

BEFORE THE SOUND

Memory and the creative process

GUEST SPEAKERS

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Orpheus Doctoral Conference 2023

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docARTES students started in 2021

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BEFORE THE SOUND

Memory and the creative process

20-21 April 2023

Orpheus Institute (Ghent, Belgium)

Collecting and recollecting, ordering and disordering, suppressing and uncovering memories are essential strategies for musicians and other creative practitioners. Memory is both a tool towards the final creation and a result of it. Its role in the creative process is a crucial element of current explorations of memory artistically, academically and educationally.

Focusing on the relationship between memory and the creative process, this conference will explore discussions of different aspects of memory. These include but are not limited to muscle, experiential, informational, artificial, collective and cultural memory.

Orpheus Doctoral Conference 2023

BEFORE THE SOUND: memory and the creative process

DAY 1 | Thursday April 20, 2023

09:00 - 09:30

Registration

09:30 - 10:00

Welcome address

- Luk Vaes (Orpheus Instituut)
- Vera Plosila (docARTES)

10:00 - 11:00

Session 1a Cultural Memory

(chair: Maya Fridman)

- Majid Sarnayzadeh: *Collective Sound and Gesture Memory*
- Stephan Meidell: *Sound-Currents*

11:00 - 11:30

Break

11:30 - 12:30

Session 1b Memory in Performance

(chair: Vera Plosila)

- Aaron M. Frison: *To What Do We Owe This Pleasure?*
- Arja Kastinen: *Past in Present - Subconscious as the Producer of Musical Improvisation*

12:30 - 14:00

Lunch

14:00 - 15:00

KEYNOTE 1 Karl Kügle: *Shifting Ontologies of Sound and Sight: The Act of Reading as Envoicement, Transduction, Resonance, and Re-Materializing Memory in Pre-modern Europe and Today*
(chair: Chiara Percivati)

15:00 - 15:30

Break

15:30 - 16:30

Session 2 Memory in the Now

(chair: Francesca Ajossa)

- Awra Tewelde-Berhan: *Collective Authorship as the Remains of Altered States*
- Juan Sebastian Delgado: *The Tango Trilogy - Learning from playing: improvisational practices in tango music*

18:30

Dinner

DAY 2 | Friday April 21, 2023

09:30 - 10:00

Registration

10:00 - 11:00

Session 3a Memory in Performance

(chair: Francesca Ajossa)

- Agustín Castilla-Ávila: *Before the Silence: Memorizing for the Inner Voice*
- Rolf Hughes: *Unspeakable Dialogues*

11:00 - 11:30

Break

11:30 - 12:30

Session 3b Cultural Memory

(chair: Stijn Saveniers)

- Stephen Kendall: *The Sound After the Sound: Echoes in the Tower*
- Nicholas Cornia: *Flemish Archive for Annotated Music - a Presentation*

12:30 - 14:00

Lunch

14:00 - 15:00

KEYNOTE 2 Catherine Motuz: *Memory and Musical Expression in the 21st century*

(chair: Harry Buckoke)

15:00 - 16:00

Session 4 WORKSHOP Isaac Alonso de Molina: *Memory and Imagination in Early Music Education*

(chair: Vera Plosila)

16:00 - 16:30

Session 5 CLOSING REMARKS

Keynotes

Karl Kügle

Utrecht University and University of Oxford

Shifting Ontologies of Sound and Sight: The Act of Reading as Envoicement, Transduction, Resonance, and Re-Materializing Memory in Pre-modern Europe and Today

A vital shift in the approach to reading occurred during the early modern period in Europe: Silent reading, although by no means unknown throughout Antiquity and the medieval period, became the cultural default. Until then, reading was understood as an envoiced performance, acoustically re-generating both the content and the sounds of who and what was committed to writing, and performed in the midst and for the benefit of a physical community. The adoption of silent reading as a cultural norm, in contrast, turned reading into a primarily visual activity that is typically done alone and focuses on content, eliding social, sonic and performative elements in favour of a private interaction with one's 'inner voice'.

