

## **‘Sharing the cultural capital’**: a position paper by Juliet Fraser

This short paper hones in some of the questions of agency and authorship I touched on in my presentation yesterday, and raises some questions about how we can share the rewards of a fruitful collaborative partnership.

My title is built upon a sort of misappropriation of Bourdieu’s term. In his essay *The Forms of Capital*<sup>1</sup>, Bourdieu describes three categories of capital: economic, social and cultural. He then defines three types of cultural capital<sup>2</sup>: embodied cultural capital (knowledge both unwittingly inherited and consciously acquired); objectified cultural capital (stuff, material goods that signal status and/or wealth); and institutionalised cultural capital (academic or professional credentials).

If we see the whole process and result of a musical collaboration as a ‘cultural good’, what form does its capital take? What are the dominant models for sharing such capital, currently? What issues or limitations do we perceive within these models? And what alternative models might we imagine?

Generally speaking, we might expect a musical collaboration to have capital in each of Bourdieu’s categories: the resulting project or work has economic capital (it is given a price before it even exists, often, and each airing will usually demand economic resources), social capital (if it has been supported by public funding it will surely have had to demonstrate *impact* for the common good) and cultural capital (most immediately, it contributes to each participant’s artistic development, and thus their social status). It may well also be rich in all three of Bourdieu’s types of cultural capital if it furthers the artists’ embodied knowledge, affords them more stuff and enhances their professional credentials.

In practical terms, for the collaborating parties the capital at stake comes in the form of agency, authorship, remuneration and recognition. When it comes to sharing this capital, however, we may well find that the sort of ‘bleed-through’ accepted in sociological theory is somewhat stymied by inherited hierarchical structures and a persistent lack of imagination. The classical music industry is still bound to the traditional distinctions of composer, librettist, performer, editor etc. and, despite the wilful blurring of these roles, particularly in experimental music since the 1960s, struggles to achieve the sort of flexibility one might find in pop music, jazz or improvised music.

Let’s have a look at the hierarchy, working our way down the pyramid: composer at the top, I would say (‘the genius’ etc.), then conductor, then soloists — singers above instrumentalists, of course — then ensembles (and you’re lucky if you get named as a member), then orchestras and choirs. This is partly practical, of course, but the reflection and indeed perpetuation of this hierarchy in fees

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<sup>1</sup> Bourdieu, P. (1986)

<sup>2</sup> Cultural Capital. *Social Theory re-wired* (Routledge, 2016). Available at: <http://routledgesoc.com/category/profile-tags/cultural-capital> [accessed 18 Feb. 2019].

earned and in *agency afforded* is enormous. To continue to draw on Bourdieu, we find here, too, that capital begets capital: those further up the hierarchy will have greater opportunity to develop economically, socially and culturally than those rank-and-file members of an orchestra or chorus.

I have experienced a fair bit of what one might term 'hierarchical oversight' in the 15 years that I have been working as a professional musician. The first example, which endures still, is being repeatedly overlooked as co-founder of EXAUDI, because, I think, I am a singer (not The Conductor) or because, I'm afraid, I am a woman. I am regularly asked, by people who really should know better and who have definitely read our biography, how long I've been singing with the ensemble or what my involvement is — the only conclusion I can draw is that problematic assumptions are at play. I have found this extremely frustrating, and ultimately it was one of the factors that led to me retiring from my role as Executive Director. I have also experienced the hierarchy of 'composer trumps performer', sometimes even having my name omitted from the concert billing for a work that was celebrated for being collaborative. I have seen performers listed on a CD cover according to the label's perception of their status, and quite counter to the more obvious order that would make clear the structure and instrumentation of the actual works. On the other hand, I now quite often experience the hierarchy of 'singer trumps instrumentalist/ensemble' — I am still figuring out how to challenge this fairly and productively...

The dominant models for sharing the capital are prey to these entrenched hierarchies and to a spirit of rigidity. A sharp distinction tends to be drawn between performer and composer: one shouldn't assume, therefore, that the agency, authorship, remuneration and recognition granted to each is necessarily well thought-through. In collaborative projects, it is the development time where the exchange of ideas and knowledge takes place, where the 'meshed consciousness'<sup>3</sup> develops, and thus where the shared capital is accumulated. The problem is that, traditionally, it is the composer that is paid for this time, not the performer, and it is the composer whose name is attached to the final work. The image that I have of a fruitful collaboration is of two people helping one another clamber up a ladder. A ladder because status is always at play; clambering because it takes a team effort, or combined agency, to challenge the traditional models concerning authorship, remuneration and recognition.

