can sometimes observe exceptional collaborative pianists breathing along with their partners, unwittingly inducing a highly empathetic interoceptive state within themselves. A pianist who is able to reach an interoceptive state while playing will be more likely to flexibly accommodate the myriad of different breaths a partner may present. It is helpful for pianists, who may often be told that they should breathe with their

²² McKinley Corbley, “Did You Know Breathing Deeply Can Boost Your Empathy?,” Good News Network, May 22, 2017, <https://www.goodnewsnetwork.org/know-breathing-deeply-can-boost-empathy/>.

partners, to be aware of the science behind why this is important. In this way, breathing with is a scientifically validated, useful tool within a pianist's togetherness toolbox.

If empathy is such a crucial component of collaborative music making how then can pianists work to increase their instrumental empathy? Voss recommends a simple method people can use to increase tactical empathy in their daily lives:

Turn your attention to someone who's talking near you, or watch a person being interviewed on TV. As they talk, imagine that you are that person. Visualize yourself in the position they describe and put in as much detail as you can, as if you were actually there.²³

In a similar way, musicians can closely observe and consider the unique demands of each other's instruments and parts in order to increase their instrumental empathy. Pianists can consciously exercise instrumental empathy in their personal practice/rehearsal in a myriad of creative ways. It simply involves paying attention to the other player. Some of the methods listed below are commonly used practice techniques, but they are freshened and infused with a greater awareness of their empathetic components.

How to Practice Instrumental Empathy

1. Foreign language study: It goes without saying that pianists who collaborate with singers must carefully coordinate the attacks of their fingers with the vowels and consonants of

²³ Kurt Voss, *Never Split the Difference*, 53.

another, possibly foreign, language. Therefore, it is helpful for them to have a visceral understanding of the linguistic sensations a vocalist experiences when singing in order to appreciate the full breadth of linguistically informed rhythmic subtlety. There are many ways in which a pianist can develop this type of working empathy; much of this work can be done outside the practice room and before specific repertoire is even selected.

Aspiring opera or art song pianists can increase their instrumental empathy by infusing their life with the study of foreign languages. They can take classes in lyric diction. They can carefully observe movies in foreign languages, and using subtitles, try to speak along with the actors. They can practice speaking and interacting, whether it is through complete language immersion or getting involved with a foreign language study group. Pianists who do this will furthermore notice that their increased knowledge and personal investment will encourage them to be more interested – and listen better – to the singers with whom they work. In fact, developing and fostering this genuine interest and personal investment is perhaps the most important component of foreign language vocal empathy, as a pianist's love for a foreign language is a direct precursor of good listening.

As a final step, collaborative pianists commonly practice speaking and singing a song's text while playing; this is especially important when understanding how the fingers must adjust to accommodate breaths. While this is a crucial part of preparing vocal repertoire, it lacks effectiveness without the broader context of a personal and emotional investment in a more complete language education. In this way, speaking and singing a song's text while playing should be used as a finishing touch in the togetherness toolbox rather than an emergency quick fix.

2. Education in partner's instrument – Pianists can develop cognitive aspects of their instrumental empathy by learning more about their partners' instruments. They can research and study an instrument's construction and performance traditions, as well as its technique and sound capabilities. They can learn what is uniquely challenging about their partners' instrument, which is actually an important part of being considerate to their colleagues. It can be helpful and motivational for pianists to understand that knowing about another instrument will directly improve cognitive aspects of their instrumental empathy, giving them the knowledge to better support their partners.

In order to increase visceral aspects of their instrumental empathy, pianists must develop the ability to project themselves into their partners' physical experience. What does it feel like to play their partners' instruments? To do this, they must develop a visceral knowledge of what it is like to play their partners' instruments. In a perfect world this would involve taking lessons on each instrument. While this is an ideal, it is highly unreasonable for busy collaborative pianists who work with many different instruments. One time-efficient solution is to simply seek an opportunity to hold and play a few notes on the particular instrument – a small project that goes a long way in understanding their partners' visceral experiences. They can further build on this project by watching videos of musicians playing each instrument. Note, this must be done carefully, just how Voss suggests people build empathy by closely observing video interviews; it must be done with the intention of projecting themselves into their partner's shoes– or rather, onto their partner's instrument. Pianists can page turn for recitals, closely observing both partners. In rehearsal, they can simply ask their partners to play specific passages so that they can

watch and listen. This practice will give them a more accurate idea of how to align the attacks of their fingers with their partners.

3. Singing partner's part (either vocal or instrumental) while playing

The full benefits of this age-old practice technique are reaped when pianists sing their partner's part while playing and projecting themselves onto their partners' instruments and experiences. Otherwise, this technique yields a rather one-dimensional result – merely understanding how the rhythms of the two parts fit together. When pianists sing their partners' parts while playing, they can consider the following projective questions:

- a. Where will my partner breathe? What is the nature of these breaths? (i.e. catch breath; long, deep, restorative breath; etc.)
- b. How will the breaths affect the trajectory of the preceding and proceeding phrases?
- c. Where will my partner or I need a cue? Who should lead and follow in these moments?
- d. Where will my partner likely adhere to an unwritten performance tradition?
- e. At what points will my partner (and/or her instrument) move easily through notes? At what points might there be more inertia between notes?
- f. At what points will my partner have trouble projecting (in terms of volume)? At what parts will my partner project the most? How should I adjust my playing in order to support the different ranges of my partner's instrument?

- g. Which parts are most challenging for my partner? What can I do in my playing to support my partner in these places?

CHAPTER 3

CORE COLLABORATIVE SKILLS: ACTIVE LISTENING

While empathy is a key ingredient of positive collaboration, active listening is the process that begets empathy – the action one must take in order to induce a highly empathetic collaborative state within oneself. Perhaps a professional musician may feel indignant reading this, thinking listening should come naturally to a person who works daily within a musical construct. However, active listening is different from hearing and responding to sound; it is a multi-dimensional form of listening that can be defined as “building rapport, understanding, and trust.”²⁴ It requires you to “actually hear what the other person is saying [or playing] – not just what you think they are saying or what you want to hear.”²⁵ It also requires musicians to carefully adjust their playing according to the acoustic of the performance space. In this way, active listening encourages musical flexibility and collaboration by making a person feel understood, less defensive, and more willing to listen to others with contrasting views – the emotional starting point from which a musical collaboration can flourish.²⁶

All of this being said, I would like to include a disclaimer before beginning this discussion. Although five specific active listening techniques will be discussed in this chapter, I think there is no one way in which a collaborative duo should verbalize issues

²⁴ John M. Grohol, “Become a Better Listener: Active Listening,” PsychCentral, October 8, 2018, <https://psychcentral.com/lib/become-a-better-listener-active-listening/>.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Kurt Voss, *Never Split the Difference*, 16.

and work together. Furthermore, communication preference is highly influenced by one's culture of origin. It is a given that each duo will have its own way of interacting; however, it is also a given that a collaborative pianist will work with a variety of different musicians throughout his career. Therefore, it is beneficial for collaborative pianists to understand a number of different ways in which they can talk about musical issues, and to consider emotional implications of their various approaches. Let us simply consider the active listening techniques discussed in this chapter a starting point.

Demonstrating Concern

One important form of active listening is “demonstrating concern.”²⁷ While this may seem obvious, it is helpful to know that demonstrating concern is a codified and essential form of active listening. It can be used to powerfully and preemptively avoid blame games and the calling of shots – the one-dimensional (and often incorrect) way of labeling collaborative issues as “on you” or “on me.” See the examples below to observe how a pianist can demonstrate concern in a duo rehearsal setting:

Example 1: A pianist did not allow his singing partner enough time to take a breath before the beginning of a phrase, and he ran out of air at the end of it.²⁸ The pianist could

²⁷ “Learn about Active Listening Skills with Examples,” The Balance Careers, updated April 30, 2019, <https://www.thebalancecareers.com/active-listening-skills-with-examples-2059684>.

²⁸ When necessary, Chapters 3, 5, 7, and 9 will use male gender pronouns and Chapters 4, 6, and 8 will use female gender pronouns.

demonstrate concern (and accept responsibility) by exclaiming, “Oh! I didn’t give you much time to breathe at the beginning of that phrase, and you ran out of breath. Can we start from the previous passage so I can try to set you up better?” When a pianist demonstrates concern when he is at fault for a lack of togetherness, his partner is less likely to feel slighted or angered, and more likely to feel considered. Consequently, he is more inclined to positively assist the pianist by saving air over this longer phrase; this makes it probable that the duo will find a workable solution together, resulting in a better and cohesive musical product.

