Chapter 8

Developing familiarity: Rehearsal talk in a newly formed duo

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Researchers have long been interested in performers' cognitions about the music they learn, practise and memorize for performance, and how these cognitions change as they become familiar with the music. The study of cognitive processes underlying ensemble performance is more recent. Cognitive processes occur within each individual performer and between ensemble members, thus both influence and are influenced by social processes. These, too, change as ensemble members become familiar with each other (see Chapters 1 and 5). Research questions concern the different aspects of the music to which they attend at different stages of practice and rehearsal, and the nature of performers' interactions with each other (see Black, Chapter 2.i and Bishop, Chapter 2.iii).

The present case study was inspired by two studies involving the preparation of unfamiliar repertoire. The first investigated changes in practice focus in the individual practice sessions and joint rehearsals of a singer and pianist/conductor (Ginsborg, Chaffin & Nicholson, 2006). This informed a framework of musical dimensions in line with Chaffin, Imreh and Crawford (2005) – see the categories displayed in Figure 1 – and suggested that, over time, musicians' focus shifts from structural and basic dimensions of the music (e.g. where section boundaries occur) to interpretative dimensions such as dynamics and rubato (e.g determining how softly or loudly to play, how much to accelerate or decelerate), and finally to expressive dimensions (e.g. deciding what is to be conveyed to the audience, such as "yearning" or "joy", and how it is to be conveyed).

The other study investigated the roles of familiarity between performers and their expertise, as well as change over time (Ginsborg & King, 2012). Student and professional singer-pianist duos worked first with their regular duo partner and then with a same-expertise partner on the same songs. Finally, one student and one professional duo swapped partners and prepared a third new song. Analysis combined the musical dimensions framework informed by the work of Chaffin et al. (2005) with Bales' (1999) Interaction Process Analysis (IPA) for exploring positive and negative socio-emotional interactions and task answers and questions (see the categories displayed in Figure 2). The professional duos' approach to rehearsal was more efficient: they sang and played more, and talked less than the students. Socio-emotional interaction was overwhelmingly positive but the professionals were more likely to request and volunteer their own opinions to their rehearsal colleagues. The numbers of references made to structural, basic, interpretative and expressive dimensions changed over time in similar ways for the students and professionals.

Aim and research questions

The present case study asked how a newly formed duo – both expert performers – negotiates a shared understanding of an unfamiliar work. Two songs were learned over a seven-day period; each performer memorized one song. Practice sessions and rehearsals were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim. A multi-strategy approach was used to analyse and triangulate three sets of data:

1. talk during rehearsal;
2. singing and playing; and
3. annotations made by the musicians on the scores after the final rehearsal and three public performances (Ginsborg & Bennett, in preparation).

In this chapter we consider the content analysis of rehearsal talk, addressing four research questions:

1. What topics (i.e. musical dimensions and rehearsal strategies) did the musicians discuss?
2. What were the musicians' interaction processes?
3. How did these topics and processes change over the course of rehearsals?
4. What differences were observable, if any, between the singer and viola player, memorizer and non-memorizer, and/or the two songs?

Method

Participants

The authors, a singer and viola player, are experienced performers who had not previously worked together.

Materials

The work was *From Kipling* (1994): Boris Tchaikovsky's settings of Rudyard Kipling's poems 'Far-off Amazon' ('Amazon') and 'Homer', loosely translated into Russian.

Procedure

Over the course of seven days the musicians practised the songs independently and rehearsed together every day (see Table 1). Following their final rehearsal, they gave two performances. The viola player performed ‘Amazon’ from memory while the singer read from the score; the singer performed ‘Homer’ from memory while the viola player read from the score.

Analyses

Quantitative analyses included calculations of time spent talking, numbers of exchanges (verbal dialogue between episodes of music making), proportion of exchanges initiated by each musician, and total number of verbal utterances.

Qualitative analyses involved coding each utterance in terms of musical dimensions and/or as interaction process, as appropriate to the utterance. From a total of 302 utterances, 206 musical dimensions codes and 207 IPA codes were generated. To check reliability, each author coded one rehearsal of one song. Analysis using Cohen’s *kappa* showed reliability to be excellent (0.98 and 0.93 for the two frameworks, respectively). The remaining coding was undertaken by JG and double-checked by DB. Disagreements were resolved following discussion. In total, taking both speakers and both songs together, 582 musical dimensions codes were assigned, and 948 IPA codes.