It is evident that such a cultural change is much more than a nuance or a technicality. If reading and writing are understood as two interlinked stages of a transductive technology that allows us to de-materialize, then re-materialize sounds, as well as the cultural meanings and memories attached to these sounds, then the ontologies of both writing and reading are profoundly affected by a shift from sound to sight as the preferred medium of reception.

My paper will explore the implications of this observation for the relationship between hearing, seeing, speaking and musicking in pre-modern Europe and today. I am concerned with the *outbound* end of a process already examined by a rich body of scholarship on orality and memory which, however, focuses mostly on the *inbound* dynamics of *en*-coding sound, i.e., on the creative processes involved in the act of writing/notating/copying. Instead, I am interested in examining the moments of *de*-coding and *re*-creation, i.e., of reading/performing. Concerning music-writing and the cultural meaning of notations (and how to read them), the shift from reading aloud to silent reading has significant potential to complicate and re-orient our relationship to pre-modern notations.

BEFORE THE SOUND: memory and the creative process

Catherine Motuz

Schola Cantorum Basiliensis

Memory and Musical Expression in the 21st century

Emotional expression in music is something that nearly all musicians prize—after all, the emotional power of music is usually one of the reasons we signed up in the first place. But what is musical expression? For some, it is something that some people have innately—an idea that first became famous with Plato’s theory of poetic frenzy and which pervades more recent Romantic theories of genius. But to the myriad ancient and humanist rhetorical treatises, and the view most in keeping with an understanding of historically informed performance for music of the Renaissance, expression is something to be learned and improved, highly dependent on memory, and which, to be effective, must be learned orally.

Recent research in the perception and cognition of music posits that expression is based on a shared understanding of what sounds can mean. For humans, it seems that some utterances, like sighs or screams, are innate, while others are learned. Studies of mirror neurons show that humans process these sounds not only through passive listening, but by unconsciously mimicking their production. Just as yawns are contagious, a “sigh” gesture in music, if well executed, can stimulate the brain of the listener to sigh along. Even if the theory that explains this is new, rhetoricians like the humanist Rudolph Agricola (c.1475) nevertheless understood this phenomenon, advising orators to build up vocabularies of words as well as methods to make their words vivid, in-the-moment, and infused with motion in order to trigger emotional responses.

Musicians also need to build a vocabulary of musical gestures in order to be expressive. These can range from compositional, using melodic, harmonic and rhythmic figures that depict or emphasise mental or emotional states, to alterations of timing and dynamics that may feel spontaneous to the performer but that stem from a highly trained intuition. Somewhere in the middle lie learned improvisation skills. Renaissance authors explicitly assigned expressive properties to the basic melodic motions of counterpoint as well as to ornamentation. Happy pieces could benefit from the addition of *passaggi* and quick figures such as *gropi*, but sad pieces should be sung or played only with modest graces, including dynamic shapes such as the *mesa di voce* or *exclamatio*, or small adjustments in timing, spending a little longer on the first consonant of a word or the last note of a *passaggio*. Students today learn to recognise these gestures very quickly, but to execute them in an organic manner that gives them an affinity to human utterance involves training their procedural memory, which takes longer.

Fortunately memory and expression are mutually reinforcing: research shows that a gesture that provokes a clear emotional reaction is much easier to memorise than one that is ineffective. Furthermore, what is learned in embodied and active music-making is

more easily learned than what is learned from imitation. The biggest hurdle to learning to be more expressive is faced by students who grew up with Romantic ideas of spontaneous expression. They are often resistant to learning expressive gestures, understanding them as artificial and therefore inauthentic. If we are to teach students to sing and play expressively, then, we need to do three things: first, to show students that expression in music is something that they aren't only born with, but that they can learn, improve, and ultimately make their own, second, to show that tools for expression are to become something they carry in their memory, and finally, to make spaces where they can try out and improve their mastery of expressive gestures.