Example 2: A pianist’s partner is struggling with a technically challenging passage, and the two are not together. The pianist could point out the issue a number of ways. He could simply say, “We are not together at measure 25; we need to work on it.” He could also approach the issue by demonstrating concern. He could say, “Those double-notes you have at measure 25 sound horribly difficult to execute. Let’s slow this passage down to see what is actually happening, and gradually bump it up to tempo.” Better yet, a pianist can recognize how slight adjustments to his own playing can make the passage more workable for his partner. While both examples effectively address the issue, the latter does so with empathy; it lets the pianist’s partner know he understands his struggle, cares about it, and is willing to help.

Pianists who demonstrate concern express to their partners the sentiment that both theirs and their partners’ musical success are intrinsically connected; this attitude often begets more collaborative behavior in both members of the duo. In this way, the slightly

self-centered sentiment that one is helping another is stripped away and replaced with larger process and goal-based thoughts, the mental processes from which positive collaborative behavior flowers. This is why pianists should at least consider how to address musical issues with concern, demonstrating to their partners that the success of each member of the duo is bound together.

Paraphrasing

Another useful active listening technique that can help a duo reach musical consensus is “paraphrasing,” or checking for understanding by repeating what a person said using different words.²⁹ Musicians can utilize this technique in rehearsal to clarify their partners’ musical intentions.

Example: A pianist and his partner are not in agreement on how to shape a particular phrase; the pianist listens to his partner play it. Then, in order to clarify his partner’s musical intent, he verbally paraphrases what just happened by asking, “It sounds like you are starting quietly, and then increasing in volume every two bars until reaching the loudest point at measure 10? And then you want to suddenly drop back down to a quiet dynamic at measure 12 in order to begin an echo of the previous phrase?” His partner will then likely confirm that this summary is correct, or question his very own interpretive intentions and decide to make changes. This is definitely a possibility, as Voss confirms that actively listening to someone encourages them to become more clear of their very own thoughts and

²⁹ Ibid.

intentions.³⁰ It is amazing to know that pianists can help their partners find clarity simply by listening to them! This will in turn make their partners easier to follow, improving the collaboration. At the same time, paraphrasing is a diplomatic way to open a discussion about both partners' musical preferences; a person who has first been on the receiving end of active listening is more likely to be receptive to, or to at least consider, their partner's differing musical ideas.

Reflecting

This active listening “technique involves reflecting back to speakers what you believe they have said in order to verify (or clarify) your understanding and to encourage speakers to continue elaborating on their points of view.”³¹ Musicians can use it in all sorts of creative ways in order to support empathetic contagion and synchronism:

1. A pianist listens while his partner plays a phrase. Then, on his own instrument, he repeats the phrase back as he heard it.
2. The pianist listens while his partner plays a phrase. He sings the phrase back as he heard it.
3. A pianist sings along with his partner while his partner is playing.

³⁰ Kurt Voss, *Never Split the Difference*, 16.

³¹ JoAnne Yates, “MIT Sloan Communication Program Teaching Note” (teaching note, ESG.21W732 Science Writing and New Media Class, MIT, Cambridge, MA, Fall 2010), 2, https://ocw.mit.edu/courses/comparative-media-studies-writing/21w-732-science-writing-and-new-media-fall-2010/readings/MIT21W_732F10_listening.pdf.

4. A pianist plays his partner's part on the piano while his partner is playing.
5. Both parties sing a phrase together.

All of these methods support a simultaneous clarification and convergence of a duo's musical intentions, thereby encouraging the phrase to be "more together."

Questioning

John Grohol specifies four main types of questions used while active listening: leading, open-ended, close-ended, and reflective. Leading questions encourage someone to share more. For example, "Can you tell me a little bit more about how you'd like to use rubato in this section?" Open-ended questions usually involve words such as "who," "what," "when," "where," and "how." Examples of open-ended questions are, "How do you think we should cue this passage?" Or, "Who should cue this passage?" Close-ended questions ask for a specific response. For example, "Is our balance good here?" Finally, reflective questions ask someone to expound upon something they have already said. An example of a reflective question is, "Can you tell me a little more about how you think we should use rubato in this style?" While Grohol cites questioning as a useful aspect of active listening, he is careful to note that "why" questions should be avoided; they tend to make people feel more defensive and on-the-spot.³² For example, the question, "Why are you shaping this phrase this way?" could be more sensitively modified to, "How do you think we can shape this phrase?"

³² Grohol, "Become a Better Listener: Active Listening."

Blinking Words

Pianists can listen for “blinking words” in order to create an emotional “outline” of rehearsal priorities. Reldan Nadler says, “Blinking words are the feelings; they have the emotional content. You want your ear to be sensitized to them as though they are flashing brightly.”³³ Blinking words help pianists locate the emotional core of their partners’ verbal messages. In a rehearsal situation there is almost always an infinite amount of musical issues to discuss; blinking words help pinpoint which musical issues carry emotional weight. For example, a partner might say, “I feel desperate because I can’t seem to make this phrase.” In this sentence, “desperate” is the blinking word. It clearly locates a collaborative roadblock. However it does not provide a musical diagnosis; that is the duo’s job to figure out.

On a more positive note, blinking words also provide pianists clues about their partners’ strengths and likings – excellent mediums through which to tackle tricky collaborative issues. For example, a pianist hears his partner say, “I love the opportunities this movement provides to capitalize on color.” Here, “love” is clearly the blinking word. The pianist can choose to address other collaborative issues (such as rhythm, cues, phrasing) within the context of color, so as to encourage the collaboration to stay in an extremely positive place.

³³ Reldan S. Nadler, *Leading with Emotional Intelligence: Hands-On Strategies for Building Confident and Collaborative Star Performers* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 2011), 260.

Furthermore, the concept of blinking words can be expounded upon to include words or phrases that are emotionally charged for musicians specifically. For example, words or phrases with negative emotional effect for musicians are: “rushing,” “covering,” “dragging,” “not together,” “messy,” “out of control,” “running out of breath,” “tense,” “unclear,” and “abrasive,” to name a few. Examples of words with positive emotional affect to musicians are: “controlled,” “balanced,” “together,” “clean,” “relaxed,” “clear,” and “rich.” When a pianist, after playing through a piece with his partner, asks the all so common question, “And how did that run-through feel to you?,” he can listen for both emotional blinking words, as well as for terms or phrases that imply specific emotional responses to musicians. Perhaps these could be coined as musical blinking words. In a tense or sensitive collaboration, he can also choose to use the positive version of a negative word – for example, “exciting” in place of “out of control” in order to trigger more positive affect within the collaborative space.

Summary

A discussion of how active listening can be used in a rehearsal reveals how the words a musician uses directly affect the invisible collaborative space between two partners and the resulting musical product. While demonstrating concern, paraphrasing, reflecting, questioning, and listening for blinking words are just a few specific techniques pianists can practice in order to become better active listeners, they are a starting point from which they can begin practicing active listening as an art. Through this process, they may notice that musical output improves – not because they are markedly better pianists or musicians – but

because they are better collaborators in general, all through the development of the so-called “soft” skill of active listening. They will begin to see duo rehearsal as not only the intersection of musical skills, but a complex dance of musical and interpersonal aspects, all of which are invisibly and intricately connected.

CHAPTER 4

SEATING AND ROOM ARRANGEMENT

While Chapters 2 and 3 have dealt with the more abstract collaborative skills of empathy and active listening Chapter 4 discusses a more concrete subject matter – seating and room arrangement. This is an important topic when considering interpersonal aspects of piano duo rehearsal because many collaborative pianists work from a private studio or rehearsal space. If collaborative pianists are able to arrange their own studios they must consider where the piano will be positioned within the room as this will largely determine where their partners must stand or sit. The location in which people sit in a room, especially in relation to the door, has a direct effect on their comfort and the corresponding collaborative dynamic of the room.

