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Composing for musical theatre:
approaches to interdisciplinary collaboration

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates how a composer negotiates the transition from previous solo working practices into an interdisciplinary setting, through the creation of four original works of musical theatre. Experiences of composing within three contrasting collaborative models are considered within a framework of socio-psychological, organisational and creative collaboration theory, and cross-referenced with interview evidence from contemporary musical theatre composers. A five-stage process in the development of a collaborative musical theatre project is presented, illustrating key factors influencing each phase.

The musical theatre environment is shown to be an ideal setting for both research into collaborative creativity, and the nurturing of collaborative skill. By consciously exploiting diversity as a resource, the composer can both enrich their compositional practice and learn to collaborate more effectively. Auto-ethnographic research can further enhance this development, with the mental act of self-observation fostering a sense of self-awareness that promotes innovative approaches to the compositional process. The role of composer-researcher demands a flexibility of thought and approach that supports the duality required to effectively shift between collaborative and solo contexts, and the microcosm and macrocosm of the show.

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LIST OF ACCOMPANYING MATERIALS

Musical Theatre Works:

1. *Paperwork! The Musical* (script, band score, selected audio recordings, video highlights)
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Chapter 1 - Introduction

1.1 Background

Musical theatre is an inherently collaborative art form. By its very nature, the creation of a new musical theatre work requires the blending of several artistic disciplines, including drama, music, dance, and visual arts, and the diverse crafts of each member of the collaborative team. In *The Broadway Musical: Collaboration in Commerce and Art* (1992, p.237) Rosenburg and Harburg succinctly summarise the objective of the artists involved, noting that in musical theatre 'every specialist must develop his or her own work and merge it with the craft of several others'.

Within the wide spectrum of models of collaboration from smaller multi-tasking teams to huge commercially driven productions, parameters for creative collaborators and outcomes will vary. However, within each of these different scenarios, the composer is faced with an ongoing challenge: how to marry the intrinsically introverted nature of their craft of musical composition with the interpersonal requirements of the collaborative environment. This enigmatic aspect of the composer's role is occasionally fleetingly observed within existing perspectives on musical theatre, such as in Swain's *The Broadway Musical: A Critical and Musical Survey*: 'Musical composition is not by nature a collaborative enterprise, but in the theater it must be, and the best Broadway composers seem to have thrived on such collaboration' (2002, p.356). The mechanics of how to achieve this, and advice on how best to approach this aspect of the composer's craft, is rarely discussed. This would suggest there is a need for a more detailed inquiry into how the musical theatre composer deals with the aesthetic and pragmatic issues inherent within the collaborative process, whilst negotiating their own compositional practice.

The intention of this study is to document my journey as composer from a previously solitary practice of contemporary composition and songwriting into the interdisciplinary world of musical theatre. For any composer wanting to embark upon the task of writing for musical theatre, the idea of creating such a substantial work is a daunting one. In its purest sense a musical theatre work comprises three elements: the book (or dramatic script), music, and lyrics. This

is reflected in law in terms of the copyright of the completed work, which is generally proportioned equally[1] between book-writer, composer and lyricist. As such, in the process of developing a new musical theatre work the composer will commonly find themselves in one of three roles: composer (music only), composer/lyricist, or book-writer/composer/lyricist. Within the scope of each of these roles they will experience collaborative relationships and interactions on a variety of levels, from face-to-face conversations with performers concerning the mechanics of the music, through to responses to the more remote market and societal forces of the domain (Csikszentmihaly, 2013). This enquiry focuses on my collaborative experiences in the creation of the three artistic elements (book, music, and lyrics) and their integration into the final product: the musical. Specifically, it investigates the impact of my collaborative interactions with the core creative team (book-writer, lyricist, director, producer and choreographer) on the compositional process and product. By creating new works of musical theatre within differing models of collaboration my aim is to offer empirical perspectives of the development of my compositional craft and in turn articulate aspects of best practice for other composers seeking to explore this genre in their work. These findings may also benefit artists from other disciplines seeking to work collaboratively, particularly within an interdisciplinary environment.

1.2 Literature Review

In order to formulate a theoretical background on which to build new knowledge in this area it has been useful to examine literature from three distinct but related areas:

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[1] The proportional split recommended by The Writers' Guild of Great Britain (Anon, 2015) suggests fees are split equally (33.3%) between bookwriter, lyricist, and composer, even if one person has fulfilled more than one of these roles.

1. Composing for musical theatre (incorporating practical advice for would be composers in this field, and first-hand accounts of experienced composers)
2. The composer's role in the creative team (their common personality traits and social behaviours, and the legal implications of collaborative working)
3. Creative collaboration and skill diversity (drawing on organisational theory, in particular studies on the effect of diverse skill sets on productivity within business teams)

1.2.1 Composing for Musical Theatre

Existing insights on the 'craft' of writing music for musical theatre tends to fall within three categories of literature. The first of these is a range of pragmatic manuals for aspiring directors, book-writers and producers, with titles including *The Musical: From the Inside Out* (Citron, 1991), *Writing a Musical* (Andrews, 1997), *Writing The Broadway Musical* (Frankel, 2000), and *How Musicals Work: And How to Write Your Own* (Woolford, 2012). Chapters within these works provide practical advice for composers concerning structural placement and characteristics of song, often drawing on existing works as case studies to provide an illustrative and accessible survey of the musical conventions of musical theatre. For example, Woolford (2012) builds on Frankel's classification of the 'implements' and 'uses' of show music (2000) in his chapter on 'Song Spotting', which uses contemporary references to explain composers' approaches to dramatic uses of song. These publications offer an accessible commentary on the application of musical theory within a musical theatre context, and are consistent in their provision of a frame of reference for the aspiring musical theatre composer in their provision of guidance regarding the mechanics of the composer's process. They also raise the issue of the consideration of each song within the wider context of the musical, a consideration integral to the musical theatre genre, and key to the development of the composer's craft in this area.

Some of these volumes begin to explore the challenge of negotiating musical decisions with collaborators who may have little or no musical training

in theory or composition. For example, Andrews (1998, p.68) advises composers in this situation to use other songs as points of reference:

> Before you begin to write a number you and your collaborators must define precisely what you are trying to achieve. What sort of number is it? How does it sound? What does it do? Who is it for? Use your knowledge of existing songs to describe your intentions.

This is a practice similar to that used in the construction of 'temp tracks' in film scoring, where existing music is used to create a temporary soundtrack with the correct musical 'feel' to suit the video aspect. To be used effectively in film work this approach requires 'command of a huge selection of music' (Davis, 2000, pp.96–99) and similarly, using this approach in musical theatre pre-supposes a wide repertoire of musical material on the part of the creative team. Further discussion on how other members of a musical theatre team may influence decisions regarding musical content, and how best to approach this negotiation is limited to mentions of the inclusion of 'veto power' within contracts (Frankel, 2000, p.167), and general advice to respect the work of co-collaborators (Andrews, 1997, p.111, Woolford, 2012, p.262). However, as an overview of the art form, its components and the production process, these books provide a useful starting point for the aspiring composer or writer.

Composers seeking more technical guidance in the craft of composing for musical theatre will find this in the second area of literature relating to this subject area: more complex analyses of key musical theatre works. Titles include: *Sondheim's Broadway Musicals* (Banfield, 1993), *The Broadway Musical: A Critical and Musical Survey* (Swain, 2002), *How Sondheim Found His Sound* (Swayne, 2007), *There's a Place for Us: The Musical Theatre Works of Leonard Bernstein* (Smith, 2011). This de facto approach to considering the practice of composing for musical theatre offers a more in-depth study of musical grammar, compositional devices and techniques and their application to dramatic purposes. The deconstruction of compositional techniques provides a useful tool in attempting to de-mystify elements of compositional practice in this genre, and although limited to the key works of commonly scrutinised composers (such as Rodgers, Bernstein, Sondheim and Lloyd Webber) provides a rich methodological palette from which the aspiring musical theatre composer can draw. However, as a tool for research into the compositional

process and decision making processes of the composer, analyses of finished musical products fall short due to the inability of the researcher to ascertain the composer's conscious intentions in the musical material (Sloboda, 1986, p.102). To early career composers, studying the significant works of highly successful practitioners in the field could seem an inaccessible source of inspiration for those looking to take their first steps in this area. Sondheim's *Finishing the Hat* (2010) provides a useful balance between these two areas of literature: where his technical deconstructions of his songwriting are enhanced with reflections on the creative process of each of his works and on occasion, the impact of the collaborative nature of his craft. This is a useful reminder that it is the thought processes of the composer, not merely the score that is relevant to the study of their works as research sources, as noted by Coessens, Crispin and Douglas (2009, p.129): 'Scores exist through time as well as in the space of their materiality as instructions, whether verbal or symbolic, inscribed on the page.'

In seeking further evidence of the composer's perspectives on the crafting of musical theatre works, it is necessary to look within a third area of literature: published interviews with composers. Examples of this type of literature include composer blogs (e.g. Darren Clark's blog entry *A Composer Gets Fired – Six Months Later*, 2017), Bryer and Davison's *The Art of the American Musical: Conversations with the Creators* (2005) (which includes interviews with composers such as Flaherty, Brown, Kander, Lane, Sondheim, and Strouse), and interviews carried out for Tim Sutton's podcast series 'Voice of the Musical' (2016). Aspects relating to the lines of inquiry pertinent to this research may be drawn out from the context of wider interviews which are largely geared towards gaining a biographical and historical context of each composer's personal journey into the field of musical theatre, citing musical influences and mentors. In terms of compositional technique and process, within this range of literature discussions tend to be limited to questions of 'lyric or music first' or broader acknowledgment of significant musical or extra-musical influences in the development of the composer's voice. Even in these primary sources evidence supporting the emergence of models of collaboration is sparse, being limited to whether composers compose with collaborators 'in the room' and differing responses to the question of veto rights. On occasion composers' views on what contributes to a successful collaboration are made

more explicit such as those of composer Marcy Heisler, interviewed for online magazine *Theatre Mania*, 'I think collaboratively you never want to say a solid no. You want to not only be heard, but to hear the other person' (in Rickwald and Levitt, 2015).

These existing perspectives on composing for musical theatre, if triangulated, offer a useful starting point for investigation, and whilst highlighting the value of primary evidence, re-affirm the need for a more focused enquiry concerning the blending of the dual work environments of the musical theatre composer, and the intellectual, musical and social impact of the collaboration on the decision-making processes of the composer.

1.2.2 The Composer's Role in the Creative Team

> Over the years, I've come to embrace [the collaborative process] very reluctantly. It's hard for me to give up the control over everything I do, because at some point in any given process I feel that if everyone would just listen to me it would all be great.
> (Jason Robert Brown, in Bryer and Davison, 2005)

For composers wanting to adapt their practices to suit the musical theatre environment, it is essential to find a way of interacting with co-collaborators that is productive and positive. Personality and social skills will certainly come into play here, and research concerning the nature of the personality traits of artistic and musical individuals provides an interesting range of perspectives from which to begin investigating how this may be achieved.

Literature investigating the 'creative personality' often presents the figure of a stereotyped 'free-spirited' artist. Simonton's review of existing psychological studies into the creative personality (2000, p.153) surmises that creative people show extrovert, almost non-compliant characteristics: 'In particular, such persons are disposed to be independent, nonconformist, unconventional, even bohemian, and they are likely to have wide interests, greater openness to new experiences, a more conspicuous behavioral and cognitive flexibility, and more risk-taking boldness'. In their study into the effect of intrinsic/extrinsic motivation

on creativity[2], Prabhu et al (2008, p.54) focus on three common traits that in their view have the most empirical evidence for being present within the psychological make-up of the creative individual, openness to experience, self-efficacy, and perseverance. Their findings (again, limited to the general creative personality rather that the more specific role of musician or composer) are significant in that they suggest that a creative artist's self-belief feeds their creativity more than the motivation of external reward. This could be relevant to this investigation in that it supports the view that interpersonal interactions during the creative process may have an impact upon productivity.

Studies of the general 'creative personality' seem less applicable when compared to the few studies that have been carried out into the character of musical practitioners. Kemp's empirical studies of personality traits in musicians[3] (1996) highlight (amongst other traits) a tendency towards introversion, independence, and anxiety; qualities that do not immediately suggest an inclination for successful group endeavour, but may indicate reflective and self-analytical behaviours that could impact on the level of positive creative output. Pohjannoro's research (based on analysis of interview transcripts and composer manuscripts, sketches and score versions) supports this view, with her observations on the practices and decision making of a solo contemporary composer noting instances of 'emotional awkwardness, doubt and anxiety' (2014, p.180). This suggests the image of the composer as a solo artist, working in isolation from others, an image that could not be more opposed to Simonton's gregarious, risk-taking artist. However, it could also suggest a driver for collaborative working; by including others in their creative process composers have a means of gaining affirmation to support their decision-making. In her book *Quiet: The Power of Introverts in a World That Can't Stop Talking,* Cain (2013, p.209) puts forward an alternative view, that whilst some artists are essentially introverted by nature, they 'are capable of acting like extroverts for the sake of work they consider important, people they love, or anything they value highly.' Accepting that the composer is by nature a

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[2] This study surveyed 124 undergraduate management students using 50 questions based on the What Kind of Person Are You? (WKOPAY) inventory, developed by Khatena & Torrence, (1977).

[3] Kemp's book *The Musical Temperament: Psychology and Personality of Musicians* (1996) reviews existing research on personality theory and discusses the impact of related personality traits on musicianship.

solitary animal, this would also support the notion that intrinsic motivation is key. It may also suggest that collaborative skills can be acquired and refined, an assertion highly significant to this study. More important then, would be an understanding of the conditions under which the composer is likely to make a positive transition from introverted practices to the social demands of a collaborative project.

Paul Roe's phenomenological study of collaborative composition (focusing on meeting transcripts and communications, sketches, scores and reflections on five composer-performer partnerships) reinforces the idea of the need for dual behaviours by asserting that successful composer collaborations require a mixture of 'interpersonal and intrapersonal intelligence' (2007, p.207). He suggests that a productive collaborative relationship is dependent on 'the importance of combining both of these introvert and extrovert aptitudes.' He discusses how traits such as social awareness, openness and integrity are instrumental in building a relationship in which creative risks are taken. Simonton (2000, p.153) acknowledges a causal relationship between the interpersonal experience of collaborating artists and levels of creativity, in particular in the impact of various motivational elements on the generation of ideas: 'The particular nature of the interpersonal expectations may then serve to either enhance or inhibit the amount of creativity shown by the individual.'