On the subject of agency: I have found that my agency has most increased when I have struck out on my own to do something that seems important to me. It has always been extremely costly in terms of time and money, but very rewarding in other ways. On the subject of authorship: in my own collaborations it has never yet occurred to me that I want to be billed as anything other than the performer — none of my collaborative work has yet strayed as far as co-composition. Only

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<sup>3</sup> Zaba, P. & Deane, L. (2017). Co-Composition: Radical Collaboration. *MEAKULTURA*. Available at: <http://meakultura.pl/kosmopolita/co-composition-radical-collaboration-1846> [accessed 17 Feb. 2019].

in my work with Cassandra Miller is the issue of authorship arising, but so far we have found solutions by discussing it openly and creatively. On the subject of remuneration: in my collaborative work, both parties have been paid equally for the R&D period only when I have done the fundraising for the whole project myself; otherwise (for example when the commission comes through a promoter) my time is rarely remunerated to the same degree as the composer's. On the subject of recognition: as I mentioned earlier, it's something I feel I have to keep an eye on.

One strategy that I have learned to employ is to request a period of exclusive performance rights. This is a practical way for the person who has organised the commission, invested in the development time and prepared the new work to enjoy a good run of first performances before the work passes into other hands. I have written them into commission agreements with four composers in the past five years. And I've had to enforce them twice.

So, what alternative models might we imagine as we try to move towards a more equitable, flexible and generous sharing of the capital?

In *The New York Times* on 8 February this year, Michael Paulson wrote that, 'Broadway is booming, and now more actors are going to share in the riches. In a groundbreaking agreement Friday, the commercial producers who finance Broadway's big hits have agreed to give a percentage of profits to performers who help develop successful shows.'<sup>4</sup> Could classical music learn something from Broadway?!

A new publication entitled *Commonism: A New Aesthetics of the Real*<sup>5</sup> asserts that, 'After half a century of neoliberalism, a new radical, practice-based ideology is making its way from the margins: commonism, with an o in the middle. It is based on the values of sharing, common (intellectual) ownership and new social co-operations. Could there be some food for thought here?

One other positive step we could take towards better sharing the capital could be to celebrate the diversity of agents within the collaborative process. When I was reading an online interview entitled 'Co-Composition: Radical Collaboration' on the Polish website MeaKultura, I came across the observation from composer Paul Zuba, that 'no major, international composition prize has ever been awarded to a duo'<sup>6</sup>. Somewhat shocked, I did some quick research and found that:

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<sup>4</sup> Paulson, M. (2019). Landmark Broadway Deal Gives Actors A Piece of the Profits. *The New York Times*. Available at: <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/02/08/theater/broadway-profit-sharing.html> [accessed 18 Feb. 2019].

<sup>5</sup> Dockx, N. & Gielen, P. eds. (2018). *Commonism: A New Aesthetics of the Real*. Amsterdam: Valiz.

<sup>6</sup> Zaba, P. & Deane, L. (2017). Co-Composition: Radical Collaboration. *MEAKULTURA*. Available at: <http://meakultura.pl/kosmopolita/co-composition-radical-collaboration-1846> [accessed 17 Feb. 2019].

- the Siemens Prize<sup>7</sup>, one of the biggest in classical music, has never been awarded to a collaborative partnership. In fact, the only non-individual to win it is the Arditti Quartet.
- the RPS Awards<sup>8</sup> have never yet gone to a partnership in either composition category, and looking at the description of the 12 pieces that have won over the last six years, the librettist was acknowledged twice and only once was the performer of the new work named. One piece was even introduced thus: 'This hauntingly beautiful and expertly crafted winning work arose from particularly close collaboration with its first performers' (who are not named).
- of the 178 British Composer Awards<sup>9</sup> given out since 2014, only two have gone to collaborative partnerships.

Perhaps it's also worth saying that there is no award within either the RPS or the BCA for performers of new music. In fact, there isn't any award, that I know of, that recognises this contribution.

This isn't to say that I am in any way anti-composer, nor that I feel held back or unfulfilled as a performer — not at all! But, to me, these statistics reflect a general lack of recognition at the *institutional level* of the role that performers play in the creative process. Down on the ground, between us artists, we all know how it works, but the diversity and flexibility of creative partnerships simply isn't reflected in the way our industry celebrates and supports creativity. Frankly, it's probably just a lack of imagination. I am tempted to start something like The New Music Gongs, a fresh take on the classical music awards ceremony and a really good party.

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<sup>7</sup> Ernst von Siemens Music Prize. Available at: <https://www.evs-musikstiftung.ch/en/prize/prize/archive/prize-winner-archive.html> [accessed 18 Feb. 2019].

<sup>8</sup> Royal Philharmonic Society Music Awards. Available at: [https://royalphilharmonicsociety.org.uk/awards/rps\\_music\\_awards/latest-winners/past-winners](https://royalphilharmonicsociety.org.uk/awards/rps_music_awards/latest-winners/past-winners) [accessed 18 Feb. 2019].

<sup>9</sup> British Composer Awards. Available at: <https://britishcomposerawards.com/> [accessed 18 Feb. 2019].