Results

Quantitative characteristics

Almost exactly half the musicians' rehearsal time was spent on talking (49.9%). They rehearsed 'Amazon' in all seven sessions, 'Homer' in six (see Table 1). Although 'Amazon' was slightly shorter, they spent 8% more time rehearsing it, with a larger proportion of talk, than 'Homer'.

Table 1. Individual practice and joint rehearsal time (hours [h] and minutes ['']), percentage consisting of talk, and proportions of talk relating to each of the two songs

Date (March 2014)	*Individual practice*	*Rehearsal*	*% of rehearsal spent talking*	*Proportion Amazon : Homer*
24th	1h 17'	20'	33.8%	88 : 12
25th	17'	34'	53.6%	59 : 41
26th	33'	26'	73.5%	(Amazon only)
27th	57'	28'	45.3%	31 : 69
28th	1h 04'	27'	43.4%	45 : 55
29th	-	33'	50.1%	80 : 20
30th	-	27'	44.1%	24 : 76
TOTAL	4h 08'	3h 24'	49.9%	61 : 39

On average, there were more, and longer, exchanges in rehearsals of 'Amazon' (10, mean of 14 utterances per exchange) than 'Homer' (8, mean of 10.5 utterances per exchange). The singer initiated, on average, 62.7% of all exchanges: 65% in 'Amazon' and 58.3% in 'Homer'.

Musical dimensions and rehearsal strategies

To identify the topics discussed by the musicians, the number of utterances made in each sub-category by each musician was calculated as a percentage of utterances in all rehearsals to which musical dimensions codes had been assigned. For example, the two musicians' 336 utterances during seven rehearsals of 'Amazon' included 22 references to *tempo* (6.55%) made by the singer and four by the viola player (1.19%). Their 246 utterances during six rehearsals of 'Homer' included seven references to *tempo* made by the singer (2.85%) and three by the viola player (1.19%). Thus 11.8% of all utterances referred to *tempo* (see Figure 1).

Other basic dimensions mentioned comparatively often were *ensemble* (10.6%), and *entries* (10%). The most frequently mentioned interpretative dimensions were *dynamics* (10%) and *words* (23%), while the most frequently mentioned rehearsal strategies were *repeat section* (13%) and [work on] *memory* (21%). Comparisons between the mean numbers of utterances in each rehearsal referring to these seven dimensions were made using Mann-Whitney U tests. A Bonferroni correction having been applied, only in the category *words* did the singer make significantly more utterances (M=4.85, SD=5.19) than the viola player (M=0.23, SD=0.44, U=17.5, Z = -3.63, p<.001).

<Insert Figure 1 about here>

Interaction processes

The musicians were most likely to *make suggestion*s (47.4%), *agree* (41.8%) and *provide orientation* (24.2%); *disagreements* were rare (2.8%) and there was no *antagonism* between them (Figure 2). The only significant difference between the musicians was that the singer made more suggestions (M=13.46, SD=10.27) than the viola player (M=3.92, SD=2.25, U=24.5, Z = -3.01, p=.002).

<Insert Figure 2 about here>

One change in the IPA codes was revealed by Kruskal-Wallis tests to be significant across rehearsals as the musicians became more familiar with each other, and with the music: *Showing solidarity* (χ [6]=14.73, p=.022) rose and fell with each rehearsal, as shown in Figure 3.

<Insert Figure 3 about here>

Other observations

No differences between the musicians' references to musical dimensions were observed that might be attributable to the song having been memorized or not, but more requests for orientation were made by the viola player when rehearsing 'Amazon' (M=2.21, SD=2.46) than 'Homer' (M=0.17, SD=0.39, U=22, Z = -.2.89, p=.004), possibly because 'Amazon' has several difficult passages for the viola that are somewhat similar but not exactly the same.