According to the intra and interpersonal implications of body language psychology, people are more comfortable if they do not have their back to an open space. Allan and Barbara Pease explain, “research shows that respiration, heart rate, brainwave frequencies, and blood pressure rapidly increase when a person sits with his back to an open space, particularly where others are moving about.”³⁴ The same holds true if people have their back to the door. Pease further notes that collaboration is facilitated and consensus more easily reached when people are relaxed.³⁵ Perhaps it behooves the comfort level and corresponding collaborative mood of the room if the piano is positioned so that neither

³⁴ Allan and Barbara Pease, *The Definitive Book of Body Language* (New York: Bantam Dell, 2004), 334.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 334-5.

pianists or their partners have their backs to an open space in the room or a door. See examples below to observe how interpersonal aspects of room arrangement can be actualized.

KEY

Pianist is represented by a white arrow and black background. The direction of the arrow represents the direction in which the pianist is facing.



Pianist's partner is represented by a black arrow and white background. The direction of the arrow represents the direction in which the pianist's partner is facing.

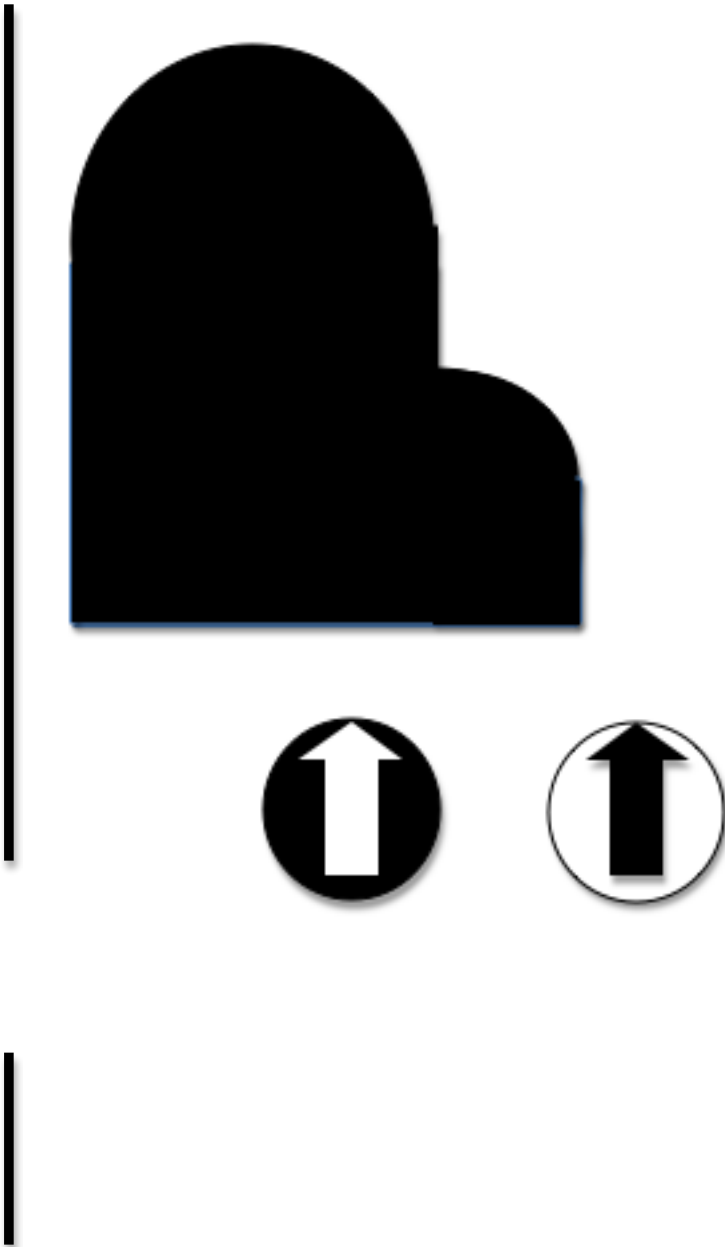


Piano



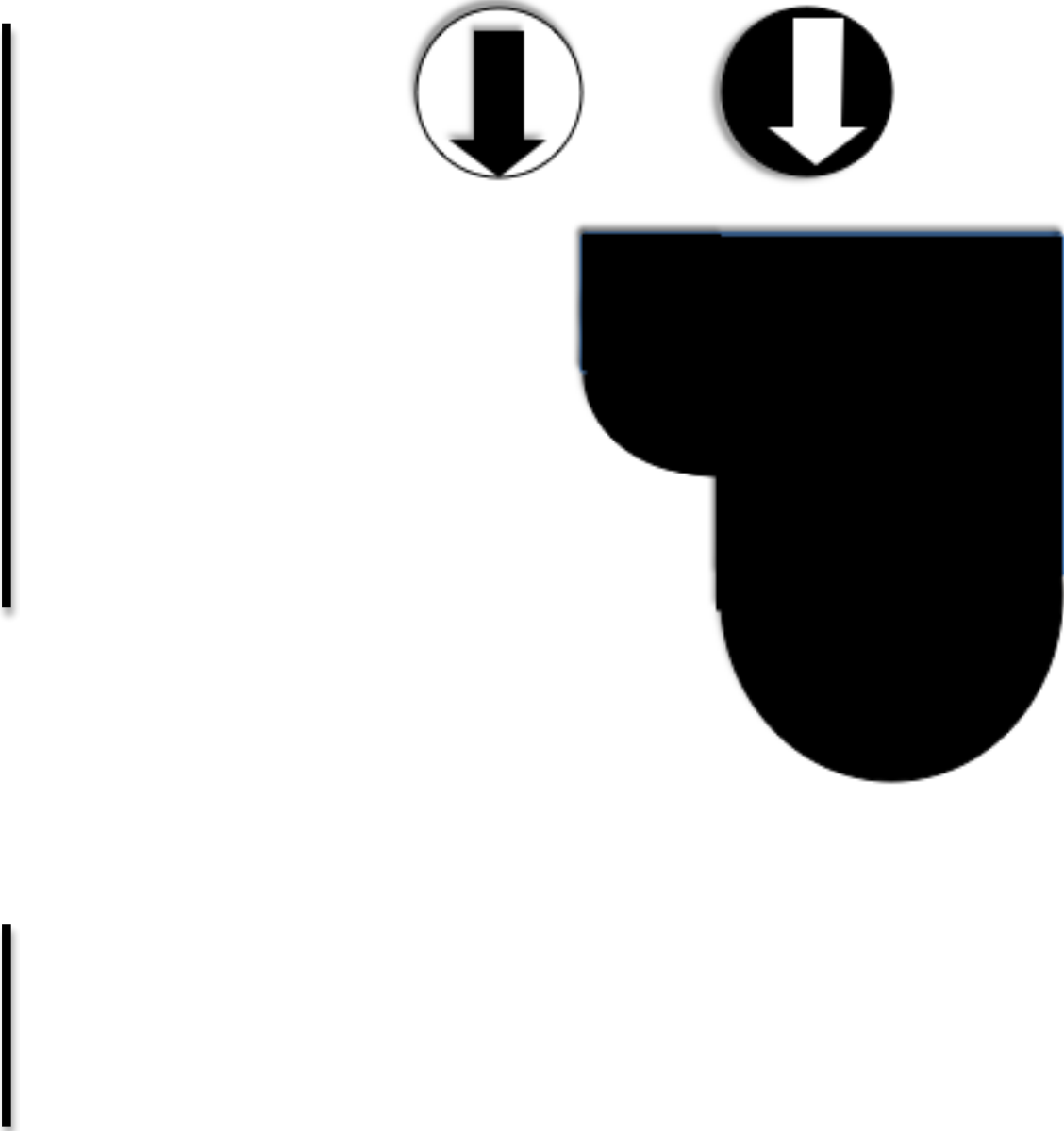
Diagram 1. Backs to the Door Room Arrangement

The room arrangement below positions both the pianist and her partner with their backs to the door. The interpersonal implications of this setup are likely more uncomfortable than the following alternative shown on the next page. The door is represented by the space in the black line.



This room arrangement allows both pianist and partner to see the door, likely resulting in an interpersonal implication that is more relaxed. Again, the door is represented by the break in the black line.

Diagram 2. Faces to the Door Room Arrangement



Next, one can consider the numerous seating/music stand constellations traditionally used by different duo instrumentations in concert. Musicians use these set-ups to mitigate three elements: acoustics (from an audience's perspective), view (from an audience's perspective), and aural and visual communication between players. While all of these aspects must be considered when determining a seating/stand arrangement in concert, rehearsal arrangements can often be more flexible, as an important element to be considered is the verbal communication between the two partners. When considering how seating arrangements can differ between rehearsal and performance situations, one must remember that rehearsal involves much verbal communication, whereas a performance typically does not. Thus, positions for effective verbal communication in the beginning stages of rehearsal can pave the way for partnerships that can survive the inopportune stage seating positions a performance sometimes requires.

