

# The Opener

# Relations

## A Duo-workshops-project

Professor of piano Signe Bakke and Professor of song Hilde Haraldsen Sveen

As educators, we find a dynamic connection between our academic background and research, and our experiences as performers. This intersection creates a space where our teaching decisions can surprise, inspire, and lead to important discussions, such as:

What defines our practice as teachers, and what knowledge and understanding do we bring to the table?

This question is at the heart of our Duo Workshop Project, which focuses on the relationships between:

Performers (voice/piano)

Teachers and performers

Teacher-to-teacher

Performers and content

Teachers and content

A key aspect of this project has been testing a model where song students and piano students work together in the same class, guided by two instructors: a professor of singing and a professor of piano who has collaborated as a duo-both as performing musicians and in their roles as singing professor and professor of piano and accompanist for the vocal students at the Grieg Academy. This project marks the first time we have mentored song/piano duos on regular basis.

### Our Approach to Teaching

Hilde: My pedagogical approach emphasizes collaboration, flexibility, and personal growth in both artistic and technical development. Teaching music-especially as voice and piano instructors requires a blend of personal experience, communication, and methodical structuring.

Signe: My pedagogical approach is to guide and support the students in their personal growth as pianists and artists. In this duo-project I use my experience from my own artistic work as an accompanist. My aim has been to inspire the piano students to find the joy of playing together with singers by inviting them into a duo-class and to guide and discuss the duo's performances together with Hilde and the group.

Our teaching is rooted in our experiences as performers, both solo and in ensembles. These experiences shape the way we teach voice and piano, and we believe they are key strengths in our pedagogical practice.

We foster an active exchange between the student, the music they are learning, and the teacher. This encourages flexibility, clear communication, and independence throughout the learning process.

Our goal is for students to finish their studies not just with knowledge of different teaching methods, but with the ability to develop their own personal approach to both the artistic and technical aspects of music. This independence will help them continue to grow as musicians on their own.

In this project, we will focus on duo teaching as a model for music education. We will explore various themes within this model and examine key aspects and terminology that define our teaching approach.

The Opener - sharing the performer's process.

### **What have we done?**

Duo-Workshops: «Lead, Listen, Follow, Breathe» (13/9, 27/9, 18/10, 22/11)

Duration 2 hours. 9 Duos. Song- and piano students. Optional registration. Self-selected repertoire.

The content of the project consisted of -duo workshops- where students from both voice and piano disciplines collaborated practically to develop a deeper understanding of ensemble playing and musical-textual coloring.

### **The projects value and relevance.**

We encouraged all the duos to participate in all the sessions, even though not everyone was active in every workshop. We opened up dialogues between the students who were performing and active, and those who were listening. Therefore, no one was a "passive participant" in any of the sessions, and the students were challenged to listen actively, even if they were not the focus themselves. In this way, the project expanded the concept of «listening.»

### **Students' Reflections/Round table-session:**

After the final workshop, we divided the students into two groups, independent of their duos. Several students switch groups. Two tables were set up with sheets labeled "Relations," along with the "lead, listen, follow, breathe." The students spent around 15 minutes at each table, writing down key points reflecting on their experiences during the duo workshops.

Table 1:

- What one does, both technically and sonically, subconsciously affects the other.
- Communicates on a new level.
- To be able to create spontaneity in the music together.
- To explore the extremes in a musical collaboration.
- Fellow musicians, breathing together, attention.

- Shared initiative.
- To experience trust in the collaborator.
- To observe and be more observant.
- Receiving instruction from various instrumental pedagogues.
- A deep understanding of and treatment of the text is equally important for both performers.
- The relationship between the text and the piano part.
- Clarity in the music, playing all the notes, creating lines, highlighting moments, making space, contrasts.
- Unity, much better relationships with each other.

Table 2:

- Repertoire and stylistic knowledge.
- Textual and musical coloring. Experimentation.
- Stepping out of the comfort zone.
- Dialogue. Day-to-day condition and presence.
- Democracy and individuality within unity.
- Breathing together.
- A puzzle.
- Discovering together.
- A deeper understanding of the music as a whole.
- Associating.
- Human and musical connection, as a duo.
- Interaction and attentiveness.

Table Signe and Hilde:

- Listening to each other, sensitivity, using multiple senses.
- The pianists becoming more conscious of the text.
- Experiencing a shared understanding.
- Different approaches (concrete, abstract, technical, or playful).
- Two distinct teacher personalities challenging each other.
- Equal and balanced (singer and pianist).
- The value of community between the singing and piano classes.
- Inspiration for collaboration.
- The teacher's role is sometimes to allow space for open choices, and other times to give clear advice and guidance.
- More focused on the piano part, with the pianists being taken seriously as an equal partner in the duo.

### **A workshop for experimentation.**

What need has the project addressed?

The project has addressed the need for a more holistic and dynamic approach to collaboration and interaction between singers and pianists, particularly in the context of music education. It has also met the need to develop greater awareness of ensemble playing, text interpretation, and both technical and artistic collaboration between different disciplines, as well as fostering interdisciplinary communication and understanding.

### **LEAD-LISTEN-FOLLOW- BREATHE, some notes from our workshops.**

To Lead and To Follow – The Interaction Between Pianist and Singer

The concept of leading and following is fundamental to the collaborative process between a pianist and singer. It's essential that both musicians are actively listening to each other, responding dynamically, and understanding their roles at any given moment in the music.

### **Placing Consonants Before the Beat.**

This is a vocal technique that is particularly important in ensuring clarity and precision, as well as making the performance more expressive. By singing the consonants slightly ahead of the beat, the singer ensures that the important articulations are crisp and clear, without them being swallowed by the piano accompaniment. This also creates a tighter connection between the voice and piano, as the pianist can anticipate these articulations and adjust their accompaniment accordingly.

### **Pianist's Role**

The pianist's role in this interaction is to be sensitive to the singer's phrasing and articulation. The pianist needs to be flexible, knowing when to "follow" the singer's lead (e.g., during rubato moments) and when to assert control and feel when to take care of flow.

### **Voicing in the Piano: How It Affects the Singer**

Voicing in piano refers to how the pianist balances the various voices melody, accompaniment, harmonic support in a piece of music. The way the pianist brings out certain voices has a profound effect on the singer's experience and expression.

If the pianist emphasizes the accompaniment or secondary voices too much, it can obscure the singer's line, making it harder for them to project their voice or to stay in tune with the harmonic progression. Conversely, when the pianist brings out clear harmonic support together with a clear bass line, it helps the singer to stay in tune and focus on expression.

### **Supporting the Singer's Expression**

The pianist can also affect the singer's emotional delivery by adjusting the emphasis in the harmonic texture. For example, if the pianist emphasizes the higher voices in a chord, it might create a more transparent sound, allowing the singer to take center stage. On the other hand,

bringing out the bass or inner voices can create a richer texture that provides a dramatic backdrop for the singer's performance.

## **Practical Experimentation**

In rehearsal, experimenting with different pedal techniques can reveal the best balance for each piece. For example, if the pianist uses nuanced pedal technique, the sound can remain resonant without becoming overpowering, providing a nuanced support that allows the singer to play with phrasing and dynamics.

## **Character Exploration Through Text Transmission**

One of the most exciting aspects of collaborative performance is the interpretation of a song's text. The singer, with the pianist's support, must bring the text to life, and the pianist's response is often shaped by how the singer delivers the words. Clear storytelling is gold for the pianist!

## **Expressive Storytelling**

When the singer conveys a powerful or emotional story through the text, the pianist is not merely an accompanist, but also a responder, adjusting their playing to the emotional tone set by the singer. For example, in Strauss' songs, where the text often involves complex emotional transitions, the pianist's role is to reflect the singer's emotional arc. If the singer shifts from sadness to rage, the pianist can adapt the intensity and texture of their accompaniment to match this change.

## **Conclusion**

The interaction between pianist and singer is a constantly evolving, dynamic exchange. Through leading and following, voicing, pedal usage, and interpretation of text, both musicians shape the overall performance. By experimenting with these elements, performers can bring the music to life in a way that is both faithful to the composer's intentions and deeply personal to the performers themselves.

What need has the project addressed?

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The value of teaching together is great. Two different subject teachers (voice and piano) complement and challenge each other in a process where students get to experiment with various methods and possibilities within musical expression, phrasing, content, and interpretation.

How far have we come, and what will we further develop (based on the experiences from the project)?

The project has made significant progress in bridging different disciplines and has established a solid foundation for further development. Many students reported increased awareness and new perspectives on ensemble playing and collaboration, with several expressing a desire to continue developing their skills in the duo format, together in a class.

Further development might include.

- Expanding the repertoire used in the duos, with a greater focus on diversity in genres and styles, to provide a broader foundation for learning.
- Incorporating additional instruments, such as strings or wind instruments, to expand the concept to include a variety of ensemble situations.
- More structured follow-up after the workshops, with opportunities for ongoing development and reflection through masterclasses, individual mentoring, or group work.
- Systematizing learning goals for different levels, so that the project can be implemented at various stages of education, starting from the first year of study.
- Professionalization and external collaboration, for example by inviting guest professors or external artists who can contribute new perspectives and experiences.

In summary, the project has been successful in creating fruitful collaboration between different disciplines, providing a solid foundation for further exploration of interdisciplinary music education, by two teachers working/teaching as a DUO!