Conclusions

As the musicians developed familiarity with each other, and with the music, their talk consisted of references to musical dimensions and rehearsal strategies, and revealed the nature of their interaction processes. In terms of the latter, the musicians made suggestions and agreed with each other, provided orientation, showed tension and relieved it using humour, but they also showed solidarity. The musical dimensions to which they referred most often were the meaning and subject matter of the songs, and memory, followed by tempo, ensemble, entries and dynamics. Meaning and subject matter were particularly salient because of the discrepancies between Kipling's original poems and their reworking into Russian; memory was salient because of the musicians' different perspectives on the task: the singer was an experienced memorizer but this was the first time the viola player had deliberately memorized her part. In terms of rehearsal strategies, they preferred to repeat sections shorter than a verse.

Analyses comparing the musicians revealed relatively few differences between them. The singer made more suggestions, related to the dimensions to which she referred most often: words, tempo, and sections to repeat. This may be because, as singer, she was responsible for conveying the meaning of the words, but in addition she already had experience of conducting such studies. While there were no differences between them attributable specifically to their role as memorizer or non-memorizer, the two songs were different in style: there were fewer switches, for example, in 'Homer'. Finally, although there were differences between the nature and content of talk in the seven rehearsals, no clear progression – such as a focus on basic to interpretative and expressive content, for example – could be identified, as the musicians became more familiar with the music. Nor were there meaningful changes in the nature of their interactions as they became more familiar with

each other, perhaps because they were both already experienced duo musicians with other partners.

The positive socio-emotional interactions found in the case study, and the musicians' requests for provision of orientation, echo those revealed by Ginsborg and King's (2012) study of student and professional singers and pianists. Unlike those participants, the singer and viola player in the present study rarely asked for or gave opinions, and were more likely to repeat sections than the whole song.

One limitation of case studies is that results cannot be generalized. There is nevertheless value in taking a 'fly-on-the-wall' observational approach to the study of collaborative rehearsal and performance, not least for the musicians themselves who both feel they have learned something new about how they go about preparing for performance with co-performers (for example, the singer's tendency to make suggestions; being more aware of how rehearsal time is spent), and how this might be applied in other situations. We hope that this will also be of value to researchers curious as to the methods that can be applied to the study of collaborative performance, and of interest to other musicians who enjoy making music together.

References

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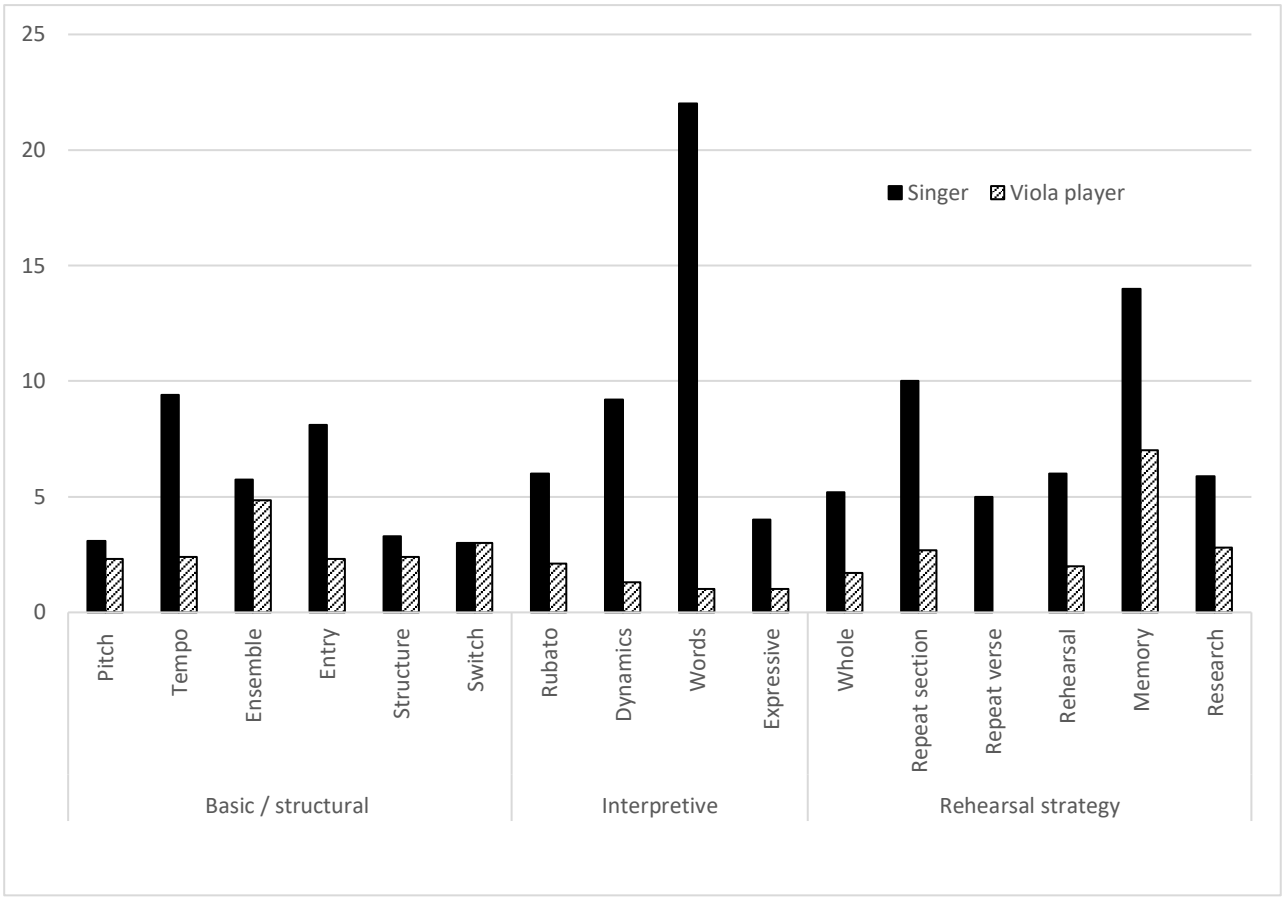