Workshop

Isaac Alonso de Molina

Royal Conservatoire of The Hague

Memory and Imagination in Early Music Education

The "art of memory" transmitted by the rhetorical treatises of Classical Antiquity is very rich in metaphors, many of them of a spatial nature: the "palace of memory" or the "commonplaces" were anchors for memorization, but also for recombination using visualization techniques (the "eye of the mind"). Strategies for memorization and visualization originally devised for rhetorical purposes configured a model of how the mind works, becoming relevant for many other disciplines throughout the Medieval and Early Modern periods.

In the case of music, up to the standardisation of modern conservatoire methodologies, skills such as ear training, sight reading, and, perhaps most famously, improvisation (be it ex-tempore ornamentation of a given melodic line, improvised counterpoint on plainchant, realization of a partimento, or "free" fantasia) were shaped by analogous ideas and concepts, to the point that even those skills that are arguably closer to modern musical practice such as playing repertoire were heavily filtered through the same principles.

The purpose of this lecture/workshop is to demonstrate and experiment through practical exercises the role played by the principles of the "art of memory" in the context of *musica practica*, that is, the standardized curriculum followed by musicians during the Early Modern Era (roughly 1500-1800), which in the present day has been reconstructed and institutionalized as a fundamental element in the formation of Early Music students of the Royal Conservatoire of The Hague.

Orpheus Doctoral Conference 2023

BEFORE THE SOUND: memory and the creative process

Extended Abstracts

Majid Sarnayzadeh

Kargah Theater of Bandar Abbas

Collective Sound and Gesture Memory as a good material in creative artistic process for a deeper communication between art works and audience

It cannot be denied that, collective or ensemble memory is a most important cultural part of a community. From a social cognitive point of view, the network can play a crucial role in understanding the world environment and human communication. It was a main question for me that "why my people understand some modern artistic works of local arts groups deeper than others, especially in physical theater field?". And the question lead me to the importance of collective or ensemble memory in creative artistic process.

I assumed that designing and producing a performance based on collective memory (in my world, collective gesture memory) in a creative process help us to have a deeper connection with our audience. For instance, I produced a short dance based on the Islamic prayer (Namaz and Vodhu) titled Kariznew that was performed as a private performance in Bandar Abbas; however, in our Islamic culture dance is a reprehensible phenomenon. Our audience found the forms, rhythms and movements as a familiar phenomenon; however, they did not sure about the origin of the forms and movements.

In my opinion, understanding and receiving the world or in other word "sensory perception" is cultural based; and collective sound and gesture memory is a big part of the perception process. Therefore, by considering the elements of the collective sound and gesture memory we can produce and design artistic projects with deeper communication between performers and audience.

The collective sound and gesture memory is not a close package, but it is a flexible framework, for example collective sound memory including animal, trees, environment phenomenon and human sounds, vocal stories, concepts related to sounds, forms, events, people related to sounds, etc. I do not mean that forget the technical standard and produce a local form of art, but I mean that the collective sound and gesture memory is a good recourse for inspiration in a creative process with technical standards.

BEFORE THE SOUND: memory and the creative process

Stephan Meidell

University of Bergen, Grieg Academy of Music

Sound-Currents

In my Artistic Research project «Sound~Currents» I employ improvisation in electro-acoustic music-making – musicking – through a methodology of resonance, vibration and transduction. I explore how resonance, technologically engendered through vibrational transduction, unveils other pathways to co-creation and alternative modes of listening – providing an expansion and diversification of current improvisational music practice.

The conceptual foundation for the research is influenced by contemporary philosophy and sociology, through the writings of Hartmut Rosa, Elizabeth Grosz and Jane Bennet et al.

Resonance in and between instruments, people, spaces and other objects is not fixed, but continually in flux. So are our memories. Can resonances be seen as memories? What resounds in the actants during a performance depends on their experienced past coupled with encounters in the present and expectations of the future. While improvising together, new meanings emerge, and a collective memory is formed as a pool of resonance gradually unfolds.

