Tradition and Creativity Combined: Undergraduate Students' Use of Western Classical Music as a Source of Ideas for Collaborative Improvisation and Composition

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Tradition and Creativity Combined: Undergraduate Students' Use of Western Classical Music as a Source of Ideas for Collaborative Improvisation and Composition

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Abstract

Higher music education students often have limited opportunities to unfold their musical creativities during their Western classical music studies. The interpretation and performance of the works of great masters still largely dominates instrumental music instruction, thus reducing the possibilities for students to nurture their personal artistry as well as to develop creative skills that are important for their pedagogical activity as music teachers. However, students' creative development does not necessarily have to be at odds with the classical tradition, but rather it may find valuable stimuli in it.

Informed by social constructivist and sociocultural perspectives on creativity, this article focuses on the creative process of a group of undergraduate music education students within the module "Artistic Practice" led by the author in the context of the course of studies *Elemental Music Education* at the University of Music and Theatre Munich. The musical activity aimed to enhance students' creativity by using the classical instrumental literature that belongs to their cultural identity as musicians – the one they daily interpret or listen to, but do not usually creatively intervene on – as the starting point for a group creative journey. Students analysed and deconstructed some pieces of their own choice, identified interesting musical ideas – e.g. harmonic structure, musical texture, or rhythmic organisation – rearranged and recombined these elements in new ways, integrated further ideas of their own, and eventually assembled them to construct new music pieces. This collaborative creative process of manipulation and transformation of the material went through recursive phases of exploration, improvisation, evaluation of the outcomes, up to writing the final score of a group composition that was presented live among the artistic performances in the context of the 2022 Conference *Creative Interactions* in Munich.

The article also discusses relevant pedagogical strategies, the role of the teacher as designer and facilitator of creative learning processes as well the challenges and artistic/pedagogical implications of this kind of creative approach to classical music.

The Pedagogical Issue: Western Classical Music and Creativity

I start with some provocative questions: Does Western classical music have 'a problem' with creativity? Is the devotion to the great masters of the past actually an obstacle to creative growth and innovation? In the context of higher music education, to what extent are classical music students supported in the development of their musical ability to improvise and compose? How can we strengthen and broaden their identity as creative classical musicians and music educators?

The Western classical tradition, as represented in academic studies in many conservatoires and higher music education institutions, is mainly focused on the interpretive performance of works by eminent composers. Especially in one-to-one instrumental tuition, the emphasis is on accuracy, technical proficiency and excellence in the reproduction of existing repertoire, in the context of a master-apprentice relationship between teacher and student where teachers serve as role models and students, in essence, have to imitate and emulate them. There is a high pressure to achieve performance goals and standardised

outcomes – ultimately to preserve (or conserve) the tradition. The restrictive nature of this transmission model of teaching and learning has been pointed out by many (e.g. González-Moreno, 2014; Jørgensen, 2000). Though there are many different creativities involved in interpreting and performing given classical repertoire (see Barrett, 2014, for examples), the core of the learning process – the music itself – is left untouched and 'not violated'. At present, it seems important that classical music finds ways to embrace a transformative paradigm of teaching and learning, which can provide more space for students' autonomy, responsibility, exploration, innovation, self-expression, critical thinking, and the development of an individual artistic voice.

This article claims, especially with regard to the education of future classical musicians and music educators, that Western classical music can deliberately be used as a springboard for students' creative development. It can be manipulated, re-structured and re-imagined through a hands-on approach that, on the one hand, fosters students' in-depth understanding of its inner workings and aesthetic value and, on the other, provides them with creative skills that are crucial for their teaching practice. In this perspective, the classical tradition is not at odds with students' creativity, but rather it can offer enriching impulses for it.