Figure 1. Musical dimensions and rehearsal strategies (by musician)

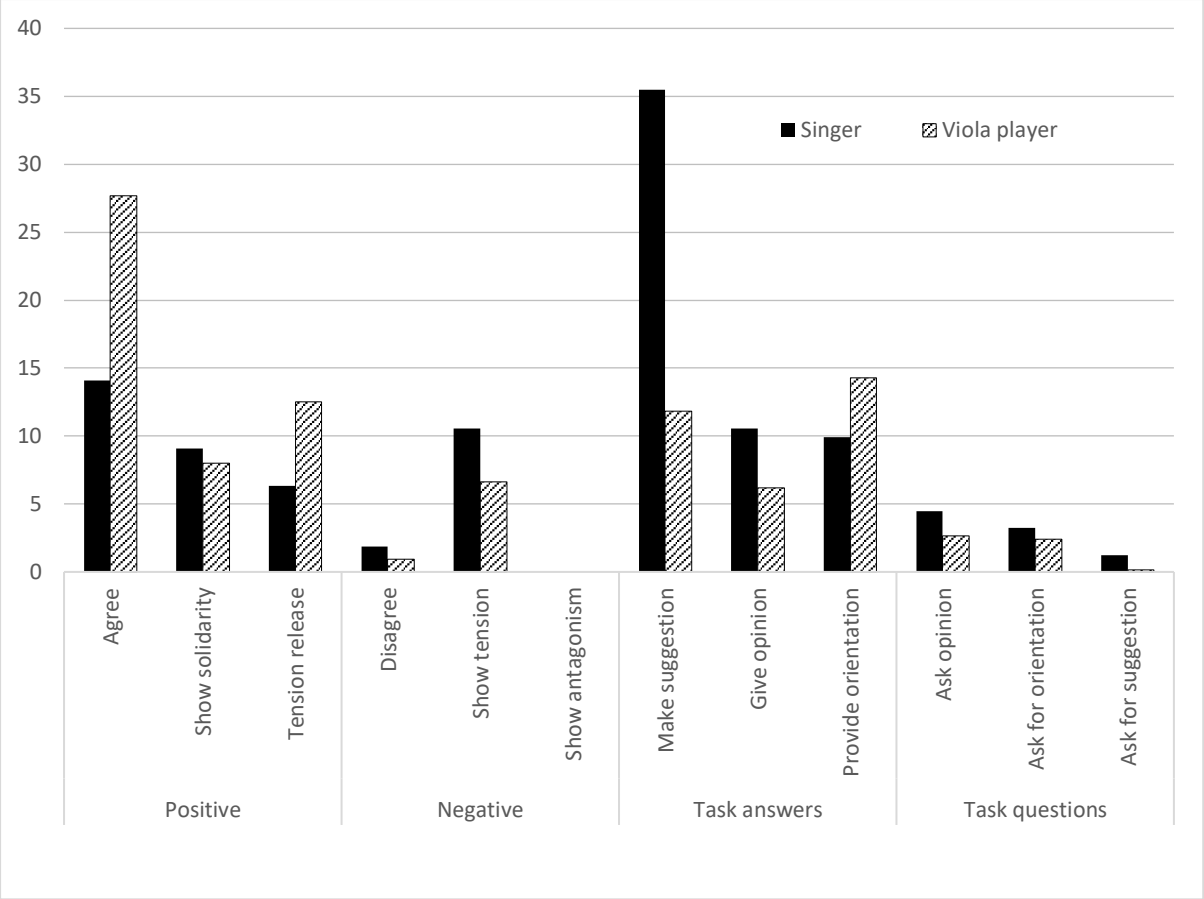

Figure 2. Interaction processes by musician