Mounting transducer speakers and microphones inside musical instruments in ensembles, the sounds from one can vibrate the surfaces, membranes, and strings of the other. This practice opens the possibility of «sounding through» and «playing» the other and establishing a new interwoven sound ~ relational ecology.

A drum can sound through a piano, becoming «drumiano», or a guitar through a harpsichord, becoming «guitarichord.» These new alloys drive the improvising musician to revisit and reassess ingrained knowledge and memories and meet their own – and the other's – augmented instruments anew.

As the electronic tools tease out potentials residing in the acoustic, they become intermingled, co-dependent, and intensified. Preconceptions are shaken by amplifying vibrations to the point where concepts of the «acoustic» and «electric», «musician» and «instrument», «listener» and «performer» become porous and begin to crack, leak, and spill – flowing into the fold and blending, becoming more than the sum of its parts.

Sound~Currents challenges conventional practices within improvised music-making vis-à-vis sense-perception, meaning-making, and potentials residing within acoustic instruments laden with history.

The praxis inspires musical forgetfulness when acoustic instruments cross-pollinate and practically become morphogenetic, continually formed, and dissolved. Then we can leave presumptions at the door and venture into musical experiences filled with curiosity and wonder.

Extended Abstracts

Aaron M. Frison

Temple University, Philadelphia

To What Do We Owe This Pleasure?

Set in urban and rural Black America, three stories interweave to explore the mysterious qualities of memory: the fragmented journey through time and space of a questioning philosopher, whose voice shifts in age gender and perspective; a documentary retelling of a scary urban legend by the once-children who lived it; and a stylised noir recreation of the true story of a man who joined a search party in search of himself. The film intends to explore the mysterious qualities of memory and what that means for the world of a generation who seeks to rediscover itself.

To approach the universal *problem* of memory, one must attempt to unravel what could be factual and what is in fact the works of the imagination, in their own lives. The opening of the film carries a quote from Chester Himes' autobiography *The Quality of Hurt* where he states, "What I think are memories of actual events might in reality be memories of dreams and nightmares."

Memories of all aspects penetrate and spread; memories of fear, of belonging, eras, all culminating into questioning one's true identity.

The core of the film's ideas imagery intends to reveal that one's memories form so much of their identity, it argues that our memories *are* our identity; sometimes collectively, as we see in *The Myth of The Mickey Mouse Man*, where an entire community, for generations, carry a horrible urban legend around, almost placing the worst of humanity on a pedestal, to ultimately terrorize each other, as children are oft to do. Where in the end, none are sure if it is a true story or simply a story. *The Myth of the Mickey Mouse Man* is a documentary exploring the origins and effects of an urban legend in a small Midwestern town.

The narrative/or scripted portion of the film arrives in the story called *Watch*, a hybrid short of the invisible results of a true story, set in documentary form, about a man who joins a search party to look for himself. What is fascinating about this story for the writer/director, is the fact that the lead protagonist and others around him can't recognize his description once he's reported lost. The documentarian, a PhD student, is also fascinated by these events, and decides to follow up to see the results. It's almost as if their memory of him is completely a creation of their minds, and he has no idea who he is. This identity crisis pulls him to recount the events that occurred while missing, and how he must strive to recover from his unknown foreign persona. The film will also show that it is not the meat of the story that those of these communities are so enthralled by, but the stories of a place, and its memories, distorted or imagined, are attached to those who reside inside of it.

BEFORE THE SOUND: memory and the creative process

Arja Kastinen

Sibelius Academy, The University of the Arts Helsinki

Past in Present - Subconscious as the Producer of a Musical Improvisation

During the late 19th and early 20th centuries, an intriguing musical improvisation was recorded within the ancient runosong culture in the remote villages of Border and Olonets Karelia. The illiterate musicians were improvising for hours on their narrow ambitus ancient string instrument called the *kandeleh* (kantele), creating music that was varying constantly "like an endless stream". According to the eyewitnesses, the kantele players sank inside their musical world and paid no attention whatsoever to the people or activity around them. One researcher (Väisänen 1943) named this process *quiet exaltation*, while the musicians themselves said they were *playing their own power*.

