

M4C Collaborative Doctoral Award- Composition as a workplace intervention: Adding value to Stan's Cafe

Project Title				
Composition as a workplace intervention: Adding value to Stan's Cafe				
LEAD INSTITUTION				
Name of HEI institution	Birmingham City University			
Lead regional city	Birmingham ☒	Coventry ☐	Leicester ☐	Nottingham ☐
PARTNER ORGANISATION				
Name of organisation	Stan's Cafe			
Website URL	https://www.stanscafe.co.uk			
THE RESEARCH PROJECT				
Research context: It has long been recognised that there are reduced opportunities for composers from traditional working models. The ongoing impacts of the global pandemic on the cultural landscape increase the urgency with which composers need to step out into unfamiliar territory and find new models for engaging and working with organisations and businesses. While the idea of a 'composer-in-residence' is a traditional one with a long history, it usually refers to the composer being a separate entity at the venue and composing work that has usually nothing to do with where they are staying. In the performing arts, the traditional theatre/composer relationship has been one which commissions the composer within a hierarchical structure to deliver output for other practitioners to use. The aim of this project is to examine the possibilities of 'inserting' a composer into the organisation of an established artistic company, so they can observe and relate to not only the artistic output of the company, but also day-to-day operational activities. This research will test models of collaboration borrowing from practices in the visual arts world, drawing on precedents such as the Artist Placement Group in the 1960s and its hybrid practices (Cateforis et al, 2018) and more recent critical attention to the potential of residencies in the art world (Elfvin, 2019), and as interventions in business activities (Berthoin Antal, 2012). Key research questions: - How can the working models and methods of a creative business inform an approach to music composition? - What can the presence of Composer-in-Residence contribute to a theatre company other than supplying incidental music? - What impact does the presence of a composer/musician within a theatre company have on the role of music in the production process? Methodology and approach: The research questions will be answered through practice-based explorations of the experience of the residency, informed and contextualised in relation to a literature review and survey of the field of contemporary practice in artist residencies. Focusing initially on non-theatre aspects of the company's work, including presentations, web presence, social media, meetings, parties and creative learning work, the doctoral researcher will explore and test what it could mean to be Composer-in-Residence in a creative theatre business. Compositions and artistic responses could relate to company policy,				

working models and strategic planning or could relate to a particular issue raised in a rehearsal. Later research may move towards the candidate engaging with the company in more theatrical terms, exploring what the compositional equivalent of a dramaturgical role may be and collaborating with the company on more performative work.

Embedded within the theatre company, the doctoral researcher will draw on and appropriate models of (auto)ethnography and participant-observation from the social sciences as well as models of participatory practice in the arts. This may include the use of reflective journals and field notes, as well as qualitative interviews and focus-group discussions with staff and performers which will enrich the candidate's own reflections on their impact. The objective is for the researcher to produce and present work and the theatre company to benefit from this artistic reflection. The particular method of creation and delivery will be chosen by the researcher in discussion with the company. The final submission will be in the form of a portfolio of works accompanied by a detailed critical commentary.

The collaborative context:

This collaborative research has the potential to establish a richer, more complex and, crucially, mutually beneficial relationship than traditional hierarchical models of artistic collaboration for composers. Being embedded within the company will enable the researcher to create an artistic response to what they have observed, and the collaborative relationship will enable mutual reflection and evaluation of the impact of their work on the company and of the artistic methods used in the creation of the work.

This project seeks to define new possible models of working for composers engaged in today's cultural landscape, and to demonstrate, through practice-led research, a workable methodology and clear outcomes for collaborative working that could be applied by professional composers and organisations.

Timetable for the research:

Months 1-6	PgCert Research Practice, background research and literature review
Months 6-12	Embedded in theatre company, observations and creating and presenting initial work(s)
Months 12-18	Reflection, extended literature review and pilot of focus groups and interviews with members of Stan's Café
Months 19-36	Embedded in theatre company creating and presenting works
Months 36-40	Reflection, interviews, focus groups and discussion with members of Stan's Cafe
Months 40-48	Preparing portfolio and finalising critical commentary for submission.

HOW TO FIND OUT MORE

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