Context and Participants

This article reports on a creative collaborative project that I realised with students at the University of Music and Performing Arts in Munich in 2021-22. I see this kind of teaching/learning activity as a possible strategy to cope with the apparent opposition of tradition and creativity in the context of classical music training. The resulting group composition – a chamber music quartet for flute, two violins and piano – was presented at the performance offered within the Conference *Creative Interactions 2022*.[1]

Informed by social constructivist and sociocultural perspectives on creativity (Csikszentmihalyi, 1999; John-Steiner, 2000; Rogoff, 2003; Sawyer, 2003, 2007, 2012; Wiggins, 2014, 2016), the article focuses on the group creative process of four undergraduate music education students within the module 'Artistic Practice' led by the author in the context of the course of studies Elemental Music Education (*Elementare Musikpädagogik* - EMP). The EMP programme is a learning environment in which creativity is an integral and foundational part of the micro-culture of the relatively small group of students (around 20 in total) that attend the four years of the Bachelor. The module Artistic Practice in the third year of study covers basic aspects related to elemental improvisation and composition in music. Students develop a variety of creative problem-solving techniques and methodological approaches that are integrated into progressively more complex designs. To this end, they acquire a critical and reflective attitude and become familiar with fundamental theoretical perspectives on creativity and creative group interaction that orient them in their exploratory, improvisational and compositional practices.

The group of the 5th and 6th semesters in 2021-22 consisted of four students – Katharina, Johanna, Selina, and Sonja. They had gathered experiences during the previous two (Corona) years in composing elemental music pieces based on harmonic patterns. In this third year, the task for them was to select some classical music pieces that could offer interesting

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[1] The title of the piece is 'Unity in Diversity – A self-designed and self-composed piece with variations inspired by music of Rachmaninoff as well as other composers'. The video-recording of the performance is available at https://youtu.be/wekadiXoi1E?t=3296 or, alternatively, https://vimeo.com/814355029/5163b9ccc9

characteristics – e.g. melodic/rhythmic/harmonic elements, form, style, or overall expressive intentions – as a starting point to structure new pieces. In my experience, this kind of procedure generates interesting hybridizations of different styles and genres and represents a fruitful approach to individual and group improvisation/composition. In the first two months of the academic year, for example, the students chose to use a piece of Max Reger, a piece of Dmitri Shostakovich, and the chord sequence of La Folia. Then we started working on a chord sequence derived from a piece of Rachmaninoff, which we took as the basis for the composition of a set of variations written in the style of different composers. This latter process – which in the following I refer to as our 'project' – extended over six months. What follows is the examination of the group experiences in conceiving, giving form and ultimately performing the piece that emerged out of this activity.

Methodology

The collaborative creative learning process was co-constructed in all its phases with the students themselves. My task as practitioner-researcher was to document the evolution of the ideas and save the recordings and the various notes that were produced in the sessions in an online folder. As a participant observer, I had the role of an 'external eye and ear', asking questions, stimulating students' reflections, and offering my feedback for possible further viewpoints (Fautley, 2014). In the following, I integrate my own observations and thoughts with the students' perspectives which I gathered both during the sessions and through a written reflective open-ended questionnaire towards the end of the project (all the quotations in this article are taken from these questionnaires). I coded the data looking for patterns of meaning, key concepts and themes (Braun & Clarke, 2006). This analysis provided the structure of the discussion below. I must add that, being the practitioner-researcher within a qualitative approach, I am well aware of the danger of bias in the interpretation of the data (Hammersley, 1993; Lytle & Cochran-Smith, 1992). As a measure to improve the credibility and interpretive validity of the work, I asked the students to give me feedback on the article prior to publication to check for narrative accuracy and resonance with their own experience.

In Harris' (2016) perspective, this project is an example of research-led practice and practice-based research, as (a) the teaching/learning processes were informed by my knowledge and experience as a teacher-researcher (Sangiorgio, 2016) and students were actively involved in a self-reflexive process as co-researchers, and (b) the activities had a strong character of experimentation and critical enquiry which eventually contributed to formulating the present framework for creative practice in classical music education.