In a rehearsal situation, a pianist can consider the fact that “where [one sits] in relation to other people is an effective way of obtaining cooperation from them.”³⁶ Seating positions are a powerful form of body language that are embedded deeply within the human psyche.³⁷ However, the physicality of musicians' instruments puts limitations on where they must sit. Furthermore, one can consider the reality that pianos are extremely large and immobile – difficult or sometimes impossible to move in order to accommodate a rehearsal. Pianists are also not able to adjust the position of their instruments while playing. One can

³⁶Ibid., 330.

³⁷Ibid.

see how these factors could lend themselves to pianists sitting in locked seating positions, or at least, positions that do not lend themselves to collaborative sentiment.

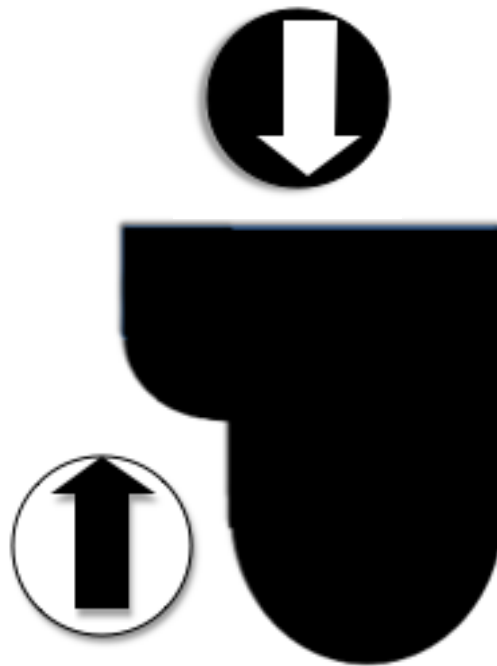
I would like to discuss the interpersonal implications of four basic seating arrangements before considering how pianists can combine the interpersonal implications of these positions with the physical reality of playing the piano.

Directly Across

At one interpersonal extreme, opposition is created when two people sit directly across from each other. Pease writes that in this “competitive” position, sentences and conversations are shorter, and according to Pease, this position only creates “bad vibes.”³⁸ While it is often necessary to almost directly face a musical partner, especially when coaching a singer's expression or diction, it is interesting to note the interpersonal implications of this position.

³⁸Ibid., 334-5.

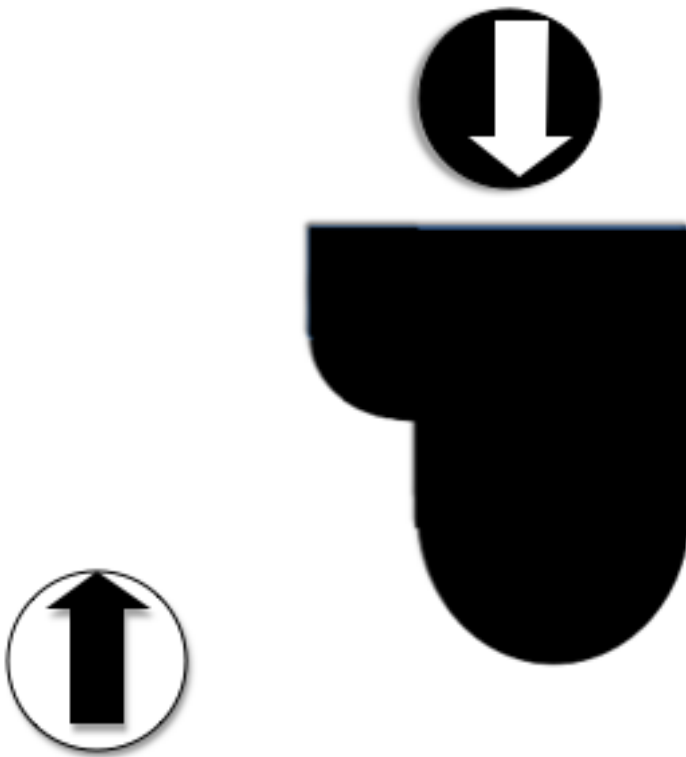
Diagram 3: Directly Across Position



Diametrically Opposite

Another seating arrangement that does not naturally lend itself to collaboration is when two partners are facing each other in a diametrically opposite position. This seating arrangement tends to encourage independence and disinterest rather than collaboration.³⁹

Diagram 4. Diametrically Opposite Position



³⁹Ibid., 336.

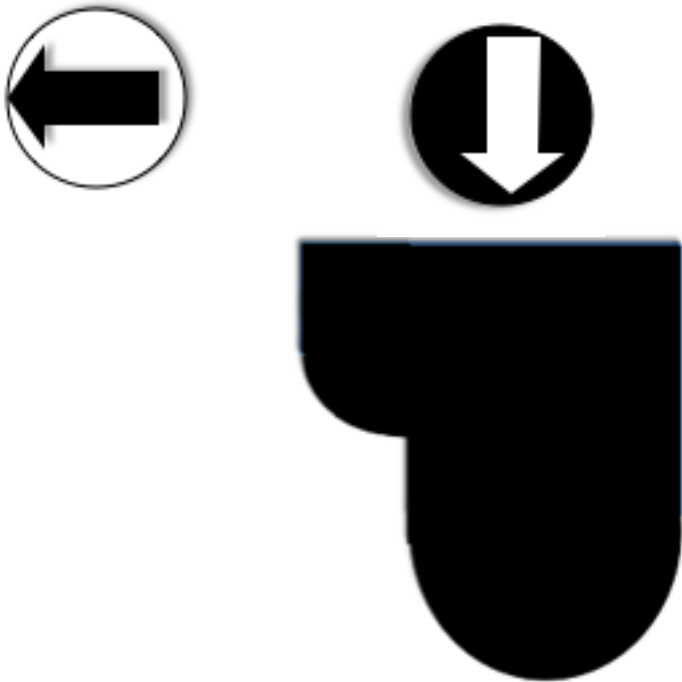
Back Turned

Most pianists can relate to the negative experience of enduring a piece collaborating with their partner's backside. It is common knowledge that it is not good etiquette for instrumentalists to position themselves with their backs to a pianist because this position makes visual cues difficult. However, the social implications are far greater than this.

Of all sides of the body, the back communicates the least information. Thus, when a person turns his back on another, it can signal rejection and that that person does not want to communicate. This is because a person, by turning her back on another, hides the most communicative part of the body – her face. At an extreme level, one could call this rejection social shunning, a painful experience that is the antithesis of collaborative spirit. A turned back can also be seen as a protective move; when a person defends herself against a flying object, she turns her back to it in order to protect the more vulnerable, soft parts of the body – her face and chest.⁴⁰ Again, the intent of self-protection is the opposite of collaboration. The two interpersonal implications of a turned back – social rejection and protection – demonstrate that a turned back not only makes visual communication and cues difficult between partners, it also creates extremely negative interpersonal vibes. This is why it is paramount for this negative stand arrangement to be corrected immediately.

⁴⁰David Straker, "Back Body Language," Changing Minds, accessed February 28, 2019, http://changingminds.org/techniques/body/parts_body_language/back_body_language.

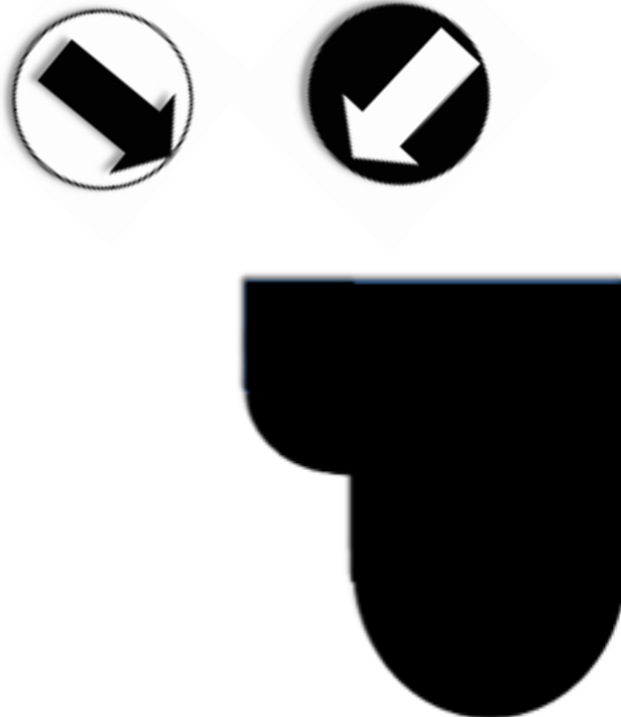
Diagram 5. Back Turned Position



Cooperative Position

How then do people naturally sit in relation to one another when they are collaborating? Pease writes that the cooperative position, when two people are facing each other at a 45-degree angle, is how most people choose to sit when they are working together. Another way of thinking about it is that it is how people are angled when looking at the same piece of paper. The cooperative position allows for eye contact and physical mirroring between parties. In fact, it is a position often adopted by salespeople, and can humorously be called – “siding with the opposition.”⁴¹

Diagram 6. Cooperative Position



⁴¹ Pease, *The Definitive Book of Body Language*, 333.