This seemingly contradictory range of social behaviours exhibited by the composer could be explained by Nash's article *Challenge and Response in the American Composer's Career* (1955). In a range of case studies, Nash examines the social behaviours of composers and suggests that professional success is linked to 'role versatility'; i.e. the fact that composers tend to have multi-faceted working lives (many also working as educators, musical directors and conductors alongside composing). This is an assertion that is reinforced in interviews with current composers, who (even at the highest level) tend to combine their compositional practice with various other collaborative working environments such as teaching, performing, conducting and examining. In combination with Cain's view (above) I would argue that arguments surrounding the introvert/extrovert nature of the composer are of less importance to this study than their ability to transfer their skills successfully between different working environments.

Regardless of personality type or the ability of the composer to function effectively within a team situation, any creative collaboration is further complicated by the complexities of negotiating a working relationship with other artistic personalities. Citron's frank observation highlights the volatility of the creative temperament: 'What should be understood about collaboration is the sensitivity of the working relationship. Artists are touchy people who have to put their own egos aside for a collaboration' (1991, p.117). In this study I will contend that not only is the musical composer's ability to collaborate with others dependent on their ability to adapt between independent and collaborative working situations, but that the field of musical theatre provides a unique environment within which these skills can be honed, and in turn aid the creative process. By learning to manage a complex set of microcosmic parameters (the creation of a range of individual songs) within the macrocosmic 'world of the show', the composer can learn to step in and out of a complex hierarchy of need, allowing them to consider the preferences of their own working practices within the aesthetic and pragmatic requirements of the complete work and the demands of the creative team.

1.2.3 Creative Collaboration and Skill Diversity

Once we have acknowledged the social and musical complexities associated with composing for new musical theatre, the issue of *why* a composer would choose to operate within this multi-disciplinary field becomes more urgent. Bennett's studies in collaborative songwriting consider the wider rewards afforded by collaborative working in the field of music. He asserts that there are both artistic and commercial drivers influencing songwriters' willingness to work together, believing 'many songwriters have taken the decision that the benefits of collaboration outweigh the loss of income – partly because they believe that they will write a better song in this environment' (2011, p.11). By nature, musical theatre is also a commercially driven art form with its own issues of marketability and financial viability. As highlighted by Rosenberg and Harburg: 'Its goal is to merge corporate business authority in real estate and theatre with a cooperative collectivity of artists and artisans to produce a unique product, a musical show' (1992, p.83). Financial limitations

are also the largest barrier to new musical theatre works reaching the first stages of production (Lundskaer-Nielsen, 2013, p.160). The level of economic support a project receives whilst in development will undoubtedly influence relationships between team members, with more commercial settings having the formality of contractual agreements, remunerative rewards and established deadlines. However, financial considerations may also limit the amount of time a composer spends on a project, particularly where they are working in other freelance roles: a survey commissioned by the Musicians Union suggested that only 43% of a portfolio musician's income is derived from composing (DHA Communications, 2012, p.10). Situations where artists are donating time/work in kind for the good of the project may allow for greater artistic freedom and flexibility but also blur lines of responsibility and levels of commitment.

In musical theatre, where by definition many disciplines are required to complete the creation of the work, it is easy to accept the necessity of the functional requirements of the creative team and overlook the less tangible rewards offered by working with other practitioners. Musician David Byrne draws attention to the aesthetic merits of collaboration as a positive resource for the artist, asserting that collaboration is both vital and an 'aid to creativity' (2013, p.189). Playwright and songwriter Caridad Svich (also an advocator of collaborative ways of working) cites the excitement and productivity gained from looking at one's work 'from another point of view' (2003, p.44), and the value of remaining free of any assumption whilst in working a collaborative state (2003, p.183). One of the great advocates of collaboration in creative works of all disciplines, Vera John-Steiner, highlights the advantages of collaborative ways of working and its complementary effect on the personal development of the artist (2006, p.204). Case studies cited in John-Steiner's research suggest that many artists are propelled to achieve and develop their own levels of craftsmanship through the encouragement and intellectual/emotional support provided by a partnership or collaborative environment. Whilst also acknowledging the 'fragility' of the collaborative environment, these studies point towards the existence of significant advantages of pooling a diverse range of skill sets within a collaborative group. If this viewpoint is applied to the field of musical theatre, the combination of skills offered by the multidisciplinary creative team should prove a productive and complementary model for creative

endeavour. John-Steiner also considers the notions of trust, respect and confidence within the creative team; commodities which (although difficult to measure) are pertinent to current investigations into composers' collaborative practices in that these have a direct influence on their intuitive and reflective decision-making processes.

Of course, not all experiences of collaborative working are agreeable, and this will undoubtedly affect the artist's view of both their process and output. Hayden and Windsor's studies in the area of art music composition investigate the relationship between the positive or negative experience of the collaborative process and the quality of the outcome; in this case, the musical work. Although their findings do not prove any degree of causality between the two, they do support the importance of establishing a shared aesthetic: 'Incompatible aesthetics can impede successful collaboration by promoting conflicts in working methods and artistic aim' (2007, p.38). This belief transfers well to the world of the musical, where arguably the increased number of collaborators compounds the importance of a common goal or vision to aid a congruent creative process. Hayden and Windsor's work concludes with a direct challenge to John-Steiner's belief in the advantages of 'the confluence of diverse fields of endeavour' (2006, p.9) by the suggestion of the existence of 'incompatible differences' caused by the 'pre-existing cultural boundaries that define artistic disciplines' (2007, p.39); a viewpoint that would seemingly go against the many successful collaborations of this type that have produced not only great works of musical theatre but other multi-disciplinary creative projects. Further investigation into the existence of innate incompatibilities between artistic disciplines would benefit those embarking upon projects of this nature; do such cultural incompatibilities exist? Are there ways of approaching multi-disciplinary collaborations that minimise the negative impact of such differences?

In an attempt to conciliate the opposing views of the value of the diversification of skill sets within the interdisciplinary creative team, it is also useful to explore other studies of group behaviour, outside of the field of arts. Milliken and Martin's study into organisational groups acknowledged both the advantages and disadvantages of mixed skill sets within collaborative groups: 'Diversity, thus, appears to be a double edged sword, increasing the opportunity for creativity as well as the likelihood that group members will be dissatisfied

and fail to identify with the group' (1996, p.403). More recent studies have taken this research further, distinguishing between different types of diversity (Bunderson and Sutcliffe, 2002; Harrison et al., 2002; Milliken and Martins, 1996) and attempting to identify factors supporting a team's development from divergent to convergent thinking (Levine and Moreland, 2004; Harvey, 2014). Harvey (2013, 2014) argues that higher levels of convergent thinking (or the ability to generate and develop ideas as a group) can be found within multidisciplinary teams, and within a commercial setting groups of this nature can be used as a positive resource for strategic approaches to problem solving. She suggests that the less closely related the specialities of the team members, the more innovative the creative outcomes are likely to be. Her research highlights the importance of 'enacting ideas' within the creative process as an aid to reaching synthesis – within a musical theatre environment this could usefully relate to the sharing of creative ideas, demonstration of sample artistic material, and workshopping of scenes/songs. To allow this to take place, team interaction is vital and in turn facilitates the shared understanding not only of the common goal or problem, but also the perspectives of others.

Other organisational theorists have focused on identifying different aspects of effective professional behaviour within a team situation, and although not composer-focused are useful in the analysis of composers' experiences. For example, recent management theory shows an increased focus on enabling businesses to become 'learning organisations', with an emphasis on reflective practices to aid the development of behaviours conducive to collaborative working (Jackson, 1996; Mannix & Neale, 2005; Senge, 2006; Marquardt, 2011). Adler and Chen (2011) identify certain conditions that they believe must be present for a collaborative effort to be successful, including the presence of individualistic and collectivist values, and intrinsic and extrinsic motivation. Within the musical theatre field this could be applied to the balancing of a composer's individual creative objectives (the satisfaction gained by the act of creating new material) with the reward and recognition afforded by meeting deadlines and completing the project (and additionally any kudos generated by the production reaching the public domain).

Further researchers cite arguments for the equal status of participants (Harvey, 2014; Yagi, 2015) and open channels of communication (Sawyer, 2008). The importance of the presence of these values and ways of working are affirmed within primary evidence from composers. However, in reality even if these circumstances are met, within a highly charged artistic scenario it is inevitable that conflict will occur, and in turn have an impact on the creative process. Perspectives on the impact of conflict on both the artistic practices of the creative team and the finished work are varied, within both creative and other organisational settings. Where outcomes are measurable (i.e. a show has a successful run or is cancelled) there are stronger arguments that the experience of the collaborative process has directly impacted on the product (Ullom, 2010)[4]. It is possible to draw value from the experiences and advice of acknowledged 'experts' on successful collaboration within related artistic fields such as Harp and Kornbluth's accounts of various collaborative dance projects (2013), or Zollo's interviews with songwriters (2003), however evidence from musical theatre composers on the negotiation of conflict within the collaborative team is sparse.

Rosenburg and Harburg (1992) offer a more focused enquiry concerning the collaborative nature of the genre of musical theatre, in their discussions concerning the effects of conflict and shifting authority within the musical theatre environment. Whilst their conclusions are well considered, drawing from the reflections of industry professionals, their findings raise more questions than they answer. The perspectives of a few composers are discussed, if only on a superficial level, however the gloomy prognosis of 'even successful partnerships will eventually fail' undermines any attempt to identify key factors required for a successful collaboration. For the composer entering into a new musical theatre collaboration, a pragmatic and informed insight into how such compromises and solutions are achievable both on a compositional and collaborative level remains elusive, and a key driver for this study.

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[4] This article includes a case study of the pop artist Prince's involvement and reluctance to collaborate in the production of the musical *Come.*

1.3 Approach and Methodology

Through a series of practical projects, I will investigate the impact of collaborative approaches to music-making by identifying how my own compositional process is reformed to fit the demands of various models of collaboration. Beginning this study as a white British mother of three in my late thirties, with a substantial formal musical education[5] and working as a lecturer in further and higher education, I will document the development of my creative practice from the viewpoint of artist-researcher. Both compositional and collaborative processes will be examined under the framework of relevant psychological, creative and organisational theory in order to outline elements of best practice for other composers seeking to move into this area. The practical outputs will take the form of the following works of new musical theatre:

***Paperwork! The Musical (2012)* (music and lyrics)** - A two-act musical originally written for FE performing arts students, with book by Rosamund Walton. Reworked in 2015 with a grant from Arts Council England, and performed as Paperwork! The Physical Musical at the Jerwood DanceHouse, Ipswich.

***The Witchfinder Project* (2013) (book, music and lyrics)** - A one act multi-disciplinary, immersive, site specific piece devised in collaboration with Sarah Alexander; choreographer, Emile Warnes; graphic novelist, and John Rixon; VJ. Again, this project was supported by funding from Arts Council England.

***Moulin Blue* (2014) (music and lyrics)** - A two woman, one act collaboration with performer and writer Jasmine Abineri. A scratch workshop performance was staged in December 2014 with a view to redeveloping the work for touring purposes.

***Whispers of the Heart* (2014) (music only)** - A two act, four-hander rock musical with book and lyrics by Canadian writer Gary Swartz. Collaboration took place via video call, email and electronic file exchange between the UK and Canada.

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[5] Including a BA Hons Degree in Music and Philosophy, majoring in alto Saxophone performance, and an MA in Music Composition.

Rather than focus on my experience in each of the various roles of composer, composer-lyricist, and composer-lyricist-bookwriter[6], my aim is to document the challenges and opportunities offered by the different collaborative models associated with the projects, and discuss the impact of these on my personal compositional practice. The models of collaboration investigated and documented in chapters 2-5 are as follows:

Chapter 2: Composer as co-writer (*Paperwork!, Moulin Blue*). This chapter will examine the initial shift from solo composer/songwriter producing singular works to producing larger scale musical theatre works as part of a co-writing partnership. Early experiences of my first ventures into both musical theatre composition and collaborative projects will be compared to later efforts, focusing on aspects of composer personality, motivation, and factors aiding the transition.

Chapter 3: Composer as a member of a multi-disciplinary team (*The Witchfinder Project*). Here the challenges and opportunities of working within a larger diverse team will be investigated within the framework of current organisational and management theory. The chapter will also consider the impact of perceived cultural differences between artistic disciplines, and the sudden expansion of project scope due to an influx of funding.

Chapter 4: Composer as remote collaborator (*Whispers of The Heart*). This project will explore the merits of a remote digital collaboration. Discussions to include the impact of status on composer voice, negotiation of a common musical language and aesthetic, and the opportunities and challenges presented by using digital discourse as a compositional and research tool.

Underpinning this research is the key question: How does a composer negotiate their craft of writing music (and lyrics) within the wider collaborative environment of a multidisciplinary team? This research does not seek to

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[6] This factor was in fact a fortuitous outcome of the projects that presented themselves during this period.

investigate socioeconomic factors, ethnicity or gender, but focus on issues of craft, and the impact of the collaborative environment on the decision-making processes, and resulting artistic output, of the composer. Similarly, notions of 'quality' will not be examined further than documenting aesthetic and process changes that occur as a result of each collaboration. In particular I will be seeking to find out:

- What challenges and opportunities are offered by working within a multi-disciplinary artistic setting?
- What qualities, values and behaviours aid the composer's transition into a collaborative environment?
- What changes to compositional process and product occur as a result of working within a collaborative context?

Any methodological approach adopted for this study must satisfy the challenges presented by two core areas of research: the compositional process and collaboration. Whilst highlighting the academic, artistic and pedagogical value of investigation in these topics, previous researchers in these areas have been faced with a multitude of limitations that should be considered and addressed within this research design. Methodologies applied in the study of the creative processes utilised by composers have historically been shaped by Soloboda's acknowledgement of the problems associated with this subject in his work *The Musical Mind: the cognitive psychology of music* (1986). Sloboda puts forward four possible methods of investigation of composer process: examination of manuscript, interview, observation of the compositional act, and observation of improvisatory performance. After discounting the value of critical analysis of the musical score as a useful tool, he also outlines the dependency of the latter methods on the composers' willingness to be scrutinised, citing the rarity of their co-operation as a significant barrier to interview and observation as reliable means of research (1986, p.103). Herein lies the problem faced by any researcher attempting to de-mystify the process of creating an artwork of any discipline. The reluctance to examine one's artistic practice in any detail is understandable; it is brave enough to present the results of an endeavour to an audience or consumer, without having to explain the process of its formation. As noted by Coessens, Crispin and Douglas (2009, p.158): 'Retracing the

trajectory of artistic creation can be disturbing, allowing a public glare into a private world; for some artists, it could potentially mean translating their inner doubts and frustrations, the personal inquiries, into a problematized, scrutinized sphere.'