The Creative Process
The overall creative strategy
The basic idea of the project was to deconstruct classical music pieces, analyse and extract interesting ideas out of them, and adjust, transform, combine and reassemble the ideas to construct new pieces. These "mechanisms of inventive ideation" (Ross, 2006) can be implemented in music both as an improvisational and a compositional strategy. In our project, we began with a lot of group improvisation, gradually moved on to composition and, eventually, to interpretation and performance.

A similar creative approach to classical music was taken by Palmer (2016) with undergraduate students, in which fragmentary motifs and compositional strategies derived

from selected Bartok's piano pieces were used as building blocks to generate larger-scale musical structures. Approaches of this kind can be found in much pedagogical practice literature for the secondary school as well as the instrumental tuition (e.g. Fautley, 2013; Konrad, 1991; Paynter & Aston, 1970).

In the context of this article, I adopt the definition that Odena (2014) gives in relation to creative work in music education: creativity is "the development of an output that is novel for the individual(s) and useful for their situated musical practice" (p. 129), so I am not talking about outstanding products that revolutionise the field, but about successful instances of 'creativity in the classroom' that are meaningful and valuable to the learners involved.

Initial improvisatory phase

Selina synthetically describes what we actually did: "We first improvised on a chord sequence for some time (both with the voice and with instruments), and then composed variations to it". In Katharina's words:

> The task at the beginning of the semester was first of all to look for ideas in mainly classical pieces. That is the style we come from, the music we can take as an inspiration for our own piece or that we could work with creatively as a group. We could start with a rhythmic pattern, a sequence of tones, an accompaniment pattern, the structure of a piece, the organisation of different voices within the piece, or even a harmonic chord structure, as in the piece we have now developed for the conference. (Katharina)

Katharina's idea was to improvise and compose variations on a harmony scheme that she took from Rachmaninoff's *Étude Tableau* Op.33 No.8 in G minor for piano. The chord sequence, over which the piece was created, is not exactly the one in the original piece, because she simplified it so that it was suitable for the improvisation/composition of a set of variations (see Figure 1).

A-Part	Gm		Gm		Cm6 D7	Gm	(2x)
B-Part	Gm	Eb	Gm	Cm6	Ab D7	Gm	(2x)

Figure 1. The chord sequence of the piece

The chord sequence (very much like in jazz) worked as an "enabling constraint" (Davis & Sumara, 2006), an open and yet sufficiently structured space that allowed for the emergence of musical ideas.

> There was no given melody that was varied, but only a harmony scheme. The group then improvised on it. There were several attempts with different specifications (loud, soft, fast, slow, different time signatures, articulations, characters, or imagery). We also alternated who played the melody, who accompanied, and who contributed rhythmic elements. During this improvisation phase, many ideas for melodic motifs, accompaniment patterns and ornaments already emerged, which later also helped in the composition process. (Johanna)

This initial improvisatory phase of the work extended over six sessions (December and January). A typical learning process in a session began by chanting rhythm patterns in

different meters and singing the tonal patterns relative to the chord sequence, so as to audiate the relevant metrical structures and the changes in the harmony (Gordon, 2012). After this warm-up with the voice, we would try out ideas on the instruments, notate melodic fragments as a prompt for the impro, and then record the music. In each session, we recorded 2-3 improvisations, which were then uploaded onto the shared online folder, so that they could be analysed. This exploratory process was highly participatory – ideas were negotiated, tried out, discussed, and refined. Both students and teacher were engaged in reflecting on and offering mutual feedback about the group interaction in the process as well as the resulting product. No perfection was required at this stage, rather the focus was on experimentation and risk-taking in a safe environment. The group comments and reflections were centred on students' intentionality, the emerging ideas had to be tested against their personal aesthetic criteria (not necessarily mine). The assessment of the activity was inherently dialogic and aimed at reinforcing students' ownership and agency (Fautley, 2014).

