Making music collaboratively

“The Collaboratorium provides a virtual meeting place for researchers working across the creative disciplines”

A program of research at the School of Music is showing how leadership in creativity and collaboration is critical for future research in creative disciplines and beyond.

Founded in 2010, the Creative Collaboratorium is a research initiative that explores the productive intersection of creativity and collaboration. Led by Professor Margaret Barrett, Head of UQ’s School of Music, it explores the ways in which collaborative interactions support innovation and creativity in composition, musicology, music education, music health and wellbeing, and performance. As a prime site for investigating the role of collaboration in creativity, creative practice research in music has the potential to generate new methodologies and theoretical frameworks for the humanities, arts, and social sciences, while promoting dialogue, transformation, and the generation of new knowledge.

“The Collaboratorium provides a virtual meeting place for researchers working across the creative disciplines,” says Professor Barrett. “Our aim is to explore the relationships between creativity and collaboration, and develop models of collaboration and creativity that not only generate new knowledge for the creative disciplines but also may be translated to other disciplines, environments, and communities.”

The program has generated dozens of projects and publications within and across each of its sub-disciplines. In addition to traditional methods of research engagement, the Collaboratorium features two Ensembles-in-Residence which provide performance “laboratories” for the study of creative collaborations. The Viney-Grinberg Piano Duo (pictured with Dr Mary Broughton and Professor Barrett) and the recently launched White Halo Ensemble disseminate creative practice research nationally and internationally while also advancing knowledge about the nature of collaboration and creativity. Cross-disciplinary collaborations between music performance and psychology, for example, focus on understanding: relationships between commissioner, composer, ensemble, and audience; how collaborations develop over time; and the distinctive features of collaborative creativity.

Other recent projects have explored the role of music learning and engagement in Positive Youth Development for young people living in Juvenile Detention, the life and learning outcomes of early joint engagement in music for infants and young children, and the processes by which canonical works in music are interpreted in and through performance.

UQ will host an International Colloquium in November 2015 to continue the Collaboratorium’s research. Looking to the future, Professor Barrett says, “We will analyse the methodologies and outcomes we have generated so far, compare and contrast these with other approaches, and identify translation possibilities as we promote the benefits that creative collaboration can offer.”
Playing music with toddlers could benefit their development even more than shared reading.

A UQ-led study has shown that music participation at home improves numeracy, prosocial skills and attention over and above the effects of shared book reading.

One of the study leaders and Head of UQ’s School of Music Professor Margaret Barrett said parents were asked to report on shared music activities when their child was two to three years old and a range of social, emotional and cognitive outcomes were measured two years later, when the child was four or five.

“Children who experienced more frequent parent-child music activity at two to three years showed stronger vocabulary and numeracy skills, more prosocial skills and stronger abilities to regulate their own attention and emotion at four to five years old,” Professor Barrett said.

“The study highlights that informal music education in early childhood is a vital tool for supporting the cognitive and social development of children.”

This study is part of an Australian Research Council funded study ‘Being and becoming musical: towards a cultural ecological model of early musical development’ led by Professor Barrett and Professor Graham Welch from University College London with team members Ms Vicky Abad, Dr Mary Broughton and Dr Kate Williams.

The study aims to provide a comprehensive account of how Australian families use music in their parenting practices and make recommendations for policy and practice in childcare and early learning and development.

In an analysis of data generated from studying more than 3,000 children, the UQ team investigated the associations between informal home music education for very young children and later cognitive and social-emotional outcomes.

The Music Trust, which works to actively promote music education in Australia, has awarded the research team the inaugural Music Trust Award for Research into the Benefits of Music Education.

Lead author on the publication Dr Kate Williams accepted the award on behalf of the team at a ceremony in Melbourne on 25 September.

Music Trust director Dr Richard Letts said the study clearly demonstrated the advantages of musical education.

“Abundant research over past decades has accumulated evidence of the effectiveness of music education in accelerating development in IQ, academic and social skills, empathy and self-discipline,” Dr Letts said.

“These are very important findings but little of this research has taken place in Australia.

“By creating this award, the Music Trust is encouraging such research in Australia and drawing attention to the opportunities offered by music education for children.”

