

A Newbie's Guide to Artistic Research and Development Work in Music

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Introduction

This guide is for students in the first two cycles - Bachelor and Master – of higher music education. So, if you are reading it, first of all, congratulations on your success! To reach this point, you will have already spent many years devoting yourself to music, whether as a performer, composer, improviser or a combination of these. You will have learned that music is something that almost everyone loves but which few people really master. As you begin or continue your studies, you will know that, however far you have already come from your first attempts to make music, the path ahead is long and full of uncertainties. But since you have chosen music and have come to a conservatoire, music academy or arts university to learn more, you will also be excited by what lies ahead and eager to progress as far as possible in every way imaginable.

If this description fits you, you may wonder why the title of this guide uses the word 'Newbie'. Surely, you're far beyond beginner status, even though you may be starting a new phase of your musical education. Well, the reason is that you may not yet have been introduced to the concepts of **artistic research** and **artistic development**. It may help you get to know them and understand how they are used because this understanding could be part of your progress to the highest levels of university study. It may also offer unexpected career opportunities after your formal education; artistic research and development work is a young and developing global field, with many exciting possibilities yet to be discovered.

In this guide, you will find information about artistic research and artistic development, how they relate to one another and how they are relevant to musicians studying and working in higher education. We hope that you will find the guide useful and that it will contribute to your making the most of your time in higher music education.

New tools for the long ascent to musical excellence

In reaching your current level as a musician, you will have acquired many tools along the way, some technical and others to do with shaping an artistic process, interpretation or creation. At first, many of these will have been passed on to you by your teacher; they made their knowledge and experience available to you and you made direct use of what was offered to help you move forward. Teaching in the arts is particularly strong in this tradition of the master and apprentice – the handing down of skills from each generation to the next, often by demonstration and example.

But at some point, you probably started to think about how this absorption of skills you are taught relates to your own musical personality and to the unique imperatives that drive you. Perhaps you talked to your teacher about this. Hopefully you have been able to move to a situation where what you are taught goes through some kind of filtering and blending process and emerges in your own music as something that feels 'authentic' to you.

How this transition has happened – whether smoothly and with little need for specific focus or in a more conscious manner – is sure to be reflected in your current approach to your studies, what you want to gain from them and the kind of teaching that you enjoy. But whatever your views, it is appropriate – perhaps even essential – that, as an advanced student, self-awareness and an open but critical attitude to what you encounter in your studies should be part of your 'learning toolkit'. 'Critical' in this case does not mean 'negative' but rather 'curious, questioning and challenging'. This is where the practices, skills and methodologies associated with artistic development and artistic

research come into play. Gaining an understanding of them, and being able to apply them consciously when you wish, could be an important aspect of the learning that you undertake.

Reflection in Artistic Development and Artistic Research

A crucial element both artistic development and artistic research is the practice of **reflection**. As musicians, we all engage to some extent in reflection on our music-making. A lot of this relates to trying to consider how good or bad our previous efforts have been. These decisions themselves alter in character as we develop: at first, getting through a piece with no mistakes or simply finishing a composition we have started may be a mark of success; later, our focus will be on deeper and more subtle aspects of our achievement. To reflect on such matters requires more sophisticated tools and techniques of reflection if its results are to be fed back effectively into our future work.

One of the ways to help the process of reflection become more disciplined and systematic is to break it down into stages. A model for this that has been developed at the Norwegian Academy of Music and tested in the EU RAPP Lab project proposes three overall phases of reflection: exploring, processing and enacting, the last of these capturing the all-important feedback element. The whole model looks like this, with important pre- and post- phases and a series of seven stages that can be thought of as the colours of the optical spectrum – distinct in themselves but, when combined, producing a single, white light that can illuminate all the recesses of our critical reflection:

The Phases of Critical Reflection				
Pre-	Observation			
Exploring			Contemplation	
			Interrogation	
Processing			Deliberation	
			Clarification	
			Confirmation	
Enacting			Modification	
			Re-imagination	
Post-				Communication

All this may seem complicated for something as fluid and almost instinctive as reflection, but that's partly the point: using this model as a checklist ensures that nothing is left out; it focusses the mind at each stage and squeezes the maximum benefit out of the process. You might say that it '*professionalises*' the process of critical reflection. Although this model is intended primarily for those working at Doctoral level, starting to use it in your Bachelor or Masters provides you with another tool when you have a tricky question about your practice, and one that will bring benefits at any level of study. You may even find it useful to write down reflections under each of these headings in a practice journal, or just to take some time to think about the connections between your practice and the many aspects that surround it, and why these matter to you.