The compositional phase

Then, suddenly, the group proceeded towards a new phase in the work: Katharina started the composition process and wrote in a very short time a number of variations in the style of different epochs:

> In the composition, I was inspired by ideas from pieces of different styles that I know, and tried almost stereotypically to cover a certain style in the variation. I looked at known pieces, for example a Handel Sonata for flute or Nocturnes by Chopin. I tried to see how these composers wrote their music – the accompaniment patterns or the interaction of different voices in the musical texture – and then tried to compose in that style using our chord structure.

Selina tells about her variation:

> A lot of ideas came up during the improvisation phase. Having tried out different parameters like time signatures, rhythms, instruments, I had a better idea of what could sound good. My plan was to write a variation without piano. I listened to some classical works of chamber music and read the notes. I then came across a work by Alexander Borodin whose opening motif I found very beautiful. Since I wanted to write my variation in 3/4 time, I changed the theme slightly and continued it using a different chord progression.

Interestingly, Selina's piano teacher suggested to her to also play the sequence in major. She chose to have only the g-minor chord become major and, in order to enhance the unexpected effect of the major sound, she combined this part with a time change (2/4). I take this as an example of co-construction, in which the students themselves mobilise further resources – other teachers, for example – to enrich their pool of ideas.

Johanna chose to work with Astor Piazzolla's tangos. She describes the collective process of identifying and negotiating feasible solutions for the piece:

> One difficulty was that the variation I first composed […] was not so easy to play because of the rhythmic variability of the individual voices, and it sounded somewhat chaotic and 'not together' to the listener. So, we tried to simplify the music by omitting or doubling individual voices as well as 'thinning out' to

achieve more clarity. Thus, one creative aspect was to find a solution together with the group about how to adapt the developed piece to fit the possibilities of the ensemble.

There were various moments in the project in which the students modified newly presented material in order to achieve a better aesthetic result or to suit particular technical needs of the players. Even though the single variations were composed individually, they had to be discussed, worked out and possibly re-shaped by the group as a whole, so that it is difficult to distinguish to what extent this was individual or group creativity – I see it as a mixed form of both.

Towards the final product: interpretation and rehearsals

In the last phase of the project, the group had to revise and refine the compositions, clarify the interpretation and the character they wanted to give to each variation, and practise/rehearse the whole. At this stage of the process, I had mostly stepped back, allowing the students to take full responsibility for their creation. Sonja expresses her sense of ownership and control on the activity:

> We are ourselves the composers of the piece. Instead of following indications from the score, we could change, simplify or adjust as we wished. Discussing interpretation and ways of making music was a new way of working, because there were no external guidelines for us about it.

This a very different view on interpretation than the one Holmgren (2022) found in his participatory action research on classical piano teaching in higher education. There, the students claimed to be "taught to reproduce supposedly correct and authoritative interpretations and historical traditions", and "musical interpretation is treated as something that is more about achieving a predefined and fixed product than an open-ended process" (pp. 577-578). The students in Holmgren's study argued that they should be empowered to develop their independent, personal, and authentic artistic voice and be given the freedom and the authority to carry out their own decisions. Interpretation should be a collaborative and dialogical process – and this is exactly how the students in the present project perceived it. By working creatively with their own material, they needed to actively address fundamental questions about a coherent interpretation of the different phrasings and playing techniques in the individual variations, which required further (creative) decision-making.

Getting to a shared understanding of how the pieces should be interpreted and rehearsing the negotiated solutions was, in Katharina's view, a challenging task for the group:

> The goal that we all have the same aural idea of the piece in our heads when realising the variations actually turned out to be difficult. At the beginning, I had the feeling that everyone was playing their own part, regardless of how it sounded, and we weren't together at all, breathing together, phrasing together, etc. And that was difficult for me at first, because I had in my head an exact aural idea of many variations, since I composed them, and I wanted to convey this to the others, so that it would sound good in the end. I think that, eventually, the recordings helped a lot here. I also think it was difficult because we don't have any chamber music experience in EMP, as this was a new field for some of us.