At the same time as the music was based on aesthetics, philosophy, and tradition as part of a long memory chain passed on for centuries from generation to generation, it was also an individual creative interpretation of innumerable possible outcomes. It seems that in *quiet exaltation*, the music was more a product of the subconscious rather than a consciously decided combination of elements. This requires automatization of the playing technique and a deep understanding of the meaning of the music inside the community.

Some results of modern brain research support this hypothesis. From improvising jazz and rap musicians, it has been reported that during their free improvisation, the parts of the brain connected with conscious control and deliberate processes are attenuated in contrast to the playing of a memorized song (Limb and Brown 2008; Liu et al. 2012). This *altered state of mind* allows unconscious, unexpected associations to emerge.

In my research, I have explored the original tradition by attempting to reproduce this musical improvisation with museum kantele replicas using the original scales and, most importantly, the old plucking technique. I have come to the conclusion that this playing technique, which does not involve a separate role for each hand, plays a crucial role in keeping the central musical elements in memory. When the playing technique becomes automatic and you don't have to pay attention to your fingers, top-down attentional processes can be forgotten. The music becomes a combination of memorised built-in elements and new insights.

Extended Abstracts

Awra Tewolde-Berhan

Temple University

Collective Authorship as the Remains of Altered States (harbouring a certain softness to order and uniformity)

Memory is not often full or in-kind.

Memory feeds us in small doses and before we can absorb the entirety of its frame, it cuts.

Summer 2008. Fifteen-year-old twin sisters return to Eritrea with their grandmother, mother and family's Sony DCR-SR35. Passing their camera to and from one another Awra and Zara find an eerie time capsule, compelling them to record. Immersed in the limitations and possibilities of low-resolution consumer grade footage, *ARB'ATE AYNI* [Four Eyes] searches for honest audio-visual textures that speak to the political precariousities and technological restrictions granted to a distinct period and place under both unnerving and serene conditions.

What are the material and immaterial implications of mechanizing memory? Are there interchangeable exchanges between technological progressions and oral traditions such as folklore, folktale and popular poetry? How might the usage of technology encircle collective memories into forms that can counter historical footprints of clandestinity and censorship? How is viewership determined through unsettling aesthetic choices such as indistinct audio, long takes, disjointed cuts between moving images and disorderly translations? What are the distinct implications of disguising authorship on the ranges and reckonings of collective statelessness?

The technical conditions of this piece have largely been set by fifteen-year-olds. In part, this audio-visual assortment propels viewers to sit with a shared memory and form their own associations, patterns with the moving images at play. *ARB'ATE AYNI* presents a coded language: translating to deceive, excessive long takes, disjointed cuts, all to distort a fixed memory.

Memory is sedated and undemanding, it extends and finds new meanings, subjectivities, and oppressions in time. Circumstantially, electronic memory births possibilities to create ruptures, small ruptures, within rigid, immutable structures. Playing with memory presents openings that can counter the inaudible tools of surveillance and disappearance.

BEFORE THE SOUND: memory and the creative process

Juan Sebastian Delgado

Université de Montreal and OICRM

The Tango Trilogy - Learning from playing: improvisational practices in tango music

Could improvisation—the process of creative interaction between the playing musician and a musical model—provide vital clues about a musical tradition?