Alternative methods to be considered for use in studies of this nature include Collins' self-study (2007) in which he uses 'verbal protocol analysis'. Here a recorded verbal commentary of his decision-making processes was cross-referenced with self-interview, and analysis of digital evidence such as periodically saved files from computer software used in the composition process. This approach presents its own practical and technical issues that will undoubtedly interrupt the creative 'flow' of the compositional process. Research by Pohjannoro (2014) attempts to minimise real-time disruption of the composer's process by using a 'stimulated recall method' (SRM); conducting focused interviews soon after (but not during) the event. She claims this method is 'one of few methods of tracing the subject's thinking, without disturbing the actual thinking process' (2014, p.169). This approach certainly deserves consideration as a timely and less invasive way of obtaining composer testimony. It also allows the researcher to direct their interrogation to matters pertinent to the specific lines of inquiry, saving the need to sift through the large volumes of data that might be collected, for example, using general video or audio recordings. Triangulation with other evidence such as finished scores and composer notes and sketches would also aid this process and act as prompts for discussion.

The argument for a mixed-method approach is supported by Roels (2016) who argues that existing studies into the composer's process have yielded different results due to the variance in musical genre, conceptual framework or data collection methods used. He suggests the need for a 'naturalistic and empirical approach' (2016, p.416) using a fit-for-purpose blend of research methods. Roels' own research into the compositional processes of eight composers analyses a variety of sketches, diagrams and digital evidence alongside interview and completed score, focusing on four defined compositional activities: planning, exploring, writing and rewriting. His findings include an assertion for the need for further investigation of individual/group projects of different musical genres in real world settings (2016, p.432).

Similarly, in his practice-led investigation into the composer-performer collaborative relationship, Roe (2007, p.214) recommends an eclectic 'mixed-methodology' research design, with interview being a vital tool in the analysis of his multi-case study research: 'I believe the methodological approach chosen gave sufficient latitude to explore a complex phenomenon through which it was possible to carry out the research without the method intruding on the process.'

It could be argued that the act of research, regardless of methods used, will have an impact on any creative process and output that is being subjected to scrutiny. The validity of findings of researchers studying collaboration will be impacted by the intrusive nature of observation as a method of research and the dangers of over-reliance on methods such as discourse analysis or interview as a source of evidence (John-Steiner, Weber and Minnis, 1998; Rossmanith, 2009). One tactic that may counter the limitations of being an outside observer of artistic and collaborative practice is to adopt the stance of researcher-practitioner. Examining an artistic practice from the perspective of participant allows the researcher to offer greater validity to their findings, as observed by Burke and Onsman (2017, p.7): 'A heuristic approach affords legitimacy to the analysis of the situated, tacit knowledge that is revealed and articulated through experimentation and interrogation within the artistic process as well as in the art created.' Collins (2007), Newman (2008), Bennett (2014), have taken this practice-based approach to researching the composer's processes, with Bennett's work (within the context of contemporary songwriting) also addressing the implications of collaborative working. Employing reflexive practices as composer-researcher offers opportunities not only to develop our understanding of the conscious and sub-conscious cognitive processes involved, but also to improve our craft. As Newman (2008, p.5) reflects:

> The rewards of conducting a self-study in music composition seem valuable for a composer: general insight and learning about specific psychological workings and compositional methods in one's own practice, or awareness of ways of working that could be streamlined or improved.

In this way, I would argue that the rewards offered by a composer-as-researcher approach outweigh its objectivity-based limitations. As summarised by Rossmanith (2009, p.7) in her studies of collaborative theatre: 'As

researchers we want to get at the (less conscious) talk embedded in those practices, as well as to encounter those practices first hand.'

With this in mind, the methodology developed for this research project seeks to align my own compositional practice and auto-ethnographical reflections within a theoretical framework of creativity, socio-psychological and organisational perspectives. As such, I propose a mixed-method approach to this study, using methods including:

- Case studies of musical theatre works developed using three contrasting models of collaboration
- Linear event analysis of my composition process recorded via self-administered stimulated recall method (following the completion of each individual song)
- Deconstruction of completed lyrical and musical content of own writing
- Interviews with co-collaborators and other composers
- Discourse analysis (email based)

Methods will be selected to suit the needs of each case study with the aim of providing an insight into the composer's perspective of the application of their craft within the field of musical theatre. Due to the phenomenological nature of this investigation, a key aspect of the presentation of findings is the researcher's narrative voice. As researcher, observer and participant a reflective approach has been taken which allows for accurate and personalised reporting of findings. To counteract the limitations of this approach, this is interspersed with relevant theoretical discussion and interviews with composers currently working in the UK musical theatre industry. By increasing the level of scrutiny of my own practice and continuing to investigate the works of others in the field it is hoped that findings will inform the work of other composers seeking to follow best practice in the production of new and exciting works of musical theatre.

Chapter 2 - The composer as co-writer

2.1 Introduction

'Collaboration is a lot like swimming; you're not going to learn much until you get into the water.'   (Carter, 1990, p.25)

This chapter will investigate the composer's transition from solitary songwriter to collaborative musical theatre composer. Through documenting my experiences of composing within two co-writing case studies, the modification of my compositional practice will be examined within a framework of theoretical perspectives on creative collaboration, and accounts of other composers' working preferences.

John Steiner (2006), Sawyer (2008) and Tharp and Kornbluth (2013) discuss the merits of collaborative working, highlighting its ability to enhance levels of creativity and innovation. John-Steiner, in particular, sees collaboration as an environment within which to nurture artistic skill: 'By joining with others we accept their gift of confidence, and through interdependence, we achieve competence and connection' (2006, p.204). Bennett (2014, p.129) outlines six types of motivation propelling songwriters into collaborative arrangements, of which pragmatic motivation is most cited within commercial songwriting case studies. This classification transfers well to the field of musical theatre, where there are also significant developmental, creative and commercial drivers for a composer to join with others in the creation of new work. Citron (1991, pp.111-112) and Woolford (2012, p.7) argue that whilst there have been a few successful bookwriter/composer/lyricists[7], collaborative arrangements are much more common. Due to the complexity and scale of the task, both recommend beginner musical theatre writers to involve collaborators rather than attempt solo projects.

Although there are advantages of working with others to create a new musical, existing research into the personality traits of the composer suggests that embarking upon a collaborative endeavour may not be an instinctive step. Kemp's view of the composer is of someone 'individualistic' with 'a capacity for

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[7] Well-known bookwriter/composer/lyricists include Lional Bart – *Oliver*, Sandy Wilson – *The Boyfriend*, Lin-Manual Miranda - *21 Chump St*, *Hamilton*, Meredith Wilson – *The Music Man*, Jonathan Larson – *Rent*.

solitude' (1996, p.216), hardly traits that one would associate with successful function within the highly collaborative field of musical theatre. The composer's need for a solitary working space in which to work is supported in anecdotal evidence gathered both as part of this study, and in the wider field. When interviewed in the early stages of this research, composers Steve Brown (2012), Francis Goodhand (2012) and Laura Tisdall (2012) indicated a preference for working alone when composing. Brown expresses the difficulties of this working environment: 'You work in isolation, no encouragement, no laughter, nothing - just a vain hope that what you are doing is meaningful or entertaining or quality etc.' (2012a). Composer Stephen Schwartz (in Giere, 2008, p.443) also describes a solitary writing situation with piano and 'pacing space' within which he likes to compose songs, and similarly Stephen Sondheim (in Citron, 1991, p.118) expresses the negative impact the presence of others has on his working practices: 'I find it difficult to work with anyone about'. Yet Brown, Swartz and Sondheim have each enjoyed successful collaborative writing relationships, highlighting that co-presence during the compositional process is not inherent in the definition of collaboration, and also implying that a preference for personal space during the writing process need not hinder the development of successful collaborative working relationships.

Accounts of composer's experiences of working collaboratively suggest that the role requires a delicate balance of flexibility of approach, and conviction that the collaboration will ensure a productive and enjoyable process. George Stiles and Anthony Drewe (known for their very successful and long-standing writing partnership) describe a fluid working practice where the composer (Stiles) will compose musical material away from the lyricist (Drewe), with the pair coming together periodically to share material and problem solve (2012). They stress the changeable nature of their working practices (an iterative approach where sometimes a lyric is written first, other times a fully formed melody and accompaniment), and discuss the variety of working preferences that occur within the wider creative team 'everyone we work with will work differently'. This indicates that it may be possible for a composer to alter their preferred working practices for the greater good of a collaborative project, and the reward this may bring. However, Stiles (2012) highlights the importance of weighing up the potential of a collaborative relationship in its early stages: 'I

think you very quickly establish if you have a shared vision, and if whatever working practices people have are a pleasure rather than a challenge.'

Little (2011) explains the abilities of individuals to act against their nature for a wider purpose by proposing a *free trait theory*, where a person may choose to display behaviours that are paradoxically out of character, if they are required to complete a task they care deeply about.

> Free traits emerge when individuals enact sociogenic scripts to advance idiogenic aims, irrespective of the person's biogenic dispositions. A biogenic introvert acting in an extraverted manner so as to advance a core project of 'keeping our clients happy' is engaging in free-traited behavior. (Little, 2011)

Little believes that within a supported environment, introverts are able to act like extroverts in order to contribute to work they value. He argues that as long as it has no adverse psychological effects, going against innate and instinctive behaviour can also have developmental value, helping build skills in counter-intuitive areas and in turn enhancing professional capabilities. Yet following Little's free trait theory it could equally be argued that a composer may be intrinsically extrovert and uncharacteristically isolate themselves from social interactions in order to complete the musical construction of a piece they are working on. In their study comparing personality traits of composers to those 'generally associated with creativity', Garrido et al (2013) found that composers were more likely to display the extroverted tendencies of assertiveness and enthusiasm. Their findings did however concede that introversion was evident 'at discernable levels of creativity' (2013, p.310). Zaimont (2007, p.168) asserts that the idea of the composer as a solitary individual is now out of date:

> Composers are highly imaginative folks. But one thing we're not any longer – if we ever were - is someone who most of the time is squirreled away in a garret charting the newest of new notes in utter isolation. True - that's part of how we do what we do. And it's the part of the process I myself like a whole lot!

Whilst alluding to a preference for lone working, Zaimont goes on to argue that in a contemporary context, composers regularly take on other roles

of producer, conductor and performer, and are often required to be 'the public face of music' (2007, p.168).

This discussion suggests at the very least that the role of the composer within a collaborative writing arrangement will involve aspects of duality, whether in terms of a continually fluctuating physical environment, or moving between the social extremes of lone-working and collaborative discussion. This duality may extend into the personality traits of the composer. Roe's study of collaborative composition (focusing on composer-performer partnerships in contemporary music) draws attention to the need for a mixture of 'interpersonal and intrapersonal intelligence' and suggests that a productive collaborative relationship is dependent on 'the importance of combining both of these introvert and extrovert aptitudes' (2007, p.207). He also considers how qualities such as social awareness, openness and integrity are instrumental in building a relationship in which creative risks are taken. This suggests that regardless of personality 'type' it is possible to adapt solitary working practices for collaborative tasks, or at least effectively navigate between two diverse environments. It may also imply that there are distinct differences in the practice of creating an artistic work in a self-contained setting and that of a collective endeavour. Writer Susan Yankowitz (in Svich, 2003, p.133) describes the difference between the solitary act of writing a novel and participation in the creation of a collaborative theatre work as 'two different kinds of breathing: one, within the familiar privacy of home and mind: the other, outdoors, where air is always a surprise, sometimes an assault, sometimes pure oxygen for the imagination'. She acknowledges that working with other artists such as composers has enriched her writing practice in general. A similar duality experienced by improvising musicians is explored by Haywood (in Burke and Onsman, 2017, p.130) : 'We spend our days in the practice room alone, developing our understanding of our approach to improvisation in isolation, yet we must often perform in an ensemble context.' Haywood defines four key elements that are fundamental to successful navigation between the 'practice room self' and the 'performer': Music Materials, Visual and Aural Awareness, Trust and Respect and Intuition.

One of these elements, 'Trust and Respect' is of particular relevance to this inquiry, and indeed could be applicable to any artistic discipline where the

artist is required to make the transition between solo and collaborative practices. Haywood believes that in an ensemble situation, trust is vital to both the development of the improvisatory musician's skill and the quality of collaborative output, stating: 'An environment that supports a genuine feeling of trust, devoid of judgement and recrimination, is essential to successful outcomes in terms of performance' (2017, p.136). This would again also support the view that developing artistic practices in collaborative settings is advantageous to the personal and professional development of the artist.

This evidence points towards an image of the musical theatre composer as an adaptable individual, able to navigate between contrasting physical and social environments in order to practice their craft. The question remains, how does Kemp's 'individualistic' practitioner (1996) make this seemingly uncharacteristic shift, and what impact does this have on their compositional process and product? To this end, this chapter seeks to document the adaptation of my own craft from a previously solitary approach to songwriting and contemporary composition to the integrative practices of writing for musical theatre. To support this transition a simple model of collaboration will be implemented, keeping the number of collaborators to a minimum; i.e. a co-writer and myself. This model offers the 'supportive' environment suggested by Little (2011) as being fundamental to 'free-trait' behaviour, whilst remaining manageable both in terms of output and interpersonal interaction. For the purposes of research, this approach will also provide a practicable case study in the observation of my development in this field. In particular, it will compare my previous solo compositional process to that applied in the co-writing model, identifying:

- Modification of the creative process (approach to composing and decision making)
- Key factors that impact the development of the collaborative relationship and compositional product

Following an auto-ethnographic approach as recommended by other researcher-composers (Newman, 2008; Bennett, 2014), my compositional notes and sketches will be cross-referenced with retrospective self-interview

material in order to document my decision-making processes, and the impact of the co-writing partnership. Interviews with co-writers will be used to draw out specific behaviours or qualities that influence my transition between the two creative environments.