Working as a group to reach a good interpretation required discipline, determination, time management, and above all independent and critical thinking:

> I think that we are now developing a common idea and interpretation of the piece, so we are also trying out different things (dynamics, volume, tempi, etc.) and deciding together, including the order of the pieces and which pieces we should discard. Also, in the rehearsing process at the end, I tried not to mince words and rather clearly say what I think is good or bad, how I imagine it musically, and what I think still needs to be practised. (Katharina)

What is striking here is the power of musical imagination: while giving form to their musical thoughts, students engage in processes of conceptual and musical understanding that enhance their aesthetic sensitivity. In many cases, they knew exactly what they wanted and what was important to them. There was, however, a missing aspect: a more competent supervision and clearer advice about a stylistically appropriate interpretation of their compositions. The students felt that "maybe it would have been good to work with a chamber music professor", too. While not taking this as a critique – rather just as a factual statement – I must admit that in this final interpretation phase of the process I reached my own personal limits. I simply do not have the necessary knowledge of the classical literature to help them more than I did, and I did foresee that at some point the issue of the teacher's domain-relevant skills would come up. However, particularly significant in this kind of creative processes is that students might go well beyond the teacher's horizon, as they discover and invent their own musical worlds – a good challenge for everybody (and a call for interdisciplinary collaboration between teachers around students' creative projects).

A note on the interplay between intrinsic and extrinsic motivation in the overall creative process of the project: the official, livestreamed concert and the (mostly positively) perceived pressure of the social validation (Amabile, 1996) played an essential role in motivating students to work hard, rehearse and deepen all aspects of the performance, up to finalising a really rewarding artistic product.

The performed piece: a musical pastiche

The piece presented in the conference concert offered a set of fully composed variations. I contributed a last variation that included some improvisation. I am not going into a detailed analysis of the piece, as this would go beyond the scope of this article.

Retrospectively (while reading Sorrell, 2016), I learned that what we did can be called a *pastiche*. The term *pastiche* comes from the French cognate of the Italian word *pasticcio*, meaning a pie-filling mixed from various ingredients. A *pastiche* is a compositional technique in various arts – such as literature, visual art, or music – that imitates the style of other artists or genres. It is a form of eclecticism and intertextuality that honours great artists of the past and employs principles and procedures borrowed from existing models to reorganise them in new and original work. A *pastiche* operates like a respectful appropriation of inspiring ideas and it can be an effective way for novice artists to build skills and learn what makes each genre characteristic, providing a basic groundwork for creative activity.

Of course, there is a danger: incorporating the salient stylistic elements of other artists' works might result in oversimplified, commonplace and cliché outcomes of little aesthetic value, especially if there is a limited knowledge base guiding the neophyte (which might have been the case in the present project). Admittedly, attempting as an undergraduate

student to write music like Handel or Chopin implies confronting one's own *mini-c* or *little-c* creativity with the *Big-C* creativity of the great masters (Craft, 2001; Kaufman & Beghetto, 2009). However, it is the endeavour itself and the critical engagement in such a process that constitutes, in my view, the real value of this kind of learning experience: not the actual (even though in this case absolutely appreciable) product, but rather the process of identifying and analysing inspirational examples, restructuring the ingredients in a new composite form, and above all infusing one's own personal meaning and musical taste into it. As Selina wrote: "As a compositional strategy, I've learned that it's okay to take inspiration from other composers, as long as you make your own piece out of it".

Findings

Impact on learning strategies

In the reflective questionnaire, I asked the students if this work changed anything in the way they play or practise music. In relation to the kind of task chosen for this composition, all students referred to their increased ability in improvising on a sequence of chords and being in contact with each other.