An examination of the history of improvisation reveals that far from being a minor, mystical, and exceptional practice, improvisation forms a basic part of most musical activity (Solis 2014). Improvisational practices have existed in tango music from its origins in the late 19th century in the Rioplatense region that straddles Argentina and Uruguay, where musicians performed from memory, right up to today's electronic tango music. Scholars Gould and Keaton argue that "all improvisation in music performance relies upon the foundations of the particular musical tradition in which the work exists." It is clear that tango's improvisational practices convey crucial information about its evolution and performance style. In this musical discourse, the input of the performer is essential in the process of creation, not only as an interpreter but also an agent of cultural transmission and renewal. Most of the improvisational techniques peculiar to tango, however, have been passed down through oral tradition (collective and individual memory), which means that the only way of understanding and reconstructing them is through listening (research) and through the first-hand experience of performance (creation). It is striking, however, that almost no research has been devoted to tango's improvisational practices. As a professional musician and tango researcher, I am interested in exploring this contradiction and the many research opportunities and intellectual challenges it offers.

I propose to present a 20 minutes lecture-recital, sharing my research findings, discussing in detail the different improvisational practices in tango music as well as the creative process (interpretation), the historical significance (memory), and the musical renewal (evolution). In addition, I will perform Manzi, an original solo cello work by Argentinian composer, Pablo Ortiz who explores elements of memory, tradition, and improvisation from a contemporary perspective

Extended Abstracts

Agustín Castilla-Ávila

International Ekmelic Music Society

Before the Silence: Memorizing for the Inner Voice

In the lecture *Before the silence: memorizing for the inner voice*, I focus on two works related to silence and on memorizing practices I have observed from the musicians. The first work is a "Still Life with Silence" for String Quartet without Strings, in which, since there are no sounds produced by the instruments, movement and gesture became very important elements to communicate in the rehearsing and learning processes.

The second work is the first existing silent opera "The Rest is Silence", solely written with rests but including words and expression signs to communicate to the audience all elements but sound in an opera, writing rests with pitch heights and duration as sounds have been traditionally written. Although I gave no instructions as a composer on how to learn the piece, I have witnessed musicians rehearsing using a piano claiming that it was "to memorize imagined sounds in their heads". In this work, mouth movements were involved and connected to the pitches of the "imagined" sounds. On the other hand, in the "Still Life with Silence" for String Quartet without Strings there are no "voices" involved, so that rhythm and choreographic movements played a main role in the memorizing processes.

In my opinion, silence has today the same value for humans as music traditionally had. In both presented works, I am trying to be consequent with my beliefs about this interchange of values. At the same time, I try to focus the inner voice, which means for me the highest expression of our individuality and a place where artificial intelligence will never enter.

Extended Abstracts

Rolf Hughes

KU Leuven

Unspeakable Dialogues

For the bereaved, it is often difficult to comprehend, let alone accept, that a particular voice, presence, energy, is no longer physically present. Memory can make whispers vividly present. At what point does the ear process a sound as *meaningful* as opposed to *mere noise*? Aside from the cultural and psychological dimensions to this question, it raises what we might call an *ethics of receptivity*. This presentation documents the pursuit of non-human voices in the ether via sound walks 'tuning in' to buildings and billboards, urban infrastructure and magnetic fields, not as a pastiche Konstantin Raudive "Breakthrough" to the voices of the (human) dead, but as an enactment of paying *care and attention* to the unvoiced and unheard in our material surroundings.

The work is conceived as memory work for the voiceless, part of a research project on 'unspeakable' dialogues that facilitate interdisciplinary exchanges to create new (post-anthropocentric, non-Western-centric, non-patriarchal, non-heteronormative) research models, artefacts, and performances. Such 'unspeakable' encounters create a circularity between 'material things' and 'dialogical/discursive processes'. *Unspeakable dialogues*, in this formulation, stage the meeting of concepts considered incommensurate within the conventions of academic research, leading to knowledge forms that are embodied, sensual, tacit, conjured forth from memory and requiring participants collectively to reconfigure their experience to understand what has been considered of value in the exchange. At the institutional level, *Unspeakable Dialogues* references the absence of common understanding between disciplines. This is not simply a lack of (academic) language, but (via artistic, performative and embodied ways of expanding our nodes of understanding) concerns rather an expansion of receptivity (over mere literacy). *Unspeakable Dialogues* accordingly proposes a set of knowledge instruments that help us reconceive research from a post Anthropocene perspective. It prepares us for holding new conversations about a world we once thought we understood, conversations about how we live, communicate and creatively engage our world, and so alter the impact of human development towards a life-promoting culture. Central to this process is the acknowledgement of material, non-human experience and memory as forms of encoded utterances or even narrative.