2.2 *Paperwork! The Musical* – a case study in co-writing for FE musical theatre students

In September 2012, colleague and professional soprano Rosamund Walton proposed that I co-write a musical with her. Presently working as a lecturer in musical theatre within further education, Walton had several years' experience in the UK as performer and musical director within this field. She had also previously written book, music and lyrics for her own musical theatre work, *The Soldiers Tale*. Within our working relationship I was to assume the role of composer-lyricist, with Walton acting as bookwriter and dramaturg. Seeking a friendly musical theatre collaborative model within which to begin applying my song writing and composition skills, her initial idea for the project (a vignette-style one act musical showcasing the skills of a cohort of college students) provided an informal and unthreatening setting in which to begin this transition.

Just as trust is vital to the successful transference of improvisatory skills into the ensemble environment (Haywood, 2017), it is fundamental to those embarking on a relationship with a new collaborator. Indeed, the fact that Walton had enough confidence in my abilities to commission a bespoke piece for this significant purpose in her professional life instilled a positive foundation on which to build. In turn, I trusted her to guide me through the process and offer honest and direct feedback on my work. This reciprocal respect was important from the outset, as Walton (2016) explains:

> Trust and confidence were absolutely vital in the writing relationship. I had to have confidence that the composer would be able to produce the quantity of songs needed and for them all to be of an extremely high standard. Amy had to trust that my suggestions of any alterations were going to work and were never meant or taken as a criticism.

The importance of confidence as a commodity is also supported by Dobson's observations of student composers working alongside others in a multi-disciplinary creative setting (2012). Her findings draw attention to the value of confidence as an asset that can be nurtured within a positive collaborative environment and in turn, fed back into personal practice promoting positive outcomes (2012, p.307). Although technically not a student, in a sense I was learning a new aspect of my craft, and confidence would play a significant part in this.

Cohen and Rosenhaus (2006, p.270) claim that certain musicals have 'failed, at least in part, because the creators were reluctant to criticize each other's work'. The personal history between Walton and myself proved a valuable asset contributing to our strong foundation. Knowledge of each other's respective skill sets, in addition to a sense of mutual trust, eased many aspects of our working relationship from technical musical decisions (such as choice of key, complexity of harmonies) to an ability to give and receive criticism. Consequently, and somewhat surprisingly on my part, my co-writer's input proved not only beneficial but empowering. As musical theatre composer Noel Katz observes 'When I write alone, I have no input from anybody; I can flounder because there's nobody reacting to my ideas' (in Donald, 2016).

Although I would not classify myself as an 'introvert', until this point my compositional practices could definitely have been described as introverted. In previous songwriting efforts I had worked completely alone until each song was complete, only gaining an evaluative response when the material was shared with band or ensemble members, or performed to an audience. Within this co-writing arrangement I was able to actively seek Walton's feedback on a regular basis. Our process emerged effortlessly but did require a leap of faith in my part in the initial stages – perhaps evidence of Little's *free trait theory* (2011). I would work on each song alone, emailing a score to Walton once it was complete. In these early stages I found the prospect of having my work critiqued somewhat uncomfortable, however recognised it was necessary both for the good of the project, and my own professional development. In this initial creative dialogue, Walton would try the material herself and make suggestions for alterations as required. As Walton (2016) states: 'The process was incredibly fluid, and as we were in constant contact during the initial writing and later rehearsal period, we

could build in a huge amount of flexibility.' As the work progressed, my initial need for external or internal affirmation diminished, and the act of sharing my compositional product became both inherent in and essential to my process. This resulting increase in confidence provided me with an incrementally greater sense of autonomy, creativity and satisfaction in the outcome.

Aside from taking advantage of the periodic feedback presented by working with a co-writer, another alteration to my usual songwriting practice was to be set a series of deadlines (for example all large-scale chorus numbers had to be completed by a particular date in the term due to the time it would take to choreograph them). I had rarely worked to demanding external deadlines before and found the pressure of this enormous. Due to this I made a radical change to my usual practice of only writing new pieces from scratch, to unearthing old songs to re-work. In total six songs were re-used, a process that was pleasing in that it brought new life to previously discarded musical ideas, but also presented unique challenges. Trying to block out memories of old lyrics whilst creating new ones was much more time consuming than writing from scratch, as illustrated in composer notes for the song 'Queen Maxine'[8] which show agonising crossings out (rejection) and plentiful permutations of rhymes. Whilst this did not necessarily present problems in terms of the success of musical outputs, it did raise issues of subjectivity, as it was difficult for me to discard previous incarnations of the song in my own assessment of its quality. An external perspective, such as that of my co-writer, proved invaluable here. As the project went on, deadlines became less of a pressure and more of a motivating force, encouraging the creative process to become more efficient, and capitalising on opportunities for creative feedback and input from Walton.

Another significant challenge to my skills as composer was that the style and complexity of the musical material was directly determined by the aptitude of the cast, who ranged from very competent and trained singers, to the lesser able. In order to create bespoke musical ideas to fit their competencies and provide each with solo and ensemble opportunities, it was necessary to interact with them to try out musical material. This again challenged my previous tendencies towards lone-working, strengthening arguments towards the diametric nature of the musical theatre composer's role. In this sense solitary

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[8] See Appendix 2.1 Composer Notes – *Paperwork! The Musical* pp. 75-76

practices could be viewed as the aforementioned 'home' environment cited by Yankowitz (in Svich, 2003, p.133) and sessions with the student performers my 'outside' proving 'oxygen for the imagination'. My process traversing these two environments evolved thus: I would compose initial ideas for songs alone, make initial revisions based on feedback from Walton and then bring them to rehearsals where cast members would try them out. Final revisions would then be made based on the results of the workshop. Composer's notes record multiple instances where musical material was reshaped as part of this process, as in the case of the show's opening number 'Paperwork':

> Sometimes difficult for cast to know when to come in so piano part could be altered to make this easier. Also, the texture of accompaniment varied in places. Cast picked this up surprisingly quickly. Last bar "Paperwork!" altered for phrase to begin after first beat for directional purposes.[9]

Being able to workshop songs within the rehearsal process allowed me to refine musical material not only to suit the performers but also the dramatic structure of the narrative as it was being devised. This process heightened the integration the main components of the work and greatly influenced its gradual transformation from a 'song cycle' format into a 'book' musical. The continual workshopping was an incredibly valuable tool in developing my craft: having a positive impact on my levels of creativity and confidence in the quality of the musical material produced. Also, by enabling cast members to be part of the collaborative process they were able to provide input that fed directly into the shape of the work, instilling a sense of ownership that added to its integrity. As Walton (2016) summarises:

> It was hugely advantageous to have the student cast involved in so much of the creative process. We could tailor things for them specifically and be able to add or remove things immediately that came out of the rehearsal period. They brought a great energy to the project and were full of enthusiasm and ideas.

This sense of shared ownership of musical material was also a new phenomenon for me that brought with it a trade-off between partial loss of my creative control, and satisfaction in the outcome as a work particularly fit for purpose.

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[9] See Appendix 2.1 Composer Notes – *Paperwork! The Musical* pp. 86

As well as presenting an occasion to test and refine material throughout the rehearsal process, this project also provided a cost-effective way of assessing *Paperwork*'s quality as a full-length musical theatre work, without having to endure the lengthy, risky and costly business of staging a professional production. Whilst it is relatively simple to test out a new song or two at a local 'open mic' event or pub gig, even with the input of charitable performers a workshop performance of a complete musical is often outside the financial and logistical reach of creators of new musical theatre. Aside from the obvious financial advantages of being able to test new material, there are other aesthetic and emotional reasons for taking this approach. Sondheim (2010, p.82) explains the value of workshop readings during the development of a new show (in this case his 1962 work *A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Forum*):

> The rawness of this ad hoc reading, this unprotected headlong plunge into the unknown, and most of all the knowledge that there was time to fix things before going into rehearsal, gave us all a burst of energy and confidence that eventually made the show as good as it turned out to be.

Encouraged by progress made during development, *Paperwork! The Musical* expanded into a full two-act musical theatre work, achieving two public performances in 2012: one in the UK and one at Arras University, France. This in turn also provided scope for a re-working of the show as *Paperwork! The Physical Musical,* produced with the support of Arts Council England funding in 2015.

Auto-ethnographic documentation of the process of composing *Paperwork! The Musical* was kept largely through sketches, drafts, handwritten notes[10] and an on-line blog. However due to the pressure of deadlines this was often of a disorganised and sporadic nature with real-time notes taken during the composition process mainly consisting of lyrical ideas and brief notes from meetings between Walton and myself. More useful to the research process are additional recollections of the composition process retrospectively summarised after the completion of each song using a self-administered stimulated recall method. These cite musical, narrative and stylistic inspiration as well as recording feedback from rehearsal workshops with the cast and issues

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[10] See Appendix 2.1 Composer Notes – *Paperwork! The Musical* pp. 72-88

concerning musical arrangement. For example, notes taken in reference to the song 'Life on a Plate' provide a detailed record of its evolution according to various external factors:

> In rehearsal Posy felt this song was lacking 'the money note' so the melody was altered to create more of a climax in bars 74-76 and 97 - end. The song was also transposed to suit the singer's range. In performance, we ended up using flute instead of cello due to difficulties in changeover – this did lose some of the song's emotional value.[11]

It could be argued that although these synopses signpost instances where the collaborative nature of the project influenced the shaping of musical material, their content remains at a superficial level and falls short of documenting firstly my more sub-conscious compositional decisions and secondly the explicit interactions between myself and my co-writer. Retrospective interviews and informal discussions with Walton, audience members and cast go some way to affirm the objectivity of my remembrances of the process. As the first step in my development as musical theatre composer I believe this level of scrutiny, although limited, was appropriate and allowed for an easy flow of communication and creativity without presenting additional pressure or workload. To add weight to future studies of this nature a more consistent and detailed examination of composer process (through consistently recorded process-based composer notes or analysis of 'save as' digital files, discourse analysis of audio/video recordings) could be considered, whilst sympathy and sensitivity to the creative process remain prioritised.

2.3 *Moulin Blue* – a case study in co-writing a musical theatre cabaret piece

Two years on from *Paperwork* I began another co-writing project with a friend, British performer, director and writer Jasmine Abineri. Having trained at London's The Guildhall School of Music and Drama, Abineri had enjoyed a varied career in acting, directing, writing and lecturing. She was presently working on some character based stand-up comedy material, and thought that my style of songwriting would complement this. Gradually our ideas formed into

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[11] See Appendix 2.1 Composer Notes – *Paperwork! The Musical* p.85

a two-woman, one-hour comedy cabaret act entitled *Moulin Blue*. The project once again offered an opportunity to examine a small co-writing collaborative model, with the added perspective of each of the writers also performing the work to a public audience at a 'scratch' night in a local venue.

The starting point for this work was a shared aesthetic, and a mutual appreciation of each other's creative work. We felt that our individual styles would complement each other and were eager to combine our skills to produce a new work. Although we were confident in our common aesthetic, and had experience working together on other theatrical productions within the context of a larger team, we had not previously collaborated in the creation of a new work of this nature. As such we had yet to discover if our working styles would complement each other or cause friction. Cohen and Rosenhaus (2006), Citron (1991) and Stiles and Drewe (2012) agree that for a cohesive collaboration, participants must be comfortable with each other's ways of working, even if they are different to their own. After agreeing on characters and a rough structure, Abineri and I quickly found an agreeable approach to working where we completed our respective tasks in a solo setting, working in the same space periodically to share and refine material:

> Amy wrote the songs and lyrics and I wrote the dialogue. We more or less did this autonomously only coming together to alter either words or lyrics if we felt something didn't work or we had an idea to make it funnier. (Abineri, 2016)

This echoes the preferred practices of composers Sondheim and Schwartz (above), and as suggested by Stiles (2012) we quickly established a mutual belief that our co-writing partnership would be a positive experience, which propelled us to continue.

The mechanics of writing songs for *Moulin Blue* were similar to the process adopted in pre-collaborative days writing stand-alone songs. However, to ensure textual integration between lyrical/libretto content in this project we often brainstormed ideas for a song together, sometimes producing lyrical material as a result, and I would take this material away to develop and set to music. For example, composer notes[12] record our first ideas for the song 'A Man in Uniform' – a list of different uniformed jobs and fragments of rhyming

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[12] See Appendix 2.2 Composer Notes - *Moulin Blue* p.93

couplets ("high viz – gets me all in a tiz"). The addition of '(Hot for Santa)' to the title came later on when I was alone, taking the song in a new festive direction not previously discussed with Abineri, who received the song positively upon completion. This then influenced aspects of her script writing and development of characters in the show, illustrating the organic nature of our creative process. Embedding skills honed when composing for *Paperwork*, song style and emotional development were aligned with the overall dramatic arc, and musical material shaped for our individual vocal capabilities. Once again confidence was key, but from my perspective other experiences with collaborative projects[13] had given me a greater sense of trust in myself as a composer, and the collaborative process itself. In fact, it is interesting to note that by this point my old introverted practices were not my first route to approaching a new composition; I much preferred brainstorming ideas for content, style and structure with my co-writer before sitting down at the piano.

As co-writers we were each open to suggestions regarding altering our material, following a decision-making process that adheres to Bennett's stimulus processing model (see fig 2.1) within which 'consensus permits an idea to survive and – temporarily or permanently – take its place in the song' (2010, p.8).
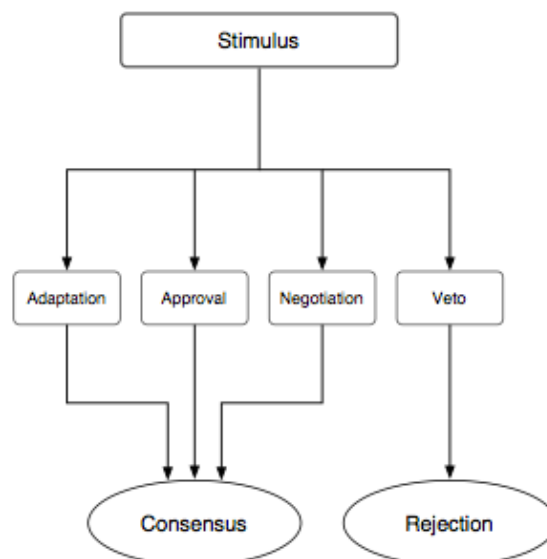

Fig 2.1 Bennett's Stimulus Processing Model

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[13] By this point I had completed two musical theatre works, *Paperwork! The Musical* and *The Witchfinder Project*

As Abineri reflects: 'We tested out ideas as we went along and quickly discarded what didn't work without much fuss' (2016). Whereas in *Paperwork* I had continually referred to musical or genre-specific aspects in assessing the material's quality and suitability, Abineri's influence in this project introduced a new hierarchy of aesthetic reference, in this case governed by the overriding question 'was it funny'? Similarly to the *Paperwork* creative process, we were able to workshop material as we went along, however being the performers of *Moulin Blue* this involved trying out the material ourselves. This meant that we could only realistically judge the artistic output in terms of our personal experience and observation of each other. This biased standpoint, exacerbated by the ease of our collaborative partnership, created an unforeseen problem - the questioning of our own objectivity. We had created a one-act musical theatre cabaret that we both found quite funny and entertaining, one collaborator genuinely appreciating the input of the other. Each of us encountered the simultaneous onset of artistic doubt experienced by many creative artists – was it really any good? To achieve objectivity on the work (particularly in terms of our primary comedic aim) we sought the views of additional collaborators (an experienced director, and attendees of a local artistic collective *Creative Heart*) to whom we staged separate showcases with the view of obtaining valuable critique. Coriglanio (in McCutchan, 1999, p.39) discusses the reluctance of some composers to seek critique of their work in progress, but recognises that 'a trained professional with similar sensibilities' can offer valuable input. In this case, Abineri and I gained both honest and useful responses to our work from other respected practitioners, which provided verification that our own judgement had been fair. My role as composer-performer further tested theories of 'composer as introvert' by requiring the hugely extrovert practice of performing to an audience, something I had not experienced for many years. This was another challenge for me, and an aspect that Abineri (a trained and experienced actor) greatly supported me with, resulting in a further sense of professional growth on my part.