Jamming With Toddlers Trumps Hitting the Books

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International collaboration

Yale University’s Chair of Composition, Professor Martin Bresnick, has been collaborating with UQ ensemble-in-residence, the Viney-Grinberg Piano Duo.

The Duo gave a preview performance of Bresnick’s Handwork, a brand new composition for two pianos, in August 2015 ahead of their tour to the United States in September.

Dr Liam Viney of the Viney-Grinberg Piano Duo said it was a privilege to work with Martin Bresnick.

“Working with Martin from the early conceptual phase right through to workshopping and premiering the new piece is a rare opportunity. Two-piano activity is collaborative by nature for performers, but working with a composer extends our research into a different order of collaborative music creation,” Dr Viney said.

The Duo toured Handwork, along with other new Australian works receiving their U.S. premieres, to Los Angeles, Houston, Austin and New Haven.

Handwork was commissioned by the UQ School of Music’s Creative Collaboratorium.

Audience Development for New Music

Developing a new software application has been a key part of Dr Mary Broughton’s investigation in 2015 into how listeners respond to musical performances.

Dr Broughton’s current project, supported by a University of Queensland Early Career Researcher Award, investigates audience members’ musical and motor-expertise moderated empathy responses to contemporary music performance.

“I have developed an audience-response app to engage audience members as active participants in the performance process,” Dr Broughton said.

Dr Broughton has worked in collaboration with an app developer and with eminent Australian pianists, including Liam Viney and Anna Grinberg to co-curate the performance material for the empirical research.

“Results of a laboratory-style experiment in the first phase of the project showed that whereas musicians had significantly higher cognitive empathy responses to contemporary solo piano performance than the responses of non-musicians, the groups did not differ in their emotional, affective empathy responses.”

“Current research is investigating audience members’ empathy responses to live contemporary piano performance, using the new audience response app.”

Dr Broughton’s ongoing research aim is to develop evidence-based models and strategies for audience engagement and development for contemporary music practices.

Canonic conundrums

Ground-breaking computer modelling of the development of canonic compositions from the Late Middle Ages to the early Renaissance is revealing the melodic and rhythmic conventions learned by their composers.

Dr Denis Collins, one of the chief investigators for this Australian Research Council funded project, said the work included not only consideration of the different ways of transforming melodies and their rhythms across the canonic voices, but also broader contextual issues relating to canon’s role in society and culture during this period.

“In devising computer-assisted analysis tools that extend recent methods in computational musicology, we focus on identifying different kinds of repeated patterns of contrapuntal behaviour across all voices in a composition,” Dr Collins said.

Dr Collins and his fellow chief investigator, Dr Jason Stoessel of the University of New England, expect to address two research questions through their innovative approach.

“The first seeks to determine empirically what conventions might lie behind the creation of canonic compositions, particularly the regulation of melodic behaviours,” Dr Collins said.

“The second, is how these conventions manifest themselves in one sense as repeated contrapuntal patterns. The superimposition of these repeated contrapuntal patterns informs us about the interrelationship between canonic techniques and contrapuntal convention, providing the first steps towards answering the first research question.”

Dr Collins expects that their methods and results will have wider application for studies of later contrapuntal repertoire to ca. 1800.
The challenges presented by conducting youth ensembles are being explored through the University of Queensland Symphony Orchestra by its conductor, Dr Warwick Potter. “To date, there has been very little published about conducting youth symphony orchestras,” Dr Potter said. “There is no national consensus on how to manage youth orchestras. Youth orchestras are very different in structure to professional orchestras.”

Dr Potter’s research investigates these differences and how they are expressed in musical and extra-musical aspects of youth orchestra preparation, rehearsal and performance. “Youth ensembles are characterised by the transitional nature of membership,” Dr Potter said. “Players are only there for a few years, and throughout those years they are gaining maturity and experience.”

The importance of leadership and communication skills, both verbal and non-verbal, are reflected in the findings of Dr Potter’s research. “As a conductor, you face a more complex and diverse environment when dealing with a youth orchestra. Leadership and communication skills change dramatically from section to section, from student to student, and from year to year—the psychological aspects of personnel management come to the fore.”

“In every youth ensemble there is a developmental dynamic that ideally becomes transformational.”