As a final note, pianists should also consider the interpersonal implications of a room's lighting and acoustics. Studies have shown "that cool white fluorescent lighting was associated with an increased reading speed and accuracy, whereas warm white lighting was improving social skills like working together and minimizing conflicts."⁴² However, studies show mixed results as to whether participants actually perform better in cool or warm lighting.⁴³ Regardless of the inconclusive results, the psychological affect of different lighting is an important interpersonal aspect of room design. Pianists should also think about the size of their rehearsal space and whether the space will be large enough to support the sound produced there. Studies show that noise exposure can "be accompanied by negative responses, such as anger, displeasure, exhaustion, and by stress-related symptoms," all negative responses that would certainly affect the interpersonal dynamic of a rehearsal.⁴⁴ If the acoustics of a space cannot be managed, pianists can at least consider musicians' earplugs, especially when collaborating with instruments or voices that have a high decibel level.

⁴²Elisabeth M. Weiss and Markus Canazei, "The Influence of Light on Mood and Emotion," *Handbook of Psychology of Emotions: Recent Theoretical Perspectives and Novel Empirical Findings 1* (October 2013): 301, accessed October 5, 2019, https://www.researchgate.net/publication/258120919_The_influnece_of_light_on_mood_and_emotion.

⁴³Ibid.

⁴⁴Mathias Basner et al., "Auditory and Non-auditory Effects of Noise on Health," *Lancet* (April 12, 2014): 1331, doi: 10.1016/S0140-6736(13)61613-X.

Application

While there is no one way musicians should sit in a rehearsal, it is helpful for pianists to understand the emotional implications of different seating arrangements. At the very least, noticing how partners position themselves can serve as one kind of visual clue as to the interpersonal dynamic of the collaboration. Most collaborative pianists can relate to the experience of an instrumentalist walking into the rehearsal and placing her stand in a number of different positions; a pianist who is aware of the interpersonal implications of these positions can suggest alternatives to avoid negative interpersonal dynamic. Understanding the emotional implications of different seating positions can also provide greater impetus for a pianist to quickly address negative seating arrangements. Even though the piano itself is immobile, pianists who are aware of the emotional language of seating arrangements can, when they are speaking with their partners, position themselves on the bench in order to more closely replicate a collaborative seating arrangement.

CHAPTER 5

BODY LANGUAGE

While the seating arrangements discussed in Chapter 4 are one kind of body language, Chapter 5 examines other forms of body language and their interpersonal implications in detail. Carol Kinsey Goman, an author who writes about the intersection of leadership and body language says, “A leader can unintentionally sabotage collaboration by sending exclusionary body language signals—because it really doesn’t take much to make people feel left out.”⁴⁵ Many of these behaviors are so small that a few offenses will likely not matter; it is the repetition of these behaviors and/or showing multiple exclusionary behaviors that can be problematic. Much of people’s body language is largely subconscious, and they may be unaware what messages their bodies are sending; the intent of this chapter is to raise awareness about collaborative body language, and discuss it within the context of a musical rehearsal and the physicality of a piano.⁴⁶

Physical Barriers

In Goman’s article entitled “Want to Build Collaboration? Watch Your Body Language!” she notes that “physical obstructions are especially detrimental to collaborative

⁴⁵ Carol Kinsay Goman, “How Leaders Kill Collaboration – Even When They Say They Want It,” *Forbes*, December 13, 2015, <https://www.google.com/amp/s/www.forbes.com/sites/carolkinseygoman/2015/12/13/how-leaders-kill-collaboration-even-when-they-say-they-want-it/amp/>.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

efforts.”⁴⁷ Goman candidly writes of how a business executive told her he could judge a team’s collaborative comfort by “how high they held their coffee cups” when talking with each other.⁴⁸ While pianists may indeed need to think about how they hold their coffee, there are many other objects that could serve as physical barriers in rehearsal – instruments, bows, stands, and music scores. Pianists can observe how their partners shield themselves with these objects in order to more accurately gauge their partners’ comfort; if their partners are hiding themselves with any of these objects, it could be a sign of interpersonal discomfort. At the very least, pianists can know that any sort of shielding behavior is certainly not indicative of collaborative sentiment. Most importantly, pianists can also be more aware of their own body language. When they listen to their partners talk, they can be aware of their own listening body language. Pianists who understand the implications of shielding behavior are likely to demonstrate collaborative body language, and be aware of its presence, or lack thereof, within their partners.

Arms and Torso

Pianists do not have to hold their instruments, and are able to use their arms freely when speaking. This gives them a wide range of arm movement possibilities, and also necessitates that they think carefully about the ways they use their arms. Body language

⁴⁷ Carol Kinsay Goman, “Want to Build Collaboration? Watch Your Body Language!” accessed August 23, 2018, <https://www.forbes.com/sites/carolkinseygoman/2011/07/22/want-to-build-collaboration-watch-your-body-language/#1a15730d774b>.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

experts Allan and Barbara Pease write about the powerful different signals arms send. First, it is easiest to discuss which defensive arm signals are harmful to collaborative efforts. While the previous section discussed using objects as shields, people can do the same thing with their arms. Pease explains the background behind defensive arm movements; children quickly learn to hide behind different objects – their mothers’ skirts, a chair, or table – when they are threatened or nervous. Adults, on the other hand, have perfected this defensive gesture to make it less noticeable – crossing their arm or arms across the chest.⁴⁹

The crossed-arms gesture is particularly detrimental to collaborative efforts because it sends a negative message – namely, that the people adopting the position feel defensive and are not open to collaboration. Pease points out that this gesture can be extremely subtle – for example, crossing just one arm, or crossing one arm in the lap. Another common crossed-arms gesture is a self-hugging position adopted by people to comfort themselves as if someone else was hugging them.⁵⁰ The people adopting the position may argue that they simply feel more comfortable that way. Regardless, the interpersonal affect is still anti-collaborative.⁵¹

The crossed-arms gesture is also detrimental to the person adopting the position because it causes them to retain less information. In a study, two groups of volunteers were asked to listen to a lecture. One group was instructed to keep its arms unfolded and to sit in a relaxed position, and the other was instructed to keep its arms folded in the crossed-arms

⁴⁹ Pease, *The Definitive Book of Body Language*, 90-91.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.* 99-100.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*

position. After the lecture, participants were tested for retention of the information presented. Results showed that individuals who had adopted the crossed-arms position had a retention rate of 38% less than those who had adopted a relaxed position.⁵² It is remarkable that these participants' body language had such a quantifiable impact on their minds. A collaborative pianist, a person whose expertise is largely defined by exceptional listening and retention abilities, should be aware of research that shows how a simple body language adjustment can affect a person's ability to listen.

How then do people demonstrate collaborative behavior with their arms and torso? People who are interested and listening lean forward. Pease describes a lecture in which a speaker discussed the mistreatment of salespeople by management. He observed that when the lecturer stepped on the stage, many of the managers adopted defensive arms-and-legs-crossed positions. The salespeople, on the other hand, leaned forward.⁵³ This situation is informative, because it describes people's posture when they are truly interested. It is helpful to collaborative pianists, as it represents a body language that will help a musical partner feel heard. Most importantly, it is possible that adopting an interested body language could induce interest and greater listening aptitude in pianists when they are not initially interested.

In a rehearsal situation, it is helpful for pianists to be mindful of how they are holding their arms and torso while listening and speaking. It is quite easy for pianists to adopt both extremely positive and negative arm positions because they have nothing to hold. Pease offers advice as to how to avoid the cross-armed position; he suggests for

⁵² Ibid., 91.