Overall, the positive aspects of the *Moulin Blue* collaboration were due in part to practical applications of compositional skill learned in the earlier co-writing partnership of *Paperwork*, and in part to the composer's advancing self-development as a collaborator. Entering into the co-writing arrangement with

prior experience of a similar model of collaboration was empowering. Rather than establishing explicit ground rules for collaboration (Carter, 1990; Wilson, 2015) we allowed a working practice to naturally emerge under a shared aesthetic and faith in the creative process. Operating under an umbrella of mutually shared values, both parties felt 'safe' to present our separate ideas and receive criticism from the other. I had learned to value feedback within previous projects and was increasingly happy to seek this from both co-writer and fellow practitioners. Interestingly when interviewed for this study, neither of us could recall a single instance of veto where we had completely rejected the idea of another, indicating perhaps that our interactions had been wholly positive and solution-focused. Rosenburg and Harburg (1992, p.253) argue that 'full collaboration can be learned, not by handbooks, but by practice' and in this sense the return to an effective co-writing partnership model of collaboration and its successful outcome illustrates a healthy transition from the composer's previous solo approach to that of co-collaborator.

For the purposes of this research, analysis of composer notes[14] cross-referenced with co-collaborator interview material and stimulated recall on the part of the composer have proved sufficient in tracing the creative and collaborative process to allow for comparison with that of *Paperwork*. However, in this case composer notes record in slightly more detail the birth and expansion of musical ideas via chord symbols and traditional notational sketches. Also documented are initial brainstorms on structure and content, which give some insight into the creative context of the piece as a whole. For further examination of the co-writing process it would be useful to scrutinise the notes of each collaborator in order to investigate the symbiotic nature of the development of both music and libretto. Again, deeper analysis of collaborative discourse could be made possible via audio/video recordings of composer/writer interactions. Having only had two 'scratch' performances in 2014 the work is very much still in development, and it may be interesting to examine how the work could be developed with other performers in mind.

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[14] See Appendix 2.2 Composer Notes - *Moulin Blue* pp.89-97

2.4 Conclusions

This chapter sought to examine the shift in the composer's craft from that of solitary songwriter to musical theatre composer through two co-writing case studies, *Paperwork* (2012) and *Moulin Blue* (2014). Investigation focused on two main areas: changes in composer process and factors influencing the success of the collaborative relationship and resulting creative outcome. Fig. 2.2 (below) shows a breakdown of aspects of compositional process that were different between the two environments.

Solo:	**Co-writing:**
• Composer-led ideas (style, content)	• Generate initial ideas with co-writer (style, content)
• Whole creative process spent alone	• Musical material initiated alone, shared and developed with co-writer
• Actively seeks aesthetic influences	• Shared 'vision' or aesthetic goal
• Self imposed deadlines, tendency to extend	• Externally imposed/negotiated deadlines
• Self imposed musical parameters	• Complex musical parameters determined by external factors
• Material tested by composer	• Periodic workshopping with performers
• Evaluation sought when song complete	• Evaluation sought on ongoing basis
• Longer to make creative decisions, unsure when each song is 'finished'	• Creative decisions made jointly, affirmation or veto quickly given
• Revisions rarely made after song complete	• Material often revised
• Song craft limited to microcosm	• Need for microcosmic view within macrocosm of show
• Shorter process	• Individual songs created more efficiently, whole show longer process

Fig. 2.2 Comparison of solo and co-writing approaches to composing

In summary, changes to composer process centre around moving from an autonomous decision-making process to the fusion of ideas under a shared aesthetic, the consideration of a more complex set of constraints and parameters, and fluidity of musical/lyrical material. Both scenarios involve an element of lone working however within the co-writing model the time spent alone is in short bursts, interspersed by interaction with co-writer and cast. In terms of acquiring a basis of technical knowledge of the constructs of a musical theatre work, the practice of composing music and lyrics for *Paperwork* provided a thorough grounding in the consideration of internal and overarching structure, function of song, characterisation, diversification and thematic methods. Compositional material offered practical exploration of conventional approaches to composing for this medium such as a conscious application of Frankel's various 'implements' and 'uses' of show music (2000) and songs as 'moments of character development' (Woolford, 2012). Each project also required the composer to embed a practice unique to this genre: a simultaneous referral to the requirements of the show as a whole entity, as well as the specifics of each individual song. As Stiles (2012) explains:

> I think you've also got to remember when you are going through a score is that you are not just in the microcosm you are in the macrocosm of the whole show; what does this follow? Are we 'lyricked' out at this point? Do we need a break on the ear?

In musical theatre, this requires a flexibility of thinking comparable to the act the crafting of an album or gig set list, but with additional attention to the narrative, staging and character development of a theatrical piece. It is necessary to learn to view each song not as an individual entity but as a small element of a wider work, which involves cultivating a sense of emotional detachment on the composer's part. Swartz (in Giere, 2008, p.445) explains why he has learned not to become too attached to the songs he writes:

> A song in a show has responsibilities. It has to be moving the plot along or having some purpose in the storytelling or in the audience's understanding of the overall show. It's a tile in a mosaic. It doesn't matter how beautiful that individual tile is if it doesn't fit in the overall picture.

A similar duality to this 'microcosm v macrocosm' view is also reflected in the changeable physical working environments of a composer in this field,

requiring them to adapt between a solitary quiet space (for the act of composition) and an interactive collaborative environment (for brainstorming, negotiation, workshopping and critique of material). Whilst there are differing perspectives on the role personality plays in the composer's suitability to function effectively within each environment, it may be possible for them to overcome previous preferences and inclinations for the good of a project or developmental objective. Building on Haywood's research into improvisatory musicians (2017), I propose that prior practical musical training would prepare the composer well for this binary role through years of flux between lone practice and bustling ensemble rehearsal.

      Findings also identified that certain factors played an influential role in easing my transition between these two creative environments. Confidence and trust were vital in building a strong foundation from which to begin the collaborative journey, and in these case studies my prior history with each of the co-writers played a significant part in facilitating the swift establishment of a shared aesthetic vision. Whilst approaches to working processes were not explicitly pre-established, in both cases as co-writing teams we quickly formed mutually agreeable working arrangements, which may suggest that our prior relationship history negated the need for formal ground rules. Early stages of the process were aided by the designation of clear roles and division of responsibility, and an initial phase of prototyping (each project began with 'let's try one song/scene and see how it goes'). This is an approach recommended by Woolford (2012, p.9) who suggests that shorter projects (singular songs or a fifteen minute musical) are 'an excellent way to assess your relationship with your collaborators'. Both projects were also aided by the involvement of performers in the creative process, a situation not always accessible to the early career musical theatre composer but one that offers continual rewards.

      These case studies support the view that an effective collaborative relationship is greatly aided by continual communication (Sawyer, 2008, p.71), open mindedness (Bennett, 2014, p.233), and an empathic approach to informed critique (from both co-writer and external sources). As Abineri summarises: 'you can't be too precious and you need to enjoy the process' (2016), acknowledging perhaps that not everyone will. Whilst honesty is welcomed, it should also be accompanied by tact, diplomacy and alternative

solutions: 'to make a bad idea go away replace it with a good one' (Wilson, 2015).

The relative success of my transition from solo songwriter to musical theatre composer was undoubtedly influenced by my willingness and capacity to make this shift, and my awareness and adaptation to the conditions that collaborative working imposes. For me, and many others, these new working conditions have a positive effect on the efficiency of the composition process and enriched the musical craft. Prolific songwriter Trey Anastasio (in Eisen, 2011) sums up the invigorating nature of creating his first musical: 'It's so refreshing. People are constantly huddling in little circles, asking questions. It's satisfying and challenging on so many levels. I'm very grateful to be a part of this team.' For those who do not welcome the input of others in their work, or adapt well to social changeability, a move towards collaborative working may not induce such positive responses. It is up to the individual to decide whether this trade-off is worth making. Brown (2012) is pragmatic about the anxieties involved in creative projects, but eludes to the realistic assertion that such doubts are shared by many artists: 'Like anyone I have self-doubt, and [have] spent some time thinking 'am I any good at all?' but that has never stopped me.'

Chapter 3 – Composing for a multi-disciplinary collaboration

3.1 Introduction

A musical theatre collaboration by nature involves a multi-disciplinary team that must combine their specialist skills to produce one cohesive artistic work. In its simplest form, at the creative core of the project will be its writer, lyricist and composer. However, the wider team may include different configurations of some or all of the following: choreographer, set/lighting/sound/costume designer, director, producer, dramaturg, musical director, performers, artistic director, often with some members taking on more than one role[15]. Aside from the complexities presented by this variable creative team, each artistic discipline will bring its own conventions, subject specific terminology, and preferred ways of working, differences which on the one hand may encourage innovation but also create tension between group members. As acknowledged by Rosen and Harburg (1992, p.206) the 'fusion of one talent with others' required for the development of a musical theatre work is not always straightforward or harmonious. They also suggest that personality has a role to play in a group dynamic, describing the interrelationships within a musical theatre team as 'nearly indefinable and almost undecipherable. Why one personality will not mesh with another we are unlikely ever to understand in any depth.'

These complexities suggest that those embarking upon a large-scale collaborative project such as a musical theatre production must do so with a degree of creative risk, accepting that levels of group cohesion and productivity may fluctuate. First-hand accounts from composers in this genre indicate that despite their seemingly intangible nature, the interpersonal dimensions of a collaborative group have a significant impact on the artists involved, which ultimately affects their creative output. Composer Nia Williams (2016) explains: 'Dealing with different personalities and ways of working seems to me to be as important as—if not more important than—the actual creative work.' As noted in

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[15] For example, Jerome Robbins, Harold Prince and Cameron Mackintosh have all taken on dramaturgical roles outside of their primary function in the conception and development of performance works.

chapter 2, musical theatre partnership Stiles and Drewe (2012) also agree that their willingness to pursue a project rests largely on 'the personality mix'. The importance placed on this aspect of a potential collaboration indicates that a deeper investigation into factors influencing the social and artistic cohesion of a musical theatre creative team might be of value to not only composers, but also other creative artists considering embarking upon collaborative projects. Awareness of said factors may lessen the level of risk associated with embarking on multi-disciplinary project, and provide a navigable pathway through this 'garden of egos' (Rosenberg and Harburg, 1992).

This chapter will focus on the musical theatre creative team from the perspective of it being a functionally diverse, multi-disciplinary group, and investigate the impact of this diversity on its ability to work effectively. In an attempt to conciliate the polarised views of the value working of within an interdisciplinary creative team, and counter the lack of research in this field, this study will acknowledge existing explorations into aspects of composer collaboration, but also draw upon the findings of other studies of group behaviour outside of the arts.

For the musical theatre composer, the aural nature of their artistic output can be a barrier to the communication of musical ideas to the rest of the creative team. In many cases co-collaborators do not read traditional musical notation, which can lead to the necessity of providing demonstrable examples of musical ideas. If the composer's performing abilities (e.g. piano/vocal) do not match either the complexity or aesthetic quality of the music they are trying to showcase, they will need to involve additional musicians and technologists to produce 'demo' material, and this can prove costly. The ability of co-collaborators to read music may not solve this dilemma. Love & Barrett (2016) identify a significant issue faced by composers working collaboratively with performing musicians: the limitation of musical notation (traditional or otherwise) in the communication of the composer's intentions to the instrumentalist. They assert that 'a musical score only partially communicates composers' intentions' (2016, p.50) and will always be subject to the performer's interpretation. Similarly, composer Caitlin Rowley sees the score as 'an incomplete thing, requiring human collaboration to make it live' (2012). If musical notation (or other forms of graphically represented music) is limited in its conveyance of a

true representation of the composer's musical ideas to a trained instrumentalist, then communicating aesthetic ideas between the different specialist fields found within musical theatre may present artists with a host of similar problems. Choreographer Sergio Trujillo (in Cramer, 2013, p.232) articulates the difficulties of conveying musical requirements from his perspective: 'Since I don't read music, I approach communication differently...some arrangers will go away and work on a piece of music, and then bring it back to the choreographer. That's not how I like to work.' As an answer to this problem Trujillo describes an approach where through research, he finds mutually accessible source material (which can also include musical references) for the work that all collaborators can relate to. He also makes attempts to 'sing' his ideas or 'dance it with accents', which shows a hybrid approach to the communication of artistic intent, and a willingness to utilise the 'language' of another discipline. This suggests that with flexibility and creative thinking it may be possible to develop strategies to bridge the 'incompatible differences' between artistic disciplines cited by Hayden and Windsor (2007, p.38), particularly in the communication of ideas.

Organisational theorists studying diverse groups in business, scientific and academic environments have historically encountered similarly differentiated findings: that there are both advantages and disadvantages to different types of diversity within collaborative groups. Dissatisfaction with the resulting metaphor that diversity in teams should be viewed as a 'double edged sword' (Milliken and Martins, 1996) has led to further research which distinguishes between three different types of diversity: surface-level, deep-level and functional-level (Bunderson and Sutcliffe, 2002; Harrison et al., 2002; Milliken and Martins, 1996). Surface-level or 'salient' diversity relates to more demonstrative differences between team members (sex, age, race) while 'deep level' diversity takes into account more (personality, values, beliefs). Functional-level diversity is concerned with the skills, experience and expertise of group members.