> Especially with this piece, I realise that I have internalised the harmonies so much that now I can play the right notes without thinking. It is a good feeling to have this certainty. […] At the beginning, it was not so easy to play something myself and still listen to the others so well that I could respond to them at any time. Now I can open my ears more to the others and still play my own ideas. (Selina)

Importantly, they discovered a different approach to classical literature. By deconstructing and reconstructing the music, they could understand it more in depth and widen their thinking:

> By studying the individual styles, I was able to look more closely at how individual styles are achieved: How does the bass run, how can leaps in the melody be handled, how does the composer achieve an atmosphere? (Sonja)
> Definitely, the way I look at and analyse pieces has changed. Now I pay much more attention to what structures, harmonies and ideas were used by the composer, and I try to see how he 'thought'. In general, I no longer see just a piece or notes, but a lot of ideas and how they were used, combined and developed in the piece. And this new perspective helps me a lot in learning, understanding and interpreting other pieces. (Katharina)
> The gain of this work is to broaden one's horizon (especially if one otherwise only plays classical music according to notes with relatively little freedom) and to leave one's own comfort zone. […] The composition process sensitises one to the 'compositional decisions' of other composers when interpreting their pieces. (Johanna)

Key elements for the success of the project were, in my view, the collaborative nature and the extended timescale of the activity, the supportive environment, and the students' enhanced agency both with regard to the process and the final product.

Fostering creative group work

For the kind of work described here, teamwork, cooperation, trust, interdependence, as well as constructive criticism and productive conflict, are of paramount importance. Field (2016) criticises the persistent conception of the classical composer as the 'lone genius' and sets out a stronger case for creative teamwork around improvisation and composition in classical music education. The students' reflections confirm this idea:

> You gain group cohesion. After spending a lot of time together through rehearsals where there are also disagreements, you get to know each other better as a group. It's also a really nice feeling to experience the whole process as a group, from improvisation to composition to rehearsals to the final product that is put on stage. You don't usually have this process, because in the classical field there are actually always already composed notes that are then played together. (Selina)
> It's a great feeling to stand there with the piece now as a final product, so I'm very proud of us as a group for creating something like this. It's a great experience. (Katharina)

Selina underlines the importance of trusting the creative process and the mutual scaffolding in the group:

> I would recommend to other students that they should get involved in the process and also trust that it will work. There will always be moments when you are overwhelmed and you don't know if you are doing the right thing. But with the help of other students and the teacher, the final product will come. And the nice thing about it is that you've been involved in every step of the way, so you can fully identify with the product.

Through the collaborative creative process, not just a new object is created, but also the identities of the individual group members and the identity of the group as a whole are transformed. The intersubjective co-construction of meaning, the shared understanding about the activity, the different ways of flexibly complementing and integrating each other's contributions, and the cognitive and emotional scaffolding within the group do have an impact on the developing selves of the participants (Moran & John-Steiner, 2004).

This project is a felicitous example of a "pedagogy of collaborative creative learning" (Barrett, Creech, & Zhukov, 2021) applied to Western classical music in education. It strongly resonates with sociocultural and Vygotskian assumptions about learning, i.e. that knowledge is jointly created through social interaction within communities of practice (Wenger-Trayner, 2015) and in the context of authentic purposes (Wiggins, 2016).

The challenge of improvisation and the relationship improvisation/composition

In the questionnaire, students reflected on the differences between improvisation and composition as two different ways of being creative in music, and how they perceived their relative importance in the project. Both Selina and Johanna claimed that, though the approach via improvisation was very good, in retrospect it should have switched to composition a bit earlier to have more time to rehearse the finished piece. Katharina offers a nuanced perspective:

> In the beginning we improvised a lot, which was necessary and good because many ideas came up that way, whereas in the end we practiced more what we

had composed. However, through the improvisation variation [Andrea's last one] the improvisational component is still represented. So, I would say that the relationship between composition/improvisation is 65:35, because the composition process was also very much influenced by the improvisation process.