⁵³ Ibid., 94.

people to find something to do with their hands – writing something down, observing something, perhaps even holding something in the other hand. The bottom line is that collaborative pianists should avoid any form of the crossed-arm position for the benefit of themselves and others, and be mindful of this behavior in other partners.⁵⁴

Feet

People's feet are used to go toward what they want and to run away from potential danger; people's feet reveal where their interests lie. Thus, when Person A genuinely wants something from Person B, or wants to talk with Person B, they will unconsciously move their feet in the direction of the person with whom they are talking. When Person A feels defensive or is not interested in talking with Person B, he is likely to move his feet in the other direction. He is likely unaware of this. This is because the farther away a body part is from a person's head, the less likely a person is very aware of it. People can more easily control their facial movements and pretend to have different feelings, but they usually forget to consider their arms and legs.⁵⁵

This information is interesting for pianists when one considers the fact that, while playing, pianists' feet must be rooted in a direction away from their partners. They are further locked into position when they use the pedal. If pianists maintain their playing positions while verbally communicating with their partners, their feet could be indicating disinterest. However, pianists can capitalize on the fact that a piano bench is a relatively

⁵⁴ Ibid., 94-95.

⁵⁵ Ibid., 209-228.

long chair, and allows a lot of space for them to be flexible with their seating. Pianists can consider the idea that they have playing positions and talking positions – two very different poses.

Eyes

One could say we live in a distracted world where it is common to have cell phones, computers, and other items readily accessible during most situations. However, repeatedly checking electronic devices while another person is talking shows disinterest and will likely cause them to disengage. Thus, when talking or listening to another person, it is not good to have these items visible or in hand. Simply remove them from view! Goman writes about one business executive who “has a reputation of being totally addicted to his Blackberry. He is constantly on the machine during internal meetings. When he finally focuses on others, peers make jokes about his ‘coming back to earth’.”⁵⁶ She says, “Bottom line is that it is important to align your nonverbal behavior with your leadership goals. If you say you want to build collaboration, make sure you look like you do!”⁵⁷ This last quote brilliantly sums up the issue for collaborative pianists – a group of people that works in such detail to sound collaborative and together, but rarely considers how to look and move in a collaborative manner.

⁵⁶ Carol Kinsay Goman, “Want to Build Collaboration? Watch Your Body Language!”

⁵⁷ Ibid.

CHAPTER 6

COLLABORATIVE LANGUAGE

While spoken aspects of collaborative “language” are briefly discussed in Chapter 3: “Active Listening,” Chapter 6 details more aspects of collaborative language.

Tone and Speed

It is ironic that a chapter that discusses the grammatical construction of collaborative speech begins with the following caveat: Voss says, “people tend to focus all their energies on what to say or do, but it’s how we are (our general demeanor and delivery) that is both the easiest thing to enact and the most immediately effective mode of influence.”⁵⁸ He continues by pointing out that the most important part of verbal communication is not one’s words, but tone of voice. Voss details three tones of voice: inflecting the voice downward, talking assertively, and talking with a positive/light tone. He writes that a person should adopt a positive/light tone during collaboration, as people tend to respond in kind with what they have been given. Thus, if pianists hope to contribute positively to a rehearsal’s collaborative spirit, they should consider their tone of voice.⁵⁹

Voss continues by saying that others will likely mirror this positive/light tone, and it will in turn put them in a positive frame of mind. He further notes that when people are in

⁵⁸ Kurt Voss, *Never Split the Difference*, 32.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 32-34. This pertains specifically to American English as the use and meaning of tone and inflection is vastly different across languages and cultures.

a positive frame of mind they are able to think more clearly, almost as if they are smarter.⁶⁰ Collaborative pianists can only hope that their comportment will help their partners to feel positive, and to think and play better. This will automatically make both theirs and their partners' jobs easier, and it will be much easier to play together.

Speed of voice also matters. Pease points out that if Person A is speaking faster than Person B, Person B is likely to feel pressured and rushed by Person A. Person A should instead try to speak at the same rate, or slightly slower, than Person B. This is because the rate at which a person speaks is “the rate at which their brain can consciously analyze information.”⁶¹ Thus, when talking with a partner in a pressurized situation, such as before an audition or recital, it behooves the collaboration for pianists to monitor the speed at which they speak.

Positivity

Leadership communications expert Judith Humphrey writes that positivity is an important component of collaborative fuel. She advises collaborators to avoid using negatives such as “no” and “not.” Humphrey explains that others feel shut down by negative speech, and closed off to positive possibility.⁶² See the table on the next page to observe how rehearsal problems can be rephrased using positive language.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ Pease, *The Definitive Book of Body Language*, 259.

⁶² Judith Humphrey, “These Speaking Habits Make People Want to Collaborate with You,” March, 21, 2018, <https://www.google.com/amp/s/amp.fastcompany.com/40546622/these->

Table 2: Negative v. Positive Language

Negative Language	Positive Language
“We cannot get this passage clean.”	“Let’s brainstorm how we can make this passage cleaner.”
“We cannot get this measure together.”	“We are struggling to get this measure together. What ideas do you think we can try to fix it?”
“I cannot rehearse the day before your recital.”	“I am booked the day before your recital, but perhaps we can squeeze in an extra long rehearsal two days before?”
“I don’t understand what your musical intentions are here.”	“I’m having trouble understanding your musical intentions here.”

Rephrasing musical/business problems of rehearsal in a positive manner will likely encourage others to come up with creative solutions to problems, and continue to work tenaciously. This provides the musical collaboration with positive collaborative fuel.

5-speaking-habits-make-people-want-to-collaborate-with-you.

Pronouns

James Pennebaker, author of *The Secret Life of Pronouns*, writes about “we” companies versus “I” companies. In order to determine in which category a company falls, managing consultants interview employees about their jobs, and observe how they talk about their work. For example, employees who favor the first person singular pronouns “I” and “my” are likely to be content with, but not committed to, their companies. An employee who uses distancing words, such as “that employee” or “this company,” signals a dislike for the business. Employees who favor first person plural pronouns, such as “we” and “us,” demonstrate contentedness with and commitment to the company itself. These first person plural pronouns are the words consultants hope to hear, indicators of collaborative spirit within an organization or group of people.⁶³

Another study observed how couples, the ultimate duo, talked about their marriage; researchers noted that those who used more first person plural pronouns had a much happier marriage. Again, in another series of couples study interviews, one partner was sick and the other partner was healthy. Researchers found that the sick partner fared better in the couples that used more “we” words when referring to the sickness. Researchers supposed it was because both parties viewed the problem as a shared responsibility.”⁶⁴

But how does this information connect to the rehearsal situation? First, musicians who know about this research may be encouraged to be more aware of their own words,

⁶³ James W. Pennebaker, *The Secret Life of Pronouns: What Our Words Say about Us* (New York: Bloomsbury Press, 2011), 227.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 228-229.

especially within the context of observing their own collaborative mentalities. Personally, I have noticed that observing my own pronoun usage has helped me become more aware of the times when I am or am not thinking collaboratively in rehearsal. At the times when I am not thinking collaboratively, these small words serve as red flags for a need to change.

Pianists can also anticipate the effect of their pronouns on the collaborative space between their partners and themselves. Note a few examples of how one might initiate work on a passage where it is unclear why the passage is not together.

Example 1: Partner 1 says to Partner 2, “You are not with me here.”

Example 2: Partner 1 says to Partner 2, “I am not with you here.”

Example 3: Partner 1 says to Partner 2, “We are not together here.”

Examples 1 and 2 both place emphasis on the individuality of members of the musical duo. Example 1 could come across as slightly accusatory, and yield defensiveness within Partner 2. Example 2 could be self-centered because it is overly self-deprecatory, assuming complete responsibility for the musical issue. Example 3 incorporates the first person plural, “we;” it is indicative of collaborative language because it does not place blame on either partner, and merely points out a musical problem that needs to be solved.

Another situation where collaborative language can be employed is when a duo is not playing together, and it is unclear why. A musician can point out the issue a number of ways. For example, instead of pointing out who is rushing and who is dragging, pianists can utilize the first person plural by saying something like, “We are not together.” Or they could say, “We are not agreeing on the tempo.” The latter two first person plural examples

avoid negative language that incorporates the charged blinking words, “rushing,” or “dragging.”