Research into functional-level diversity or more specifically groups consisting of contrasting skill sets has proved to be of interest to this study, as their findings are most easily transferrable to the musical theatre environment. Jackson (1996) observes that although skill diversity may slow a group's

decision-making processes due to the differing perspectives of group members decelerating the rate at which consensus can be achieved, it has other benefits, such as the *assembly bonus effect* (Collins and Guetzkow, 1964). This term is used to describe the phenomenon in which group performance is better than that of any individual group member or any combination of members, due to the stimulation offered by interpersonal interaction. Jackson builds on the ideas of Shaw & Ashton (1976), who suggest that working within a diverse team offers participants opportunities for individual growth and learning. Jackson takes this line of enquiry further asserting that not only can novice group members take advantage of the knowledge of those more experienced than themselves, but that the more expert members learn through questioning their own assumptions and imparting their knowledge to others (1996, p.66). This presents the musical theatre creative team as an environment within which early career artists can develop their skills by working alongside other more experienced practitioners, with experienced team members also benefitting from the stimulation of new ideas and approaches. This is certainly echoed in Sondheim's recollections of his 1957 collaboration with Bernstein, Laurents and Robbins on *West Side Story* in which he describes the experience as 'an education' (2010, p.28). I would suggest that equal status collaboration might also yield many opportunities for learning and skill development, particularly where there are chances to learn about disciplines outside of one's own, and allow this to influence a range of innovative outcomes.

While the cross fertilisation found within diverse teams has been shown to produce an increase in divergence (i.e. the production of many different ideas or solutions to a problem), it has also been seen as a barrier to convergent thinking (i.e. the ability of a team to build and combine ideas to agree on one, focused solution). Levine and Moreland (2004, p.168) argue that complementary experience and knowledge is required for such teams to maintain efficient levels of creativity and move from divergent to convergent thinking. They also suggest that practical exploration of ideas can aid this transition. Applying this idea to a musical theatre environment, their findings would suggest that if an individual has knowledge outside of their own role or subject specialism (particularly if it crosses over into other disciplines relevant to the project), this may aid team cohesion by helping to transcend perceived

cultural differences. Such differences range from the media used to present aesthetic ideas across art forms, to conventional working practices derived from subject-specific training. For example, my own experience working within dance has identified alternative approaches to counting in music used by dancers and musicians; all equally valid and applicable to each artist's craft, yet often unfathomable by the opposite discipline. Similarly, representatives from different artistic disciplines may arrive at a collaborative project with predetermined views regarding their own role, and those of others, either based on previous experience, or preferred working practices. Ambiguities over the mechanics of a 'collaboration' can serve to exacerbate these issues.

Director and choreographer Susan Stroman (in Cramer, 2013, p.213) actively seeks knowledge outside of her own specialism to aid the unity of a project, and the quality of the outcome:

> I think that as I go along, the more I know about every single department, the better my work. I could do the greatest dance step, but if the lighting is not right, it won't matter. The more you know about lighting, the more you know about the set, the more you know about costumes, same thing.

Stroman goes on to stipulate the importance of her assistants as 'diplomats' able to 'deal with anything that could go wrong' (2013, p.213), suggesting the value of flexibility and interpersonal skills within a collaborative role. Nash's view of the composer paints them in a similar perspective, as 'a remarkably socialized and versatile individual' (1955, p.122) due to their multifaceted professional lives (often working also as a teacher, musical director or performer). This adaptability may put the composer at an advantage in this model of collaboration, potentially allowing them to act as bridge/interpreter between the different disciplines, perhaps helping to build bridges over any cultural boundaries associated with each craft. In turn, this may facilitate convergent thinking and group productivity within the team. Harvey (2014) suggests that if a multi-skilled group consciously views its diversity as a resource, it has a higher chance of achieving creative synthesis (the integration of ideas from differing perspectives into a mutually beneficial solution) than a homogenous one, and the more diverse the fields of specialism, the more innovative the solution. By viewing and valuing differences as a resource

creativity levels can be improved (Toseland and Rivas, 2013, p.139), and conversely:

> If a team cannot create an environment that is tolerant of divergent perspectives and that reflects cooperative goal interdependence, then the individuals who carry the burden of unique perspectives may be unwilling to pay the social and psychological costs necessary to share their viewpoints.
>
> (Mannix and Neale, 2005, p.46).

This highlights the incredible potential that is embedded within a musical theatre collaboration that truly embraces its combination of expertise. It also identifies a need for further investigation to identify specific behaviours and mechanisms that support effective practice to promote convergent thinking and creative synthesis in diverse teams. Research by Srikanth et al (2015) reviews existing findings in this area in an attempt to provide a more dynamic view of the short and long-term effects of group diversity and more importantly to identify potential tools for minimising negative impacts such as conflict.

Whether conflict is a damaging or stimulating force within a collaborative project is highly debated within the research community. It could be argued that an agreeable group who do not test each other's ideas may not always produce the most innovative solutions. As explained by Jackson (1996, p.63): 'If diversity of perspectives makes reaching consensus difficult, teams may choose to resolve conflicts through compromise and majority rule instead of persisting to a creative resolution that is acceptable to everyone.' This suggests that more passive teams may 'settle' with ideas that suit the majority rather than persevere towards novel solutions; an approach that may be beneficial in some business environments, but arguably not an exciting prospect for an artistic project. Other approaches to group problem resolution include different models of consensus decision-making[16], where inclusive and co-operative strategies are employed to ensure that all interested parties have input into one final, logical outcome. However not surprisingly such approaches (although egalitarian) tend to involve lengthy processes not afforded by the timescales and resources of artistic projects. It is perhaps more realistic to view conflict as an inherent and unavoidable part of the collaborative process (Brown, 2013: Creamer, 2004; Thomas et al, 1978), particularly when dealing with the

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[16] The 'Quaker' model of consensus decision-making is an example of this (Verma, 2009, p.31)

changeability of artistic personalities. Csikszentmihalyi (1996, pp.55-76) notes the 'contradictory extremes' of the artistic personality; a factor that is surely amplified when multiple artists work together. Producer Gail Berman (in Rosenburg and Harburg, 1993) presents the view that periods of friction within a musical theatre production process are healthy and in some cases necessary, in order that the work can achieve 'integrity' (1993, p.227). This is a view shared by organisational researchers such as Sawyer (2007), Neale (in Rigoglioso, 2006) and Miskin (2014). Bicat and Baldwin (2002, p.151) discuss the importance of valid research as a foundation on which to settle differences of opinion when devising theatre collaboratively.

> If your work process is amenable and substantial enough to welcome and respond to the questions of others (and, indeed, influence the decisions of others), then the act of making that critical voice will be all the more valid. Not only will the end result be stronger but also the likelihood of a crisis occurring later in the process will be dramatically reduced.

Certainly, within a 'healthy' collaboration conflict can be used as a catalyst for innovation, the testing of ideas and a positive step towards group consensus, but there is still a need to define the conditions that will ensure that positivity, rather than fragmentation and dissolution will prevail.

Acknowledging that conflict is a likely consequence of diverse team endeavours, identifying the conditions under which diverse teams are more likely to succeed would provide a useful insight for prospective musical theatre collaborators. Sawyer (2008, p.71) suggests diversity in collaborative teams enhances creativity but only if the group displays: 'some degree of shared knowledge; a culture of close listening and open communication; a focus on well-defined goals; autonomy, fairness, and equal participation.' Sawyer's factors offer a useful starting point for the development of guidelines for successful collaborators within diverse teams. Indeed, his views are shared by many organisational theorists who agree that the adoption of open behaviours and reflective practice help promote a 'learning' environment in which diverse teams can learn to collaborate more effectively (Jackson, 1996; Senge, 2006; Argyris and Schon, 1997; Mannix & Neale, 2005). The idea of the 'learning organisation', or a group that consciously assesses, re-evaluates and reforms

its processes and outlook, is currently a popular topic. Teams with a learning culture nurture trust between co-collaborators and in turn foster the increased sharing of ideas (Levine and Moreland, 2004, p.167). This allows their members to develop the skills to overcome the potential limitations of multi-skilled teams – in the artistic world this may mean minimising the effects of cultural differences between artistic disciplines, or learning to deal with conflict in a productive manner.

Repeated involvement in collaborative activities over time allows for the development of communication skills and working practices that ultimately enhance performance (Bercovitz and Feldman, 2011, p.91). Playwright David Grieg (in Svich, 2003, p.158) discusses how his own working method has developed through experience: 'Collaboration necessitates group-working situations like workshops and you slowly learn how to handle them to the best advantage of the work.' Grieg's collaborative work with company Suspect Culture is driven by the desire to 'integrate text, movement and music through the creation of innovative performance styles' in works which contain 'genuine risk' (Wright, in Svich, 2003, p.157). This shared sense of purpose is an example of a strong collectivist value, also advantageous to the fusion of group ideas. Adler and Chen (2011, p.80) claim that diverse teams can benefit from the right balance of individualistic and collectivist values. Individual motivational factors may include a desire to widen one's own practice and skill set, gain career momentum from joining forces with others on a larger enterprise, or benefit from working with more experienced artists. Collectivist values shown to contribute to the effectiveness of a collaborative team can be more explicit, such as the belief in common goal, or more intrinsic such as an artist's need to be 'part of something larger than themselves' (Senge, 2006, p.274). Van Der Vegt and Bunderson (2005) found that 'Collective Team Identification', or a strong emotional connection to a group and its endeavour, can be a significant moderating agent to counteract the difficulties caused by diverse perspectives and viewpoints. Similarly, the infrastructure of a team may also contribute to feelings of involvement and ownership both in the common goal and the team itself. A review of current literature reveals that researchers do not agree on an optimal management structure to suit the needs of the functionally diverse team. Some favour flatter hierarchies where members hold equal status

(Harvey, 2014, Yagi, 2015), others advocate strong leadership (Jackson, 1996) or either a strong hierarchy or great deal of trust (Best, 1999). Rather than the existence of any one optimum solution, it is likely that the suitability of a team infrastructure (whether in the business or artistic world) is dependent on the individual situation.

3.2 *The Witchfinder Project* - a case study in multi-disciplinary collaboration

This investigation examines my experiences working within the site-specific multi-media musical theatre collaboration *The Witchfinder Project* (2013); examining the impact that working within this multi-disciplinary environment had on both my compositional and collaborative processes. The study takes an auto-ethnographic approach drawing upon composer notes, collaborator correspondence and post project feedback/interviews to provide a commentary on the impact of working with an ever-widening group of artists to produce a multi-media musical theatre performance work.

As a composer, this project presented many novel challenges that stretched my skills outside of the security of my realm of experience and usual practice. Firstly, rather than using a lyrical or musical starting point, initial inspiration for the work came from the historical tale of Matthew Hopkins, a local witchfinder who was active in my local area (East Anglia) in the 17th century. Katz and Gardner (in Hargreaves, Miell and MacDonald, 2012, p.117) label this the 'beyond domain' approach to composition; where ideas are borne from a non-musical stimulus and in many cases are allowed to 'bubble up naturally and over time.' Their study observes that 'beyond domain' composers are often inspired by visual images. This may be due to the nature of the visual image, arguably a highly accessible artistic medium that is able to transcend some of the aforementioned barriers associated with interdisciplinary collaborative idea exchange. The dark graphic novel illustrative style of visual artist Emile Warnes[17] and a chance meeting with site-specific dance artist and

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[17] British artist Warnes trained as an illustrator at Anglia Ruskin University, Cambrigde. For examples of his work See Appendix 3.3- Illustrations by Emile Warnes pp.180-183

choreographer Sarah Alexander[18] became the catalyst for the development of my ideas to write a piece of musical theatre that explored themes of injustice and persecution in Matthew Hopkins' story. United by a common desire to explore a cross-disciplinary approach to developing new work, Alexander, Warnes and I embarked on the creation of a multi-media presentation of this historical tale; *The Witchfinder Project*, that would be produced within Ipswich's historic Town Hall buildings. Our similarity of levels of experience (all being early career practitioners) benefited this initial stage of the writing process in that we channelled our excitement surrounding the creation of new ideas into positive feedback and encouragement, affirming the view that flat hierarchical team structures provide a supportive background for group endeavours (Harvey, 2014, p.336). The writing process began with a meeting to brainstorm ideas, sketch out the show's structure[19] and outline which parts of the building each stage of the show would explore. This presented the next challenge to my regular compositional practice: the site-specific nature of the project. The venue was hugely influential in the decision-making process for aspects of the musical material; in particular the acoustic properties of the spaces used (the reverberating qualities of the upper hall were exploited in the song 'Come Swim With Me' with strong soprano melisma maximising the eerie echo of the space). In addition, I explored the opportunities of the promenade nature of the piece by exploiting the mobility of the musical instruments available (folk instruments were used for the opening song 'Mistley Fair' that could be played whilst the musicians moved from one space to another).

Using historical source material paved more of a 'lyric first' approach to songwriting than I had used in previous projects, by providing a rich and interesting stimulus that I felt also added integrity to the work. I undertook three months of historical research into the background to the history of Matthew Hopkins' witchfinding activities, other characters and original writings from the time[20], which formed the basis for the lyrical language adopted. For example,

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[18] British dance practitioner Alexander completed her dance training at Rambert, and achieved a BA (Hons) degree in Dance and Visual Art at Brighton University and a Masters at Trinity Laban, London. At the time of this study she was working as Lecturer in Dance at University Campus, Suffolk, as well as enjoying a rich community practice.

[19] See appendix 2.3 Composer Notes - *Witchfinder* pp.99-100

[20] Inspiration was taken from the 1646 publication *Select Cases of Conscience*, by the Reverend John Gaule, and Matthew Hopkins' own work *The Discovery of Witches*, from 1647.

research into superstitions and healing practices of the time such as use of willow bark as a cure for headache, and the act of turning your coat inside out to ward off ghosts became incorporated into the lyrics of the song 'About Go We':

> Willow bark to sooth your head
> Turn your coat to fool the dead
> About, about, about go we[21]

The title was drawn from verse found in a medieval play[22] and the proceeding lyrics 'Jamara, Sack and Sugar, Vinegar Tom, Holt, Newes' are in fact the names of accused witches' familiars as claimed by Hopkins (Hopkins, pp.4-5). Similarly, the ensemble song 'Mistley Fair' uses colloquial language and references from the era[23]:

> A jubbe of hum or merry-go-down
> Will chase your cares away
> It won't take more than a tipsy cake
> To lead a maiden astray

Much of the script was derived from Hopkins' own writings, either used in its original form or developed in a rhetorical style. All three co-collaborators continually referred to our pool of historical research, adding a level of consistency to our outcomes, perhaps providing the strong basis for reference advocated by Bicat and Baldwin (2002) and Trujillo (2013) (above). Although this foundation was never tested by disagreements regarding the content of the piece, feedback exchange relating to our emerging artistic produce reinforced the value in using this approach, and also re-seeded ideas in each discipline.