BEFORE THE SOUND: memory and the creative process

Stephen Kendall

Newcastle University

The Sound After the Sound: Echoes in the Tower

The Morden Tower, part of Newcastle's Town Walls, was the site of an influential poetry reading series from 1964 to c.2010 which contributed to, and helped to showcase, the British Poetry Revival of the 1960s and 1970s, and introduced British audiences to new American voices, such as the Beats and the Black Mountain poets. The Tower was the location for the first public reading of Basil Bunting's late modernist masterpiece 'Briggflatts' and its reading series gave a platform to many poets in the North-East of England.

The first reading at the Tower took place on 16 June 1964 and featured the poet, rock musician and lyricist Pete Brown. This was 'Bloomsday', the date on which Leopold Bloom's peregrinations around Dublin take place in James Joyce's *Ulysses*, a novel which begins in a tower. Readings continued until the early 2010s but the Tower now stands empty and silent. Accounts of readings at the Tower stress the unique atmosphere and sonic properties of its space, yet there are almost no recordings of readings there. Poets writing about the Tower nevertheless engage with its history imaginatively, seeming to insist on the persistence of the ephemeral, the voices raised within its walls – the 'sound after the sound', recorded in the round walls of the tower. For one, the Tower is formed out of the sound of every reading held there. For another, the walls of the Tower are 'marked with 42 rings of poetry', as with tree rings, one for each year, for each full rotation (at the time she is writing). Furthermore, 'the walls are recording'. These are strategies for recovering the sound of the voices in the Tower, for securing its memory, where the work is the result of the process of remembering. In my presentation I will explore the history of the Tower, the work of poets mining its memory, including some examples of my own, which interweaves the history of the Tower with the events of my own life, my own creative development.

Extended Abstracts

Nicholas Cornia

Royal Conservatoire Antwerp

Flemish Archive for Annotated Music - a Presentation

Thanks to the invention of audio recordings, we can revive the performance of iconic musicians of the past such as singers, instrumental soloists and conductors by just pressing play on our electronic devices. Unfortunately, the musicians of the pre-recording era do not enjoy such a privilege: scholars and performers have to rely on indirect sources, such as treatises, reports and historical instruments, to reconstruct their forgotten sound.

Handwritten annotations left on musical scores are a valuable source of information to recollect trends in the performance practice of musicians. Their marks allow us to reenact the rehearsal process and the interaction between performers, such as indications given by a conductor or teacher. Furthermore, annotations give us insights in how musicians interacted with the written medium of the score. The process of annotation can be seen as a form of memory support, providing musicians visual cues for agreements made during the rehearsal process. Also, annotations reveal which sort of information for the performer is missing, or left free for interpretation, in the score engraved by the editor and composer.

The contributor would like to present the state of the Flemish Archive for Annotated Music (FAAM) project, a digital research platform mapping the rich performance practice of musicians of the long 19th century through the hints and traces left by their annotations on the score. This multidisciplinary Digital Humanities project involves the collaboration of musicologists, librarians, musicians and computer scientists from several institutions around the globe. Of particular interest is the way machines memorize and process music notation, the main topic of Optical Music Recognition (OMR), a sub-field of Computer Vision.

The FAAM corpus is mainly formed by scores coming from the Heritage Library of Antwerp Conservatoire, but it is rapidly including records from other fellow institutions, like the Library of Ghent Conservatoire, the Historic American Sheet Music collection at Duke University, institutions embracing the RISM database and the DARIAH project.

A series of concrete case studies, the workflow, state of the art and challenges related to this ambitious project will be presented to the community.

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