While it is impossible to predict the effect of different pronoun usage on every duo partnership, a pianist can at least be aware of the power of language to maturely communicate the complexity of collaborative musical issues and the fact that many musical issues must be addressed with shared responsibility.

Labeling

In a tense rehearsal situation it can be especially helpful for one to speak with “labels.”⁶⁵ Labels validate another person’s experience by verbalizing it in a neutral and non-accusatory manner; they help to relieve interpersonal tension by bringing the situation to light. An example of a label is: “It seems like you are running out of breath here.” Labels should begin with an impersonal third person pronoun such as “It seems like” or “It sounds like,” in order to impartially identify the emotion or situation. First person pronouns should be avoided, such as “I think you are” or “It seems to me like,” because they tend to be more inflammatory.⁶⁶ See the examples below to observe how labels can be utilized within a rehearsal context:

Example: Partner A is rushing.

Partner B says to Partner A, “It seems like you’re ahead here. What do you think we can

⁶⁵ Kurt Voss, *Never Split the Difference*, 54-57

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

do to hold the tempo back?”

Partner B’s use of the label, “It seems like you’re ahead here” can make it easier for Partner A to hear this news. Notice how the interpersonal effect of this sentence is very different from a sentence with the wording, “You are rushing here. What can you do to hold the tempo back?” Also note how in the example, Partner B avoided the musical blinking word “rushing,” utilizing the more impartial word, “ahead.” Furthermore, she opted for the more inclusive first person plural pronoun, “we.” This example begins to demonstrate the infinite number of ways a musician can address a common collaborative issue. While the interpersonal effect of different wording and sentence structure will vary among collaborations, it is helpful for a musician to understand probable interpersonal implications of different word usage.

Mirroring

Mirroring was briefly mentioned in “Chapter 4: Seating and Room Arrangement” in terms of how the “cooperative” seating arrangement allows for greater physical mirroring between two partners. Chapter 6 discusses mirroring within the context of collaborative language. “Mirroring, also called isopraxism, is essentially imitation. It’s another neurobehavior humans ... display in which we copy each other to comfort each other.”⁶⁷ It is largely unconscious, and can range from posture and body movement (as discussed in

⁶⁷ Kurt Voss, *Never Split the Difference*, 35.

Chapter 4), to tone and speed of speech; it shows that people are aligned and flowing together.⁶⁸ When people start to pay attention to mirroring they can observe it within all sorts of teams: couples walking hand in hand, friends leaning in to a conversation. Studies have shown that mirroring is even more successful in creating connections than positive reinforcement.⁶⁹ A pianist can consider how it can be expressed verbally within duo rehearsal.

In order to do this, let us consider a verbal mirroring tool Voss refers to as a “mirror.”⁷⁰ To create a verbal mirror, Person A simply repeats the last three words Person B says in his next sentence. For example, if Person A says angrily, “I went to the restaurant, waited thirty minutes, and she never came!” Person B could say, “Yes, she never came because her car broke down and her phone died.” Although very simple, this technique is effective because it makes partners feel heard and will invite them to expand upon their previous points.⁷¹ See examples below of how verbal mirrors can be used in a rehearsal:

Example 1: (In response to the pianist getting ahead because she is not listening to his violinist partner’s string crossings)

Violinist: “Oh wow, you’re really stomping on my toes there!”

Pianist: “Oh, I am stomping on your toes! Mind if we do this passage a few times slowly

⁶⁸ This is the ideal world musicians call “together.”

⁶⁹ Ibid., 36.

⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁷¹ Ibid. 35-36.

so I can better listen to your string crossings?”

Instead of getting angry or feeling offended, the violinist is likely to oblige, and it is more probable he will help the collaborative pianist work out this difficult passage.

Example 2: A singer communicates that she is running out of breath.

Singer: “I’m running out of breath. Then when it comes time to start the next phrase I can’t get off to a good start.”

Pianist: “Yeah, let’s see what we can do to get you off to a good start. Maybe we can try frontloading the first part of the previous phrase so that it will musically make sense to take more time for the breath?”

Also notice how in this example, the pianist cleverly turned the negative sentence, “I can’t get off to a good start” into a positive “let’s see what we can do to get you off to a good start,” a good way to keep morale and team spirit positive.

CHAPTER 7

THE COLLABORATIVE PIANO AUDITION

Now that a number of different interpersonal areas have been discussed, the next area to consider is whether interpersonal skills of rehearsal are purely innate or whether they can be acquired. I think that each individual presents a certain natural ability, but that every single person, regardless of his innate level of interpersonal intelligence, can always improve these skills and tailor them to specific situations. However, I do not think that this is the most important area to consider. Rather, the most important questions for potential collaborative pianists to ask themselves are, “Am I innately fascinated and enlivened by the process of working intensely with others within a musical context? How much do I value quality interpersonal processes versus a pristine musical product?” Pianists who are intrigued by the collaborative aspect of a musical partnership will be motivated to improve their interpersonal skills, regardless of what level they begin. This is because they will pay attention. Pianists who value teamwork will figure out how to be musical team players even if they do not already know how to do this. Ultimately, the most important aspect to consider is pianists’ motivation to learn these skills.

Social motivation can prove to be an important consideration when screening applicants for collaborative piano degree programs.⁷² Although there is no clear-cut way to test for this, a pianist's social motivation should be carefully considered during the audition process. There are several ways that this could be done, none of which are foolproof, but all of which should be considered:

1. Recommendations

Recommenders can be asked to respond to behavioral prompts such as:

- a. Please write about this applicant's ability to work as a team player. (musical or non-musical)
- b. Please write about this applicant's ability to actively listen and empathize.
- c. Please write about this applicant's ability to problem solve with others.
- d. Please write about this applicant's ability to handle interpersonal stress.

2. The Audition

Committee members can carefully observe how applicants treat their partner(s) during the audition itself.

An audition committee might notice the following:

- a. How does the applicant react to his partner's mistake? (Perhaps this could even be planned, to ensure that the audition committee is able to see the applicant react in an inopportune situation.)

⁷² Social motivation refers to an individual's innate drive to interact and succeed socially.

- b. How does the applicant react to his own mistakes? If he is struggling with a passage, is he able to decide which notes are important for his partner to hear or does he try to play all the notes, even at the expense of his partner or the overall musical shape?
- c. How flexibly does the applicant respond and react to his partner's musical decisions?
- d. What is the applicant's general demeanor as he addresses his partner throughout the audition process?
- e. How closely does the applicant pay attention to his partner throughout the audition?
- f. If there is an interview, does this applicant seem to be a good listener?
- g. How respectful does he seem to be to every person present in the audition?

3. Interview

An audition committee can ask an applicant behavioral questions such as:

- a. Can you tell us about your experiences working as a member of a team? (Musical or non-musical)
- b. Can you tell us about a situation when you had to collaborate with another person who had a completely different viewpoint from yourself?

These are just three different lenses an audition committee can use to screen an applicant's interpersonal skills and motivation. Of course, all of these areas will be

affected by nerves and the amount of collaborative musical experiences a pianist has already had. For example, pianists who are extremely nervous in an audition may pay little attention to their partners. However, I think that if all three methods are considered when assessing interpersonal capability, a fairly accurate judgment of an applicant can be made. I do not think that a written self-assessment would be helpful, as people's own perception of how they perform may be very different from reality.

CHAPTER 8

SYLLABUS

With the previously stated assumption that these skills can be taught and improved, below is a hypothetical syllabus for a course on interpersonal aspects of rehearsal for collaborative pianists.

A SYLLABUS FOR INTERPERSONAL ASPECTS OF REHEARSAL FOR COLLABORATIVE PIANISTS

Course Description:

The purpose of this course is to raise awareness about interpersonal skills of rehearsal for collaborative pianists. This course will encourage students to become more aware of their own intra- and interpersonal functioning during rehearsal, and more observant of the intra- and interpersonal functioning of others.

Enrollment Requirements:

This is an undergraduate and graduate level course for piano and collaborative piano majors.

Required Text:

Voss, Kurt and Tahl Raz. *Never Split the Difference: Negotiating as if Your Life Depended on It*. New York: HarperCollins, 2016.

Additional readings will be assigned throughout the semester.