Musical starting points were mainly stylistic and derived from a variety of sources including modal/folk based harmonies and melodies. The simplicity of such ideas presented an unforeseen problem; how to develop original melodic

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[21] See appendix 2.3 Composer Notes – *The Witchfinder Project* p.109

[22] *The Maid's Metamorphosis*, printed in 1600, anonymous, once attributed to John Lyly.

[23] A 'jubbe of hum' meaning a large vessel of liquor, 'merry-go-down' strong ale, and tipsy cake a type of cake soaked in alcohol all helping to capture the leisurely and playful atmosphere of a local country fair.

ideas in this style that were not reminiscent of existing folk songs. Fig. 3.1 shows the first draft of the melody for Mistley fair.
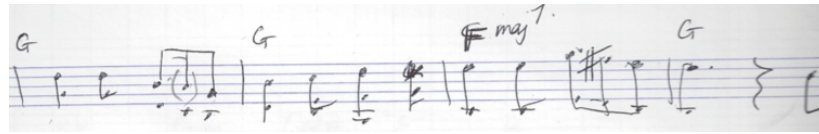
Fig. 3.1 First draft of 'Mistley Fair' melody

After a comment from my household that it sounded like Butler and Hart's 1956 classic 'Nelly the Elephant' the melody was subtly altered, but sufficiently to remove its similarity to the well-known song – see Fig. 3.2.
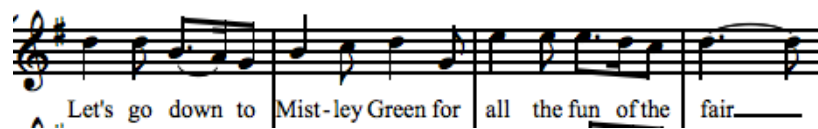
Fig. 3.2 Final 'Mistley Fair' melody

Having had some success resurrecting and reworking old musical ideas in other musical theatre projects, I was confident to use the same approach in devising melody and harmony for the songs 'About Go We' (built on a folk melody I had written for penny whistle in my teens) and 'Come Swim With Me', (based on harmonic patterns from an early, never materialised musical).

Working with collaborators from different artistic disciplines encouraged me to innovate my own compositional practice by including both acoustic and electronic elements, and in turn widening my technical expertise. Warnes and Alexander suggested I gather on-site audio recordings from Mistley Pond, where several of Hopkins' victims were drowned, to create ambient soundscapes on which to build musical material. I edited and layered these soundscapes with additional musical ideas using Logic Pro, and presented them as stimulus material for a dance workshop for undergraduate students run by Alexander and myself. The aim of the workshop was to develop movement and musical ideas whilst investigating themes of torture and body image. This organic approach was novel for each of us, but one increasingly favoured in the

dance world. Composer Christopher Best (1999, pp.3–4) writes of the merits of the process of developing musical material in partnership with a choreographer:

> When a composer works with a choreographer on a joint project, both are aware of the presence of the other's artistic input and space can be made available to ensure that the combined experience is greater than the sum of the parts, thereby avoiding a collision between two competing aesthetic intentions.

The workshop explored movement language associated with the different methods of torture employed by Hopkins and his team that was later developed to be used in the show. Dancers were shown copies of Warnes' initial image ideas, adding a third dimension to Best's composer-choreographer model that further enriched the process. Excerpts from interviews with the dancers were edited, warped and layered over the ambient pond sounds to shape one of the show's electronic tracks 'I Look in the Mirror'.

The end performance of this piece (accompanied by live vocalists, visual projections, and contemporary dance also involving audience participation) is an excellent example of how by actively using our diversity as a resource and demonstrating samples of our artistic work to each other in a sympathetic and constructive atmosphere, my co-collaborators and I improved our chances of combining our efforts effectively. This supports Harvey's argument that when diverse teams are at work the practical exploration of possible solutions is key: 'Enacting ideas can facilitate creative synthesis through cognitive, social, and affective mechanisms' (2014, p.333). The positive development of our team dynamic through artistic exploration might not have been the result of our joining forces. Where group members' skills are particularly diverse, a high level of experimental output does not necessarily ensure a smooth pathway to the selection and nurturing of ideas into a final solution (Harvey, 2013). Diverse groups are more likely to achieve this when supported by both a shared vision and an environment of 'reflective openness' (Senge, 2006). Our regular 'showing and sharing', together with the strength of our shared vision, facilitated the convergent thinking necessary to combine our disciplines, allowing more tangible parameters to be formed. Contrastingly, if a consistent level of creative dialogue is not maintained, this can be to the detriment of the artists involved, as expressed by Williams (2016), who describes the consequences of working in a collaborative environment where feedback was not forthcoming.

> I wanted approval/agreement from the others—or discussion/alternative ideas—for the script, cast, rehearsal schedule, publicity, information for the festival etc.; and found it increasingly difficult to elicit any response. I felt uneasy, as a collaborator, about making all these decisions unilaterally; but found time after time that I had no option.

In these early stages of *The Witchfinder Project* there is much evidence to suggest that all three collaborators benefitted from a period of experimentation and prolific production of potential artistic ideas for the project. As well as encouraging new approaches in my compositional processes, Alexander's experience working directly with a composer to produce a bespoke piece of music enriched her own practice:

> It was great to be able to have conversations about the quality and tone of the music, and the atmosphere we intended to evoke with the music and dance in conjunction….being able to make edits as we went along was a real resource.
> (Alexander, 2016)

In turn, our feedback and artistic ideas inspired Warnes to develop further imagery for the show. This could be seen as a version of the *assembly bonus effect*; where one co-collaborator's experience (although from a different artistic field) augments the practice of another. Without the input of the others, our individual outputs would not have been as innovative, encouraging us to see the project through to its next developmental stage.

Whilst collaborative assignments in the business domain tend to have pre-defined resources and scope, the changeable nature of projects within the arts can cause issues not addressed by organisational theory, such as radical transformation of the final outcome, and withdrawal or addition of resources. Later on in *The Witchfinder Project*'s lifecycle the sudden acquisition of Arts Council funding prompted an expansion of the collaborative model. The availability of significant funds meant that were now able to employ a live video jockey, stage manager, technical manager, musical director, costume designer, and film-maker. Due to the deadlines imposed by the expansion of the project, Alexander and I were forced to share tasks usually allocated to a director and producer, effectively sharing control and creating a hierarchy that had not previously existed. Adler and Chen's research into what motivates members of large scale creative teams (2011) recognises that creative projects involve a

marrying of independent creativity with formal structures and controls, which can cause tension. Certainly, I became internally conflicted as my new responsibilities shifted my focus from creating musical and dramatic material to pragmatic elements outside of my specialism as the project reached its chaotic climax. The demands of co-ordinating such a wide range of artistic elements (live video imagery, dance, physical theatre, drama, singing, improvisation, a five-piece band, lighting, sound, costume, audience immersion) meant that elements of each co-collaborator's individualist motivation (e.g. the achievement of high quality visual/musical/movement outcomes) became compromised, despite our commitment to the project's aesthetic. My role as composer suddenly faded, being overtaken by the pressing objective of achieving a performance-ready work, which required taking on tasks outside of my subject area (including costume and marketing). Further musical revisions were now not an option, with responsibility for musical elements being handed over to the Musical Director, an action requiring significant trust on my part and a sense of 'letting go' of the musical material. Rowley (2012) describes this as an inevitable evolution of the collaborative process of composing:

> At some point our collaborators will have more say than we will, so we need to accept – as I suspect many of our forebears did, lacking any other model – that there comes a point where we just need to let go and let the new collaboration happen.

This release, although somewhat daunting, was also accompanied by a feeling of achievement and excitement that my work was about to receive public exposure. Alexander was feeling other manifestations of the tension caused by the growth of the project; whereas the musical and visual material was at a reasonable level of quality at this point, elements of movement needed further development and adaptation to the different spaces being used within the venue. This was frustrating, but perhaps inevitable given the site-specific presentation, the physical nature of this element of the show, and the short time we had available in the venue. Whilst this may highlight differences between the artistic genres involved, it does not necessarily follow that these are 'incompatible' as suggested by Hayden and Windsor (2007). On the contrary, as co-collaborator I sought to provide opportunities for the necessary polishing of the show's movement sections, acknowledging Alexander's experience and

background in dance training (where the emphasis is on adequate staging rehearsal in preparation for quality performances) and the requirements of dance as an art form. Experiencing a wider range of perspectives and taking on additional production roles increased my appreciation and experience of other disciplines, enriching my own skill set and awareness, which I hope will serve to improve my own artistic capacity as previously argued by Stroman (2013).

Despite instances of anxiety, all members of the creative team had great trust in each other, the artistic output and the process, which without doubt generated the momentum that carried the project through to its fruition. We were also indebted to the more experienced members of the team, such as the VJ and film-maker, who slotted seamlessly into the environment during its final stages, with an immediate appreciation and understanding of the project's goals. They offered their support both in practical and emotional terms, with an unwavering faith in the creative process helping each element to slot into place. Within this organised chaos, and the timeframe available, *The Witchfinder Project* emerged as a vibrant, multi-dimensional piece of performance, with plenty of scope for further development.

3.3 Conclusions

Through reflecting on the collaborative experience of creating a new musical theatre work, this chapter investigated the impact of working within a multi-disciplinary team setting on the compositional process and product. Aspects of organisational theory have been a valuable background to this research particularly when focused on functional-level diversity, which is most relevant to the multi-skilled nature of the musical theatre creative team. *The Witchfinder Project* proves a useful case study in investigating the effectiveness of multi-disciplinary teams in that it provides evidence to support both sides of the 'double-edged sword' viewpoint, and considers the development of a collaborative team over time. Comparison between the initial smaller, less accomplished but stimulating model of collaboration and its latter form, the larger multitasking, more hierarchical team, offers opportunities to analyse the impact of scale, experience and management on the effectiveness of a creative team. Scrutiny of the behaviours, processes and outcomes of each model

corroborate the perspective that skill diversity can be an asset to a creative team, and if carefully managed within the right environment can produce innovative and rewarding results.

The advantages presented by combining multiple perspectives in the creation of a new work of musical theatre are evident throughout the project cycle, from the meeting of minds as a catalyst for the start of a work, through idea generation, integration and implementation, to post-project evaluation. A willingness to work with others' ideas and also step outside one's own craft is an influential factor in the integration of individual elements into a successful multidisciplinary outcome. Not only can the project benefit, each artist can enrich their own practice, as well as becoming the co-creator of a unique work:

> It can feel disconnected at times if you stick to what you know within a collaborative project, and the more you can get involved in others' skills areas, the more the collaboration can really flourish. Rather than art forms sharing the same platform, they can become affected by each other, creating a truly integrated scene.   (Alexander, 2016)

As a composer, working with artists from different disciplines to my own provided many opportunities for the modification of my compositional approach that enriched my craft; enabling me to make braver creative choices and produce a more diverse range of outcomes. Through discourse and practical exploration with collaborators I was encouraged to try new methods and styles of composition, which required development of my technological skills. I was also able to experience the benefits of using workshops to develop music for dance alongside a choreographer. Each of these aspects not only enhanced the quality of the musical dimension of *Witchfinder,* but also informed other compositional work undertaken since this project, having increased my versatility as a practitioner.

However, whilst it is easy to accept the potential of diversity as a rich source to be exploited for the benefit of a team endeavour, one must accept that it also presents cultural and practical barriers to both the communication and fusion of ideas. To be successful, diverse teams must not only be conscious of the differences between the skill sets of individual members, but also use these differences as a resource for idea generation and promoting of innovation. Experience outside of one's own specialism can help ease these

problems, but a genuine interest in and appreciation of the work and approaches of others can suffice. These findings suggest that rather than 'shared knowledge' (cited by Sawyer (2008) as being instrumental in the increased creativity of diverse teams), what may be more important is a *mutual respect* between artists, *complementary skill sets* and a *desire to contribute* specialist skills and knowledge towards a common goal.

A combination of individual and team motivation is important in achieving momentum in diverse team projects (Adler and Chen, 2011), and in *The Witchfinder Project* this was certainly the case; each of us had our own individual impetus for participating in the project, balanced by a strong sense of team and common goal. However I would argue that for a multidisciplinary creative project to be truly integrative there comes a point where 'Collective Team Identification' (Van Der Vegt and Bunderson, 2005) becomes more important than individualist values. A solid foundation of research (in this case historical) can help bind team members' ideas together to form and maintain a shared aesthetic vision. This can also be used as a point of reference to help resolve conflicts or aid the decision-making process, whilst maintaining the integrity of the artistic outcome. Within this case study it was a shared belief in the overall aesthetic which incentivised team members to set aside personal aspirations, and often perform tasks outside of their own specialisms, to contribute to the solution of the myriad of logistical issues. Rosenberg and Harburg (1992, p.226) believe this is often the case in musical theatre projects, where despite conflict and problems the project will reach completion: 'There is too much invested – emotionally, creatively, financially; the show must not only go on, it must "hang together" at the core and in all its components.'

For a diverse team to function effectively, appropriate team structure and management controls can be a contributing factor. In this project, a flatter, non-hierarchical structure suited our initial objectives of artistic exploration by offering a safe and inspiring setting within which to experiment with new ways of working. Later on, by increasing the number of artists, the scale of the project grew dramatically, the funding bringing issues of financial management, marketing and accountability that would simply not be accommodated by the original democratic, explorative collaborative model. With the benefit of hindsight, *Witchfinder* would have benefitted from more timely consideration of

the division of responsibility in the event of a successful funding bid and not (as in this case) overlooked the key roles of director and producer in the initial excitement of artistic exploration. The inclusion of such roles need not interrupt the egalitarian atmosphere of a collaborative team by imposing creative control: Bicat and Baldwin (2002, p.13) suggest that rather than taking their place at the top of the hierarchy of a creative team, the director and producer should act as a 'fulcrum' to ensure balance within the group. Inadvertently, these were the roles Alexander and I found ourselves in during the final stages of the project, which suggests their fundamental importance to the art form.