Despite my insistence to improvise live in the concert, the students eventually opted for writing down their pieces and then interpreting them – which is what they know as classical musicians, only this time they were the composers, too. As the facilitator of this unfolding creative process, I understood that I/we had to work starting with their own vocabulary and their culturally situated musical identity. I had to respect them and move within their zone of proximal development, helping them to fulfil their true potential and find the impetus for their musical creativity in the music they knew, understood, and loved. For these students, improvisation can be an advantageous preparatory phase – good for exploring and finding ideas – but they know that attaining improvisational fluency in performance requires a lot of work and it is a different kind of musicianship than theirs. Rather, they are trained in interpreting composed music and tend to stay very close to a notation-centred approach to music. In their view, the real product should be a well-rehearsed and well-performed composition. They are strongly rooted in a cultural conception of music as a closed form, in which the perfection of the sound plays a central role. Unfortunately, this strong ambition to absolute quality can be stifling when it comes to improvising on stage. So, to perform according to what they perceived as the necessary aesthetic standard, they preferred to improvise only very little and 'safe' – as they did, when they improvised on the last variation, with some due didactic reduction strategies (I am glad and grateful that, in the end, they accepted the challenge and that it went well!).

Roles of the teacher
I asked the students how they perceived the contribution of the teacher and what the relevant skills are in this context:

> [the teacher is] an 'external' person who can give tips from the outside. (Selina)
> I always liked that a lot of suggestions were given, including questions and suggestions for improvement, but it was always just support, not 'imposing' ideas or 'correcting' what we had composed. I think that is very good. (Katharina)

In this context, the role of the teacher is not to lead students toward a preconceived solution that comes from the presumed authority – which is the power asymmetry they are mostly used to in instrumental tuition – but rather to be open and responsive to the dynamics of the group:

> In such learning processes, the teacher should have a great deal of expertise in the areas of improvisation and (group) creativity, know the group and its possibilities well (e.g. in which areas can the participants be pushed further, in which rather not?), be open to 'deviations from the plan', and follow the process. (Johanna)

The teacher embodies a creative mindset and is a designer and facilitator of creative activities (Peters, 2014). I would suggest that the teacher is a 'catalyst' for the group creative

activity. He/she guides the group, providing sufficient stimuli and boundaries, yet there must be a convenient amount of freedom available so as to let ideas emerge. It is a matter of striking a balance between teacher's guidance and students' agency that is typical of creative work. On the one hand, the teacher has to define the workflow and lead students as they try out ideas, keeping them engaged through carefully constructed sequences of progressive activities within a session. On the other hand, he/she has to give students gradually more freedom to explore, let their learning be more self-directed, encourage them to critically analyse the outcomes of the group work and voice their own opinions, prompt them to evaluate what has been done and justify their judgements (Field, 2016; Palmer, 2016). Particularly in the work with classical students who have a strong orientation to 'getting things right', my impression is that a primary function of the teacher is to allow students to make mistakes, to be uncertain, to not know, to take risks, to build on perceived failures, and to reflect on what happens. I, too, need to trust the process and the student themselves as well as the self-organising behaviours in the group.

Discussion

Cultivating creativity as an institutional goal

It seems urgent to make systemic attempts to include in the syllabus a range of approaches to musical creativities on the classical instrument – we have to reform and integrate the curriculum. Improvisation and composition must be included as indispensable curricular components for *all* classically trained students.[2] The goal is to educate classical musicians and music educators as "contemporary improvisers-composers-performers" (Myers, 2016, p. 300), who can flexibly shape their action according to different music practices, audiences, and work settings in an increasingly complex world.

> If the music schools and conservatories are to properly prepare performers for changing cultural and economic contexts, they will need to: a) provide a learning experience that produces multi-skilled and adaptable graduates who are self-monitoring and self-directing; and b) develop the abilities and attributes necessary to adapt to different musical environments. (González-Moreno, 2014, p. 96)

In a wider perspective, we need to change the 'learning culture', that is the cultural practices through which students learn in higher music education institutions (Perkins, 2014), and realise a paradigm shift from transactional to transformational learning (Stefani, 2017), going beyond the mere transmission of established knowledge and designing new pathways for creative growth.