“Participating in these performances reflects their willingness to get involved and expand their horizons past the requirements of their courses,” Patrick said. “The experience is part of transforming them into independent, professional performers.” The series culminated with a solo cello recital by Patrick that reflects his research into Australian solo cello repertoire.

“The concert includes the world premiere of Insurgence, a new work by Brisbane-born composer Paul Dean,” Patrick said. “The work was commissioned through a research grant that supports my practice-led research into expanding the repertoire for solo cello by Australian composers.” The whole concert series has over twenty works, featuring composers from a variety of countries and from the sixteenth century to the present day. “The depth and breadth of the program across all three concerts reflects the vivacity of our performance interests and abilities in the School of Music,” Patrick said. “Themes that emerge from the program include reflections on war, death and passing, the romantic voice, and music inspired by the sounds and sights of water.”

Twilight in the Red Box

Staff and students of the School of Music featured throughout the month of July in the 2015 Twilight in the Red Box series.

Cello Performance Fellow Patrick Murphy curated this year’s series, which included performances by two student ensembles, the UQ Chamber Singers and the UQ Pulse Chamber Orchestra. Both ensembles are voluntary, audition-based chamber groups. “Participating in these performances reflects their willingness to get involved and expand their horizons past the requirements of their courses,” Patrick said. “The experience is part of transforming them into independent, professional performers.”

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School of Music’s Associate Professor Julie Ballantyne recognised the impact of “praxis shock” after seeing former students making the transition from university to school-life... not always successfully.

“I wanted to address the issue that how a person’s professional identity and teaching approaches are formed before, during and after pre-service teacher education is crucial to how that person will thrive (or not) in the music teaching profession,” she says.

“I noticed that a person’s ongoing sense of wellbeing is directly affected by their ability to cope.”

And her research may have impact in other fields too, with certain aspects of her study already being applied to early-career psychologists, doctors, engineers and lawyers.

Comprising two separate initiatives, Dr Ballantyne has established a Music Teachers’ Project website that functions as an online Community of Practice, and has complemented this with a series of questionnaires.

“To date, more than 1000 people have completed the questionnaires and the website has more than 500 users: a world-first for music teacher education research,” says Dr Ballantyne.

“Preliminary results indicate that (unfortunately!) praxis shock is not just a factor of early careerists but may occur repeatedly over the course of a person’s working life.

“If we can pinpoint these crucial junctures, we hope to be able to prepare our teachers and so lessen the negative impact.”

Music technology teaching at the School of Music is to be realigned with creative practice in 2016 to better prepare Music graduates for their future careers.

Dr Eve Klein has been awarded a University of Queensland Technology Enhanced Learning Grant to carry out a redesign of the music technology curriculum that draws on her mapping of creative practice research methods, skills and outcomes against the ‘Ten Skills for the Future Workforce’ outlined in the Future Work Skills 2020 report.

“Future Work Skills 2020 was developed by the Institute for the Future and has been used globally by territory institutions to inform and shape curriculum design towards employment outcomes for graduates,” Dr Klein said.

“The Ten Skills reflect changes in cultural production occurring within the creative industries.”

The revised curriculum will enable students to develop skills applying mobile, online and desktop computing technologies to music making scenarios that incorporate both music composition and performance practices.

By teaching musicians how to apply technology in a flexible and adaptive way, they will gain experience transforming their musical skills across a variety of contexts and mediums relevant to careers in the music industry, media, community arts and education sectors.

“Students can use their area of specialisation to inform creative projects produced in music technology courses,” Dr Klein said.

“This means that classical music students can learn how technology and technological processes can be integrated into their performance or compositional work, providing them with technologically-influenced skills that make them better prepared for the kinds of challenges they will encounter in industry contexts following graduation.”
In March 2015, UQ PhD candidate Vikram Sampath served as an inaugural writer-in-residence for a fortnight at the Presidential Palace of India, the Rashtrapati Bhavan.

“The President of India has initiated a first of its kind program,” Vikram said. “The idea is to provide creative minds a picturesque and serene atmosphere to reflect, introspect and also hone their creativity.”

Candidates were shortlisted from across India, and Vikram was one of four writers and artists chosen for the honour.