When assembling *Witchfinder*'s diverse team, it was hugely advantageous in the latter stages to include more experienced collaborators who were willing to step outside of their own specialism and offer their advice and support. Generally, multi-disciplinary teams will benefit from including members who possess 'diversity management skills' (Shaw and Barrett-Power, 1998, p.1318). Such individuals may well be those who have gained previous collaborative experience and can help with team integration, facilitation of the creative process and a healthy approach to discord or conflict. The presence of this experience can often be the difference between team disintegration and success due to their ability to return a team in conflict to cohesiveness (Jackson, 1996). Whether formal or informal, effective management of team diversity may further the development of collaborative skill within a group. By conscious consideration of different perspectives of artists from other disciplines, individuals are able to develop new approaches to communication, problem solving and conflict resolution that they are able to take forward to future projects. Investment in social capital and reflective practice, together with creative approaches to sharing ideas with co-collaborators, can overcome the possible negative implications of working with the vibrant mix of personalities often found within artistic projects.

My previous experience of musical theatre projects had provided me with the confidence to overcome complex problems and complete a wide range of tasks with an unwavering faith in the project's aims. Contrastingly, those with less experience of large-scale collaboration experienced more anxiety and in

some cases withdrew their participation[24]. Overall, evidence from this case study overwhelmingly supports the view of the musical theatre environment as an example of the *assembly bonus affect*; *Witchfinder* would simply not have come to fruition without the combined efforts and experience of the creative team, which perhaps explains how we were able to work through a complex range of problems to produce a performance work that audiences found 'exciting and innovative' (audience member, in Mallett, 2013, p.17).

The formalisation of collaborative practice and policy is becoming more commonplace in the business environment, however arguably not as popular within artistic ventures, where less formal approaches that accommodate an organic flow of creativity and development of relationships tend to be used. This could be due to the economic drivers of the corporate world, where outcomes are ultimately measured in fiscal terms. However, examining this case study through a framework of organisational research has shown that there is much that artistic practice could gain from adopting some of the theory applied in the corporate world, potentially increasing the likelihood of not only novel and stimulating artistic outcomes but also the commercial success of ventures such as *Witchfinder*. Further work needs to be done to ascertain how more formal approaches can be adapted to allow for the necessary fluidity of creative ideas and changeable scope of arts projects**.**

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[24] One mature but novice cast member left the cast after the first performance.

Chapter 4 - The remote composer-writer collaboration

4.1 Introduction

> While living away from my collaborator has its challenges, we live in an age
> where technology makes remote collaboration easier than at any time in history.
> (Christensen, 2014)

Advances in technology make it increasingly possible for musical theatre makers to collaborate whilst working in different geographical locations and time zones. Technologies such as email, video chat, file sharing and bespoke real-time platforms enable creative exchange and present wider opportunities for working with new collaborators. Whilst this approach to collaborative working can bring technical challenges, it can also be a valuable way to allow creative teams to connect where personal interchanges are not possible due to pragmatic or economic reasons (Stewart, 2015). Interaction may take place in real-time (where all co-collaborators are 'present' such as a video or conference call, chatroom, or virtual environment) or in the form of asynchronous correspondence (such as where email and/or file exchange is the preferred tool). The latter approach can offer the refuge of periods of reflection between exchanges, in which co-collaborators can digest and reflect upon their work, and the feedback of others, but arguably it lacks the nuances of gesture and expression of the former. In their study into remote collaboration between film directors and composers, Phalip et al (2009, p.2) draw attention to the ambiguities generated by using digital exchange as an approach to musical composition. Their findings support the remote collaboration as a safe place in which a composer can avoid 'taking criticisms in person'. They suggest that the thinking space provided by this model of collaboration is beneficial, offering co-collaborators flexibility and convenience and enabling an undertaking to be broken down into more manageable tasks. However, they also found that the inflection contained within verbal feedback could soften the impact of bad news in face-to-face interactions. Their research concludes that 'a balance should be attained in the use of asynchronous and synchronous communication so as to diffuse emotions and avoid interpersonal clashes' (2009, p.9), acknowledging

the need for an approach to remote collaboration that is sympathetic to the complexities of the composer-director relationship.

As well as having practical advantages, some practitioners also see remote collaboration as way of both broadening their experience and enhancing outcomes. As composer Andrea Pejrolo (2014) notes: 'I've found that these types of collaborations have brought not only more exciting projects, but also helped me to expand my artistic and social horizons.' Although by nature remote collaboration is heavily reliant on compliant and functioning technology, obstacles relating to technical issues can often be overcome through specialist support, training or a period of adjustment. Composer Winifred Philips (2013) recognises that there are other, more subtle considerations relating to working within a remote setting: 'While communications technology does a good job in addressing logistical concerns in coordinating remote members of a development team, there are also matters of a more abstract nature…and these have to do with the spirit of collaborating.' Philips' views relate to the findings of previous chapters in this study, in which it was noted that psychological, social and cultural barriers might impact the effectiveness of an interdisciplinary collaboration. It is likely then that physical distance between co-collaborators will only serve to exacerbate difficulties of communication across different artistic disciplines, and potentially offer additional challenges. For the musical theatre composer considering a remote collaboration, this highlights a need to investigate the factors that will promote positive interaction and outcomes.

The practice of studying collaboration within a virtual setting is a relatively new approach to arts research, but one that is beginning to inform new perspectives on collaboration, particularly as virtual teams become increasingly prevalent across scientific, business and creative fields. For the musical theatre composer, participating in a remote collaboration also offers the opportunity to develop and reflect upon their collaborative skills. This approach is supported by a growing trend within educational research to assess the impact of online environments for collaborative activities on both students' ability to interact productively and the quality of the resulting creative product. This research exploits the remote collaboration as a contained environment in which carefully designed methodologies can facilitate a vast amount of valuable evidence relating to enablers and barriers to on-line collaboration. Evidence can

take the form of quantitative data such as textual or discourse analysis, more qualitative insights (from interviews or observation) or a mixture of the two. In their study into how students interact when working on a collaborative graphic design task, Turner and Schober (2007, p.4) acknowledge the value of the virtual environment (in this case an internet chat room) as a research tool:

> Because chat room communication is textually based, it therefore provides us with an excellent opportunity to see how peer ratings of collaborative skill are reflected in particular textual choices. This may open the door into new insights into what counts as collaborative skill.

Their study takes a quantitative approach to data collected during the collaboration, applying methods of language coding and textual analysis to chat room transcripts. Similarly, Gerben (2012) uses quantitative analysis of the textual contributions of students alongside qualitative interview findings in his investigation into the collaborative nature of social media writing. He identifies 20 new 'behaviours' linked to collaboration that he believes are unique to the online environment, suggesting that students are able to produce more successful collaborative writing within a social media environment than in the classroom. As well as providing opportunities to analyse the textual contributions of on-line collaborators, use of video and audio tools within such investigations can also allow for physical and verbal interchanges to be scrutinised. In their study of participants working on remote collaborative tasks, Tan, et al, (2014, p.104) used quantitative analysis of vocal discourse and physical gestures to compare levels of empathic communication between visual and non-visual remote collaboration tools, concluding that the physiological cues offered by video methods served to increase group cohesiveness and positivity. These findings, whilst supporting the value of studying remote collaboration, reinforce the importance of appropriate selection of technological tools and research design in order to promote meaningful and relevant evidence for inquiries of this nature.

As a composer-researcher, participation in a remote collaboration offers a unique opportunity to document my compositional and collaborative journey whilst minimising disruption to the creative process. This chapter will investigate my remote, trans-global partnership with Canadian writer Gary Swartz in the composition of music for pop/rock/blues musical *Whispers of the Heart* (2014).

The nature of this collaboration presented some novel challenges that provide an interesting contrast to previous models. Firstly, this collaboration was not composer-led, and although Swartz indicated that his draft script was open to revision, in many ways the task was closer by definition to a 'commission' than my previous musical theatre works as two thirds of the piece (book and lyrics) was already fully formed. Bennett's study of collaborative songwriting identifies a set of process-based taxonomies (2014, p.221) in order to categorise the different ways in which songwriting 'duties' are shared. Within this system the proposed process for this project fell within the 'Lyric-Setting' model of collaboration; one I had little experience of. This therefore challenged my abilities as composer in that it demanded a different approach from my usual compositional practice. Secondly, our non-familiarity and the remote nature of our relationship meant that the majority of our communication would be via email. This meant that the negotiation of roles, creative practices and musical language would be text based, offering not only an alternative perspective on collaborative working but also a tangible evidence trail for research purposes.

4.2 Methods

Heldal et al (2005, p.8) argue that when evaluating collaboration in a virtual environment 'we can obtain different understandings about collaboration from quantitative data, from qualitative responses, and from observations', underlining the need for appropriate research design in studies of this nature. As recognised in previous chapters, a significant risk to an auto-ethnographic approach is the intrusive nature of self-scrutiny, and its potential to both interrupt and influence the creation of artistic works. Knowing that communication, processes and artistic outcomes are subject to analysis can influence how co-collaborators interact, in particular causing them to 'tone down' responses or not behave intuitively. In order to minimise such manifestations of the 'observer effect', in this case a mixed method was applied, involving triangulation of quantitative and qualitative findings from a discourse analysis of email correspondence, composer notes and co-collaborator interview.

A retrospective study of correspondence between Swartz and myself was carried out in the form of a discourse analysis[25]. This analysis noted instances of five types of exchange in the written statements of each collaborator:

1. **Small Talk/Relationship Building** (Not related to tasks and usually referencing elements of our personal/professional lives)

    E.g. "I lived in Japan for many years…"
    "I may well end up cutting the lawn this afternoon"

2. **External Musical References** (Usually in the form of hyperlinks to video or audio recordings)

    E.g. "The Fabulous Baker Boys song was 'Making Whoopee'"
    "I recently discovered this song that driving feel might translate well with Rich"

3. **Managing Expectations** (relating to timescales and delivery of musical material)

    E.g. "I've got a really busy week coming up"
    "I've got a house full of toddlers this week"
    "Just wanted to make sure you are still alive"

4. **Positive/Encouragement** (Where ideas or artistic efforts are praised)

    E.g. "Works for me."
    "Seems like we are on track."
    "I like it. Lots of nifty stuff in it."

5. **Veto** (Where musical ideas were rejected or deemed inappropriate to the project. Not including where permission was first sought to make edits)

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[25] See Appendix 3.2 Analysis of email correspondence between Gary Swartz and author, p.174

E.g. "I think it has to stay 'we'"

"It could maybe sound a bit more "Kiss my Ass!""

Findings in each category were compared between co-writers and to song productivity throughout the ten-month period.

In order to ensure that this model of collaboration was useful to the research in terms of my development as a composer, it was necessary to approach my own creative practice with a conscious level of self-analysis not sufficiently addressed in previous chapters, where my note taking had been somewhat sporadic and often too retrospective. In this investigation, I therefore resolved to take notes more consistently during the composition process to map thought processes, including stimulae, musical/literary influences, reasoning for creative decisions, and any revisions made due to collaborative discourse. In order to minimise the detrimental impact of other observational methods such as protocol analysis (Collins, 2007), I self-interviewed as soon as possible after the creative process for each song was complete. Notes were kept succinct to provide a high-level process map of the musical decision-making process. This auto-ethnographic adaptation of the stimulated recall approach to data collection (where a third party interviews the subject who has undertaken the experience being investigated using various stimuli as cues to stimulate recollections of the process) captured the key steps in the decision-making processes of the composer (myself) and also recorded how input from my co-writer was applied.

By interviewing Swartz after the work was complete, I was able to guide the enquiry into relevant areas highlighted by findings from previous research methods and cross-reference with relevant theoretical background to provide final reflections on the process. Particular points of significance to this inquiry included the development of our working relationship and authorial roles, and the negotiation of a shared musical aesthetic.

4.3 *Whispers of the Heart* - a case study in remote collaboration

'You will grow to hate emails from me' (Swartz, 2014)

Within a remote collaboration, the initial stages of any project will include a period of establishing scope, roles and responsibilities, as well as gaining an understanding of the motivating factors for working together. Tseng and Yeh (2013, p.7) argue that familiarity, commitment and team cohesion are necessary to build a foundation of trust in a virtual team. In this case, Swartz and I had not worked together before, which meant that a more intense period of acclimatisation was necessary to instil a basis on which to build. A retired advertising copywriter living in Vancouver, Canada, Swartz first made contact via email, sending me a draft of the show's script[26], which included completed song lyrics. He suggested a mutually beneficial co-working arrangement whereby he would 'commission' me as composer to write music to fit his pre-composed lyrics, in return for the opportunity to document and examine a new model of collaboration for the purposes of this research[27]. Should the work generate revenue in the future this would be shared. In deciding whether to commit to this project I chose to place more importance on the artistic quality of the work to date (script and lyrics) and its potential as a musical theatre production, than I did on Swartz's experience in the genre[28]. When interviewed via email after our work was complete, Swartz indicated that in choosing a collaborator he too placed more emphasis on abstract concepts as suggested by Phillips (2013): in this case self-belief and trust.

> I guess I was motivated to collaborate with someone who seemed to have as much faith in her skills, etc. as I have in mine, with enough reciprocal faith in the other to proceed. (Swartz, 2016)

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[26] *Whispers of the Heart* is a four-hander musical in two acts that examines the relationships of two career-minded couples, allowing the audience to decide (during the interval) whether one of the couples stays together or splits up.

[27] Swartz had become aware of my research interests through my membership of musical theatre networking organisation *Mercury Musical Developments.*

[28] Swartz had previously written a musical *Country Love* (available on StageScripts.com) and a play *Tears Like Rain.*

He also saw my PhD studies as an incentive for me to see the project through and complete the work to a high standard, and was unperturbed by any potential impact my research would have on the musical output itself, which was a valuable asset to the research process. For my part, having previously been a driving force in other musical theatre works, it felt hugely challenging to be asked to contribute to a project where the aesthetic seemed to be pre-established, the characters well developed, and lyrics finalised. As Sondheim remarks in an interview with Bryers and Davision (2005, p.200): 'You have to be sure you are writing the same show' and I would not be able to ascertain this until some way into the process. In pragmatic terms, this was my first experience setting lyrics that I had not written myself to music, and I saw this as a challenge to both my preferred ways of working and compositional practice.

Examining our correspondence retrospectively, I believe that Swartz's experience in building rapport together with my desire to widen my artistic reach helped to overcome any reