

Questionnaire CMC sessions, KC start-up week 2022

REPORT

During the start-up week of the new academic year 2022/2023 all first-year students had been assigned to a CMC group (Collaborative Music Creation).

Since I was coaching one group myself and was planning on handing out a questionnaire in the end of the course, the idea came up, that it might be interesting to hand out a questionnaire to all 1st year students, who follow the course with different coaches. Additionally, I asked all the coaches for their approach on this course. By doing this I hoped to get a picture of how these courses are approached by different teachers (staff and external coaches) and how first students react on these activities, what their experiences and expectations are when it comes to cross-genre activities.

Outcomes:

- 82 participants replied (m/f: 50/50)
- 42 classical, 16 Jazz, 11 early music, 3 docent muziek, 4 Sonolgy, 4 Composition, 2 Art of Sound
- ca 27 participants from higher years (Erasmus etc.) than 1st year
- average age: 20 years
- 60 participants had experience in at least one other genre than their main subject
- Only 7 out of 82 participants mention that they listen to music of their own genre exclusively (mostly classical and EM students), the rest mentions to listen to at least one other genre (mostly popular music)
- A bit over the half of the participants mentions to have somehow experience with improvisation. The range reaches from improvising being a jazz player or free-improviser, to students with just a little experience from a one semester course improvisation for classical or EM students. The remaining participants state to not be familiar with improvisation at all.
- More than half of the students say that they made experiences in a kind of cross-genre activity.
- Being asked, on a scale from 1-10, where the content of the CMC sessions fit into their comfort zone, 48 participants (58%) scale their comfort zone with 6 or higher (out of 10)
- On the question, what was challenging and new within the course, the overall majority mentioned improvisation and unusual mix of the instrumentation in the group. Some also mention the artistic freedom of the situation, the fact that they could or should let go, as well as the situation that one cannot make mistakes as something new. Just a few mentioned that it was neither new or challenging to them.
- When asked what was surprising and interesting, the majority of students mentions the fact that it turned out to be fun had been a surprise on itself, as well as the way the process went, the musical result, the interdepartmental experience with other peers, and the freedom and openness of the group. A lot had been impressed by the fact that the 'chaos' in the beginning quickly could turn into something structured. Just a few mention that they found it interesting but not surprising. Only one did not find it interesting due to a bad (personal) experience in general.

PARTICIPANTS QUOTES

"It was really interesting the way we could be free doing improvisation while also playing something that makes sense as a group; in the end it was surprising the way all the different styles of music could fit together and make amazing music."

"Interesting was the music itself, surprising was how I opened to it. Unexpected was the fact that everything went well and sounded good actually and I did not find anything intriguing."

"I am really surprised at how we have evolved as a group. At the beginning, almost everyone were embarrassed to do these things and I thought it was not possible to do an ensemble with that mix of departments, but I think the end result speaks for itself. I felt more confident and creativity started to flow during the week."

"It was interesting to get out of my comfort zone."

"It was interesting and intriguing trying to create music with people you have just met and somehow catching the vibe just with music and creating beautiful sounds with each other in a free and relaxed way and environment."

"I liked the different ideas everyone had when breaking into small groups and seeing them return once the group was complete again. Seeing everyone experiment with their own instruments was very interesting and as someone who likes to write music it was also inspiring and making me want to incorporate the things I saw."

"The open-minded attitude of the others was a pleasant surprise for me."

"It was interesting play with other people with different background."

"I liked it because I got to play with instruments I never played with before."

- Being asked, on a scale from 1-10 (where 1 is low and 10 is high), how satisfied they had been with the process and the outcome, only 8 students rate their satisfaction with 5 or lower; the big majority with 6 or higher. The average rating is 7,07. (54 participants rate with 8, 9 or 10)
- When asked what students have learned during the experience, most mentioned were
 - the possibility of creating something together (finding common ground) unless the different genres and instruments,
 - flexibility,
 - that it was not about perfection and control,
 - letting go, 'going with the flow',
 - getting to know more about other genres and instruments
 - improvisation,
 - that the own capacities are bigger than expected,
 - that it's just fun to make music together,
 - openness,
 - new perspectives of making music.

Only some participants react rather indifferent by mentioning that they did not really learn something, but even some of those mention that they had fun or found it an interesting experience.

PARTICIPANTS QUOTES

"I learned a lot regarding exploring more, being more creative and enjoying more improvisation and not being scared of it. I certainly did affect me as a musician because I had never done anything similar to that."

"That I'm capable to do more than I think, and that a group with such a variety of musicians, instruments and departments can always find ways to make music together."

"I wouldn't say it affected me as a musician. I would say it reminded me, that there are other genres and styles and things to focus on rather than jazz."

"I think I learned a lot about the freedom I have on my instrument. When studying, I often forget about it [...]."