“I was fortunate to be one of those chosen to stay there and showcase my work,” Vikram said. “It also gave me several opportunities to discuss future projects and ideas with both the President and the Prime Minister of India.”

Vikram’s PhD research investigates the advent of the gramophone and its impact on the music of India.

Vikram is also the co-founder and director of the Bangalore Literature Festival and the Archive of Indian Music.

In 2015, with assistance from a School of Music Creative Collaboratorium Fellowship, Dr Katie Zhukov began a collaborative project between UQ and the Royal Northern College of Music that involves embedding sight-reading training into undergraduate music curricula.

At both institutions, students undertaking sight-reading training and a control group are being tracked over one semester through weekly activities diaries and end-of-semester questionnaires to evaluate the impact of improved sight-reading skills on the educational pathways of music students.

In addition, Dr Zhukov is currently interviewing Australian classical pianists about their careers with the aim of identifying skills needed for successful music careers.

“The semi-structured interviews are focusing on acquisition of musical literacy, musical education, career paths, skills that contributed to their success and skills needed by piano undergraduates for the 21st century,” Dr Zhukov said.

Dr Zhukov’s second collaborative project with Wirripang produced Australian Women Composers’ Piano Anthology (2015) – a collection of 15 new works by established and emerging women composers for intermediate-advanced piano students – that was launched at the Australasian Piano Pedagogy Conference in Melbourne in July.

Practice-based research by UQ PhD candidate Paul Hodge has resulted in a hit Off-Broadway musical about former United States President Bill Clinton.

Dr Robert Davidson, the principal advisor of Paul’s PhD project, said that Clinton: The Musical was the culmination of years of innovative scholarly work by Paul.

“Musicology has tended to shy away from musical theatre,” Dr Davidson said.

“Through writing this musical, Paul has been researching the creative process of music theatre production, and speaking to many leading practitioners in this field,” he said.

Paul and Dr Davidson have a shared interest in politicians as inherently theatrical public figures.

“Clinton appealed to Paul as a larger-than-life character with immediately recognisable speech patterns, catch phrases and quotes,” Dr Davidson said.

“This was a point of connection for us, as we’re both interested in finding the theatre inherent in when politicians speak,” he said.

Dr Davidson had previously composed significant works about Australian politicians that included spoken word extracts from their own speeches, including Julia Gillard’s Misogyny Speech.

Clinton: the Musical has received critical and popular acclaim during its run in New York.

“Paul phoned me in great excitement the night after Stephen Sondheim attended the show and gave a standing ovation,” Dr Davidson said.

Planning is underway for Clinton: the Musical to be launched in Australia.
The Creative Collaboratorium

The Creative Collaboratorium in the School of Music at the University of Queensland was established in 2010 to provide: a research focus that recognises the unique qualities of the music disciplines; and, common ground for dialogue, collaboration, and the generation of new knowledge.

The research aims of the Creative Collaboratorium are:
- To investigate the forms of creative thought and activity in creative collaborations and collaborative creativity in the disciplines of music
- To identify the individual, social, cultural, and ecological factors that contribute to effective creative collaborations and collaborative creativity in music
- To identify the outcomes (individual, social, cultural, disciplinary, inter-disciplinary) of effective creative collaborations and collaborative creativity in music
- To investigate the relationships between creative collaborations and collaborative creativity in the disciplines of music and intersecting disciplines (such as arts, education, health)

Creative Collaboratorium

Director:
Professor Margaret Barrett (Head, School of Music)

Funding sources:
UQ Strategic Initiative Funding, Australian Research Council Discovery Grant, Australia Council for the Arts, Australian Youth Orchestra, Australian Chamber Orchestra, Tasmanian Symphony Orchestra, UQ Collaboration and Industry Engagement Fund, The Australian Children’s Music Foundation, Queensland Music Festival, Musica Viva

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CRICOS Provider Number 00025B

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The University of Edinburgh
The University of Cambridge
Sibelius Academy, University of the Arts Helsinki, Finland
University College London
University of Washington
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Professor Dawn Bennett (Curtin University)
Professor Margaret Barrett (University of Queensland)
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White Halo Ensemble (University of Queensland)
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