The Dynamic Aspect of Critical Reflection

An important feature of the model is its dynamic character; it proposes a process through which things undergo change. Of course, at the end of a process of thought, you may feel that nothing

needs to be changed, but the value of the model is that it challenges that assumption and encourages you to come up with positive justifications for the *status quo*. This is why reflection in an advanced and structured form such as this is seen as key to the concept of **artistic development**.

Every artist wants to continue developing. However, for many artists, development is a kind of by-product of an ongoing focus on their art. By continuing to work on the art, development happens almost of its own accord. Artistic development proposes an approach in which the developmental aspect is addressed more openly and is woven into the creative process. So, it is in and through the new artwork or performance that the results of the re-imaginings are applied and then communicated. Development is no longer just a consequence of artistic focus but a catalyst driving it forward.

When used by Doctoral students and fellows, the critical reflection model assumes that its various stages will largely take place within the thoughts and actions of the fellow him- or herself. At Bachelor and Masters levels, too, it can be a good exercise to think about applying this kind of formalised self-investigation to your artistic work. However, the model can also serve as a template for discussions between you and your teacher: your teacher may challenge you to provide clarifications and they may work collaboratively with you on the entire enactment phase. You can also ask them how they continue to stimulate their own ongoing artistic development. What kind of approaches do they take to reflecting on their practice? Teachers in conservatoires are always involved in their own kinds of artistic development practices as part of their work and of their identities as artists. Interactions of this kind will complement your own independent reflection and provide you with a sounding board for understanding the growing importance of your own reflective processes.

From Artistic Development to Artistic Research

The ideas in the previous section are based upon the belief that thinking about one's art and trying to come to a better understanding of it can actually help in the ongoing mission to improve that art. This is a belief that also informs **artistic research**. The quest for understanding in artistic development is already rigorous and structured but it still begins with observation; it takes its cue from what crops up in the art, reflects upon that which presents itself and attempts to draw conclusions that may lead to new approaches from that reflection. Artistic research takes the additional step of pro-actively seeking out those questions whose answers it believes will lead to better understanding.

This may not seem such a big distinction, but the difference is more significant than might at first appear. Because they are generated pro-actively, the kinds of questions posed by the artistic researcher reach beyond the context of responses to individual artistic experiences and take on a broader, more speculative and strategic character. An artistic research question may or may not address directly specific issues that are confronting the artist-researcher in their art at that particular time. Where it doesn't, it may still prove at a later point to open up a whole new field of artistic exploration for the individual. And, as with other forms of research, it may also turn out to be something upon which other artist-researchers can draw for their creative inspiration. It is this shared dimension which justifies its being characterised as a species of research, albeit a very unusual and particular one.

All this may sound a bit grand for something that we're suggesting might be relevant to you at Bachelor or Masters level, but it is never too early to begin to develop the habit of formulating your thoughts concerning your art and its development into questions that might have a wider significance than your next concert or composition. Doing so is a skill which, like any other, requires