"I learned about how differently people can absorb the same information."

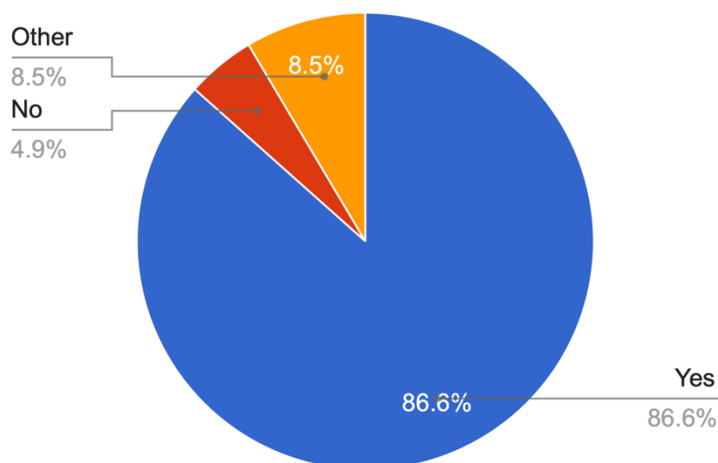
"It taught me how important it is to be open to new experiences as it can teach a lot."

"Free creation without any consequences was a great feeling for me."

"I think I remembered the power of music making and collaboration, and also that we should always keep an open mind."

- When asked, if they would like to do something like this again, and if so, why, four students mention that they would not want to do something like this again. Seven students did not know or at least would like another format or context. The big majority, 71 participants (87%), clearly mentioned that they would like to do something like this again.

Would you like to do something like this again?



PARTICIPANTS QUOTES

"[...] There was no pressure of needing a good technique or knowing a lot about harmony. I could just let everything happen, feeling like a child experimenting."

"Yes. These sessions force us to step out of our comfort zone, whereby we don't have a score to read off. I feel these sessions will boost confidence as well as make us be more creative as a musician."

"I did say it's outside my comfort zone, but that's where all the fun is after all. [...]"

"[...] It helped me become a little less shy and more willing to risk and get out of my comfort zone. I believe that, if I did it more often, I would probably overcome that fear of trying new things and making mistakes, which would certainly help become a better musician and performer."

"It's a great team building exercise and some unexpected and really cool things can happen during the sessions. You learn a lot about the people in your group and also about the instruments. I wouldn't do an elective [...], but as a workshop [...] it's perfect."

All coaches, except one, briefly described their approach to the course to me. Important to mention is that some coaches had groups of 10 participants, some coached groups that had 30 participants. The format, one-hour sessions for 4 days, had been the same for all groups. The different approaches included:

- Having a somehow tonal result in the wider western music tradition as a goal, achieved by for example limitations of notes, with rhythmical patterns as a basis.
- Rhythms and percussive sounds of the instruments forming the basis of a call-response impro
- Creating a collective composition with collective grooves and call and response
- A playful process including electronica, starting from free improv, gradually adding more rules and parameters to it, resolving in a suite based on self-written scores.
- Destructing a concrete tune into parts that are learned by a random group of instrumentalists with the goal that the participants learn unfamiliar harmony, melody, rhythm and meter next to improvisational skills.
- Using improvisational exercises based on the fact that any sound can be a musical one, finding techniques to connect them, and finally finding music collectively imagined and composed by the particular individuals as a group.
- Creating a safe environment, practicing creativity, using counterpoint in the widest sense, creating something together.

Findings

It is noticeable that the big majority of the 82 participants is positive about the CMC courses, the process, the outcome and their learning experiences. Eventually one needs to take into consideration that the students who did not enjoy the course, or did not see anything useful in it, had simply not returned the form. Nevertheless, due to the high number of responses, this result gives a clear picture of the 1st year bachelor students' interests concerning cross-genre activities within the conservatoire. 87% of the responders would like to do something like the CMC again. While almost all participants listen to multiple musical genres, and around 75% mention experience with playing at least one other genre than the own, only half of the responders mentioned to have gotten in touch with any kind of improvisation and been involved in any kind of crossover (cross-genre) performances. Also, 58% mentioned to somehow had been comfortable with the content of the sessions, the rest was rather uncomfortable.

Concerning their answers, most participants had never done something like this before, and had been surprised by the new musical results one could achieve in a cross-genre setting, the artistic freedom and the non-judgmental environment. Also, working with peers from other departments in an open-minded atmosphere has been perceived as surprisingly pleasant and meaningful. Remarkable learning outcomes had been due to the participants gaining flexibility, letting go of only focusing on perfection and control, developing openness in a musical and social sense and getting new perspectives of making music.

Another interesting fact is, that the participants mentioned to have had very similar experiences unless the fact that they had been assigned to different groups and therefore different approaches of the several coaches.