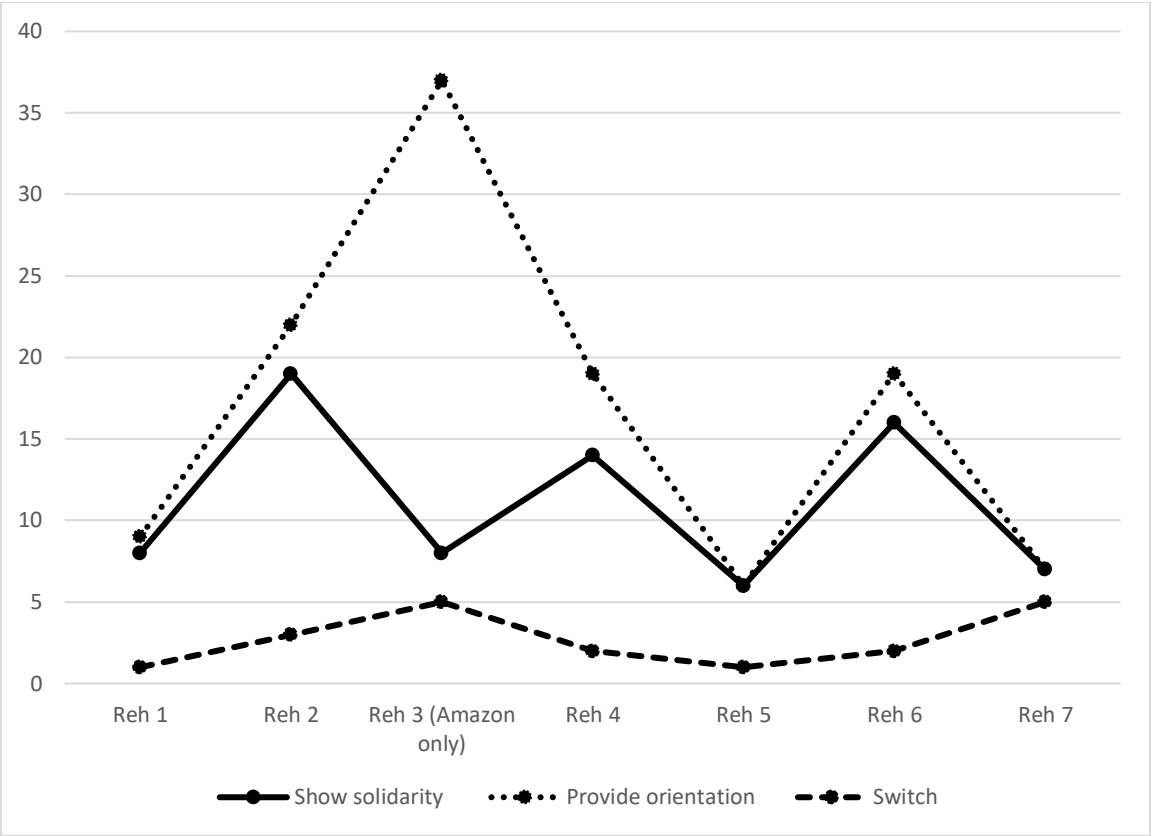

Figure 3. Utterances by both musicians *showing solidarity*, *providing orientation* and referring to *switch* in each rehearsal