Course Overview:

Students will finish this course with a heightened appreciation for the interpersonal aspects of musical rehearsals. Students will be able to:

1. Define collaboration and explain why musical collaboration is interpersonally unique.
2. Know how to practice empathy in both private practice and rehearsal.
3. Know a number of ways to fix common collaborative problems, and how to approach collaborative issues in a tactful way
4. Better understand the art of active listening.
5. Be more aware of the physical body language in the rehearsal

Course Timeline:

Section 1 (Weeks 1-7): Empathy

Section 2 (Weeks 8-9): Active Listening

Section 3 (Weeks 10-11): Body Language

Section 4 (Weeks 12-13): Collaborative Word

Section 5 (Weeks 14-15): In Class Analysis

Evaluation/Grading:

Attendance: 30 %

Participation: 30%

Repertoire preparation and assignments: 40%

*University Policies

WEEK 1: Introduction

1. Definition of collaboration
2. Why interpersonal aspects of rehearsal are important for collaborative pianists.

WEEK 2: Empathy

1. Definition and types
2. How empathy works in musical collaboration
3. Instrumental empathy
4. How to practice individually and in rehearsal

Week 2 Assignment: The class will be divided into piano duos and assigned short duets. Pianists will prepare their respective parts and predict (and notate in their scores) the ways in which they will need to be instrumentally empathetic to their partners.

WEEK 3: Empathy Continued, Breath, and Introduction to Singing Technique

1. In-class performance of duets, and class analysis of each student's empathetic predictions
2. Discussion of breath and interoceptive states
3. Group activity: cueing with breath
4. Guest presentation: Breathing like a singer; singers' experience working with pianists and common pitfalls
5. Group activity: Learn to breathe like a singer

Week 3 Assignment: Each student will be assigned an art song. Students will notate

within the score information about what type of breath a singer will likely necessitate at every given spot, as well as practice singing the vocal line while playing.

WEEK 4: Introduction to Singing Technique Continued and Active Listening

1. Students will perform art songs, singing while playing. Students will explain how a pianist can best accommodate each breath.
2. Definition of active listening and methods
3. Active listening video/active listening as used in rehearsal video
4. Class discussion of how best to employ active listening in rehearsal
5. In-class discussion: Students will brainstorm how to employ active listening in rehearsal.

Week 4 Assignment: Student will revisit duets from Week 2 to prepare for Week 5's "active listening in rehearsal" workshop.

WEEK 5: Active Listening Continued

1. Piano duos will rehearse in front of the class, employing active listening techniques; class will discuss each group's rehearsal.

Week 5 Active Listening Journal Assignment

WEEK 6: Wind/Brass Presentation

1. Guest wind presentation: Basic techniques; wind players' experiences working with pianists and common pitfalls.
2. Guest brass presentation: Basic techniques; brass players' experiences working with pianists and common pitfalls.

Week 6 Assignment: Students will be assigned a short wind/brass piece to prepare for the next class. Students will explain how to be instrumentally empathetic throughout the piece.

Week 6 Active Listening Journal Assignment

WEEK 7: Wind/ Brass Continued/String Presentation

1. Students will perform wind/brass assignments, and present the instrumental empathy of each piece.
2. Guest string presentation: Basic techniques; string players' experiences working with pianists and common pitfalls.

Week 7 Assignment: Students will be assigned a short string piece to prepare for the next class. Students will explain how to be instrumentally empathetic throughout the piece.

Week 7 Active Listening Journal Assignment

WEEK 8: Strings Continued/Instrumentalist and Vocalist Panel

1. Student will perform string assignments, and present the instrumental empathy of each piece.
2. Students will interview a panel of student vocalists/instrumentalists about their experiences working with pianists.

Week 8 Active Listening Journal Assignment

WEEK 9: Performance

1. Final in-class performance of select vocal/wind/brass/string selection with partner

Week 9 Active Listening Journal Assignment

WEEK 10: Room Arrangement/Body Language

1. Powerpoint: room arrangement implications
2. Powerpoint: stand arrangement implications
3. Powerpoint: room acoustics and lighting implications
4. Body language video
5. Observing body language of other musicians: body language of comfort and distress, as seen through different instruments
6. Class discussion

Week 10 Assignment: Students will video one of their rehearsals and analyze the interpersonal implications of the room arrangement and body language employed.

Week 10 Active Listening Journal Assignment

WEEK 11: Room Arrangement/ Body Language Continued

1. Students will discuss reflections on their rehearsal videos.
2. Students will act out different rehearsal skits involving different emotional implications, and observe how these implications are reflected in body language

Week 11 Active Listening Journal Assignment

WEEK 12: Collaborative Word

1. Different methods of speaking collaboratively
2. Video
3. Discussion

Week 12 Assignment: Students will video one of their rehearsals and analyze the collaborative word employed.

Week 12 Active Listening Performance Assignment

WEEK 13: Free Presentation

1. Each student will choose an interpersonal aspect of rehearsal (not already discussed in class) to present.

Week 13 Active Listening Performance Assignment

WEEK 14: Free Presentation Cont.

WEEK 14 Active Listening Performance Assignment

WEEK 15: Field Rehearsal

1. Teacher will attend a rehearsal for each student, and offer comments about interpersonal aspects of the rehearsal.

CHAPTER 9

CONCLUSION

This paper was inspired by my nearly life-long fascination for the interpersonal aspects of rehearsal and collaborative music making. It has always seemed slightly magical or supernatural to me how musicians play perfectly in sync, and how a duo can spend countless hours working together to achieve this goal. Before writing this paper, I frequented informal thoughts about how to best navigate my side of a rehearsal. I did not realize it at the time, but I was also constantly observing how other musicians ran these processes – especially other collaborative pianists. I noticed that the musicians who considered interpersonal aspects within the context of musical collaboration tended to create a more productive rehearsal and higher-quality musical outcome. I also noticed that instrumentalists and vocalists gravitate towards, and want to work with, these pianists. Although it is clear that all musicians have an equal impact on interpersonal aspects of rehearsal, it was important and useful to me, as a collaborative pianist, to hypothesize how pianists specifically and uniquely contribute to a rehearsal's collaborative vibe.

I began researching interpersonal aspects of collaboration with the intent of finding the answer or answers as to how a collaborative pianist should behave in rehearsal in order to facilitate the best collaborative spirit both interpersonally and musically. I was initially excited to find an abundance of research about collaboration; it seems that now is the age of collaboration, and all sorts of fields are considering how to

collaborate. Why shouldn't collaborative pianists also consider how to collaborate, especially since the word, collaborative, is part of the job title?

Ultimately, this paper provides no clear answer; rather, it serves to ignite even more questions and a much-needed conversation within the collaborative piano field. Hopefully, collaborative pianists who read the information presented will more closely consider, research, and evaluate their own interpersonal rehearsal skills, finding their own ways to navigate the intersection of social and musical spheres. I also view this research as a starting point from which others can continue to more specifically explore interpersonal aspects of rehearsal. While I began my research with the intention of creating a neat and tidy interpersonal toolbox, this project presents me with a fascinating and rich array of other aspects that need to be explored, as well as the desire to actually test specific interpersonal rehearsal techniques. It also makes me wonder whether collaborative piano degree programs should consider addressing interpersonal aspects of rehearsal via a class or curriculum. At the very least, my thought is that educators who understand its importance can consider how the discussion of interpersonal aspects of rehearsal and collaboration can enrich a lesson or duo coaching experience; a duo team that works well together is more likely to realize an instructor's feedback.

While this paper has focused mostly on soft interpersonal skills – empathy, listening, body language, and word usage – much more research can be done on concrete interpersonal subject matter. It would be very helpful for collaborative pianists to discuss time management within the context of an individual music rehearsal, as well as the entire performance preparation process. It would also be fascinating to consider how

musical teams can best manage inevitable rehearsal conflict and performance pressure – not only individually, but as a team. Both soft and hard interpersonal skills could be researched and tested in order to predict what is most effective.

In conclusion, I have found that collaborative pianists are not drawn to our rich and diverse repertoire solely for the sound it produces. We are enticed by the social interaction of its players – perfect synchronism, cues, conversation – and the empathy it takes to achieve these interactions. Players can realize that, from one perspective, the collaborative repertoire serves as a situation and stage to enact and practice a vibrant and complex web of interpersonal finesse. By noticing interpersonal aspects of rehearsal, pianists will enrich their experiences of this repertoire, and realize that this music can serve as a minute microcosm for both partners to experience, and others to observe, two individuals interacting at the very height of fine collaboration and excellent teamwork.

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