There is a huge potential in developing contexts for collaborative creative learning within higher music education. However, there are also pressing issues to be solved at the institutional level, such as:

- how to 'educate the educators', i.e. how to develop pre-service and in-service professional development measures that promote creative learning, creative teaching, and teaching for creativity (AEC, 2010; Hickey & Schmidt, 2019);

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[2] These observations concern many higher music education curricula in Germany or Italy – the situations I know best – but probably those in other countries, as well. A comparative analysis of the place of creativity within European music universities would go beyond the scope of the present article.

- how to cope with the challenges that creative learning practices pose to higher music education institutions, for example in relation to: teachers' identity and previous educational and work experiences that influence their teaching approach (Haddon, 2016; Odena & Welch, 2012); assessment of creativity, especially in the context of exams (Fautley, 2014); and quality assurance criteria that value conformity and accountability over risk-taking and innovation (Stefani, 2017).

We can and should actively deal with these aspects. My wish is that classical music institutions become innovative learning environments in which creativity is structurally embedded and cultivated – centres of excellence for the development of new artistic approaches that are rooted in tradition.

Implications for learning Western classical music
Classical music can be a precious source of ideas for creativity. Students can unlock their knowledge capital in order to manipulate the music, re-imagining it as they deem pleasurable, useful, or meaningful. Thus, they can make classical music even more engaging for themselves and their audiences.

Creative activity in music stimulates the integration of different skills and kinds of knowledge. In the collaborative creative activities described above, students were connecting aural awareness, instrumental technique, music analysis, music theory, spontaneous exploration, listening, playing by ear, improvisation, composition, interpretation, and performance. This is a multi-faceted, comprehensive way of learning and making music (which, by the way, can be implemented beneficially also in earlier stages of children's musical development).

Such a creative approach can feed back into students' usual work of interpreting the classical masters. By deconstructing and re-creating the music, they can understand it more thoroughly. Students are not passive recipients, but full musicians with active intentions who want to develop their own personal artistic voice. In line with Palmer (2016), I see "the creative exploration of published works as one important tool in their arsenal", that can help them become more intelligent and resourceful interpreters of classical music.

Implications for the pedagogical practice
If students experience creativity, they will teach for creativity. The assumption is that there are far-reaching connections between significant educational experiences and subsequent approaches to teaching (Odena & Welch, 2012; Peters, 2014). It is crucial that students make direct experience of their own creative skills during their studies and, concurrently, they become familiar with effective models of teaching for creativity, going beyond reproduction and performance as the only way to 'do music' with learners, while incorporating creativity-based approaches in their pedagogical practice. With regard to employability and professional transitions to the teaching profession, the curriculum should equip students with the relevant abilities to operate a "creative transfer" (Triantafyllaki, 2016) and optimally adapt to different work situations.

Implications for the artistic practice
A suggestion about introducing some creativity in classical music concerts: it could be interesting to see *classical musicians improvise or perform self-composed pieces as an encore*. The practice of impromptu playing in classical instrumental performance was usual

in the 18th century, but markedly declined in the course of the 19th century, due to the growing technical demands on (amateur) musicians, new aesthetic value judgements privileging composition over improvisation, and sociocultural developments such as the availability of printed music on a large scale and a stronger audience orientation in performances (Müller, in press). In a postmodernist, relativist and pluralist perspective, however, it may be worthwhile restoring the practice of improvisation in classical performance. Even though, again, this might not be the *Big-C* creativity of the musical genius, it could nonetheless enliven the audience's experience of the concert and, in addition to that, the musical personality of the player(s) might get to be more visible, for once. If every classical musician did this, we would have many more people actively listening to the beauty of classical music as an art form that is still vibrant and evolving.

Closing Remarks

In conclusion, I argue that we can connect tradition with creativity in meaningful ways. We do have the possibility to engage classical music students in processes of critical understanding and imaginative reconstruction of an inspiring, incredibly rich and colourful repertoire that, directly or indirectly, continues to have a deep impact on our musical worlds. Academia can play a decisive role in this endeavour. Creative learning, indeed, is "a necessity – not an option – to improve the level of higher music education and teachers' status as creative professionals" (Burnard, 2016).

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