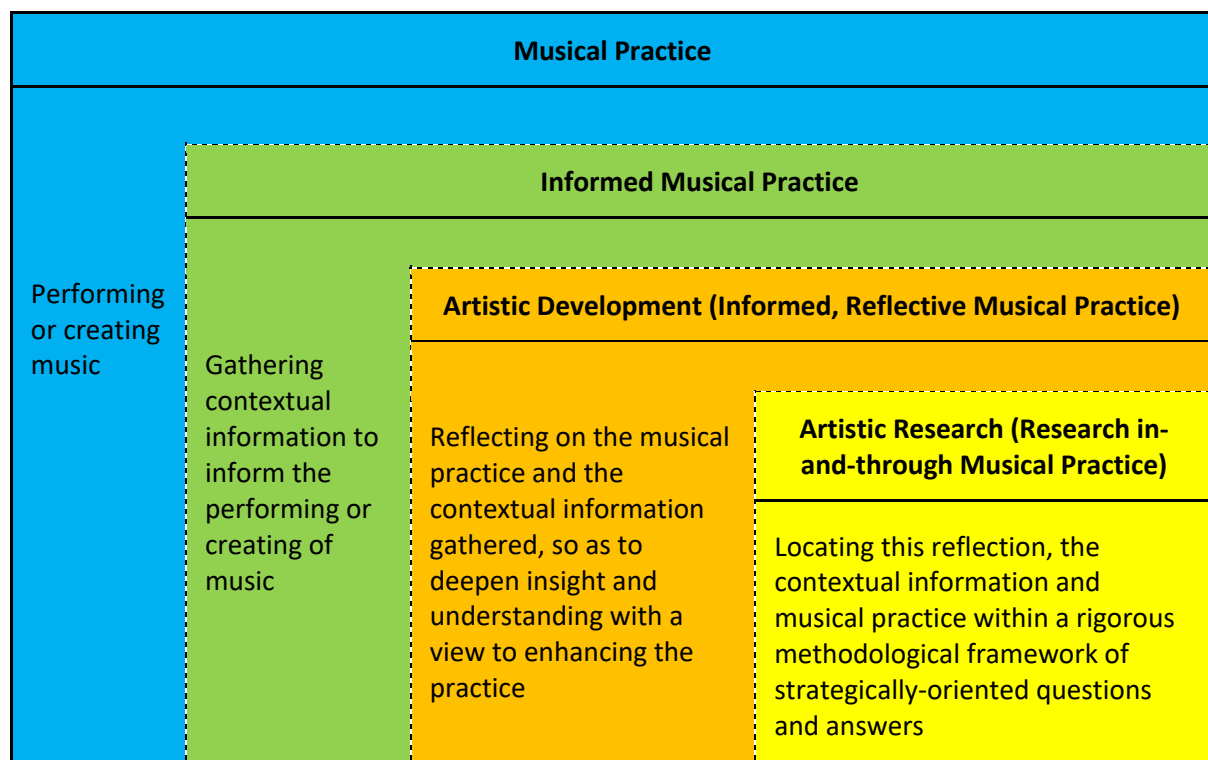
practice. Each of us probably has plenty of issues about art in our consciousness, but being able to communicate them to others is far from easy. By developing the habit of formulating specific questions about the things that interest and, perhaps, perplex you artistically, you will undoubtedly get better at sharpening your thoughts and finding the right words to express them.

Being able to do this will already be helpful in aspects of your Bachelor and Masters studies. And then, if you should decide that you wish to continue to Doctoral level, the challenge that will almost certainly arise of being asked to define the **research question** that you intend to investigate in your Doctoral study will be less daunting and more likely to result in a strong research proposal. But even if Doctoral study is not for you, the capacity to find patterns in your artistic questioning will help you to maintain an open-minded, curious and evolving approach to your music-making throughout your life.

Situating Artistic Development and Artistic Research within the Broad Field of Musical Practice

This guide has been created from the conviction that artistic development and artistic research can be useful and relevant concepts for all students. Despite this, research probably does not always feel central to the lived student experience – your experience. It is easy for artistic practice and research to feel like two separate kinds of activity, demanding different skills and interests. In reality, though, even musicians and artists who might never think of themselves as full-blown researchers are often excited by discoveries they may make in the course of their practice and, as a result, become curious to know more. In this way, their practice becomes more informed, and this may well lead them into deeper reflection on that practice and, ultimately, to what we would recognise as artistic research.

We could show these relationships in the following way:



Artists and musicians may roam freely around this space of artistic practice according to the nature of the project with which they are engaged or they may decide that their particular strengths lie in one specific area.

Where do you think you currently stand within the diagram and where might you ultimately wish to be situated?

Conclusion

We hope that this short guide has given you some feeling for the way artistic development and artistic research are understood and how they are increasingly being engaged with in conservatoires. We also hope that it may have encouraged you to think about how they may be relevant for you, now or in the future. If you have further questions, you should first discuss them with your teachers and then, perhaps, with the person in your institution who has the responsibility for research and/or development. With luck, you will find yourself entering a growing community of teachers and students for whom research is an inseparable part of their approach to music-making.

Good luck with your studies and your journey along the path to self-realisation: in life, in your artistic practice and in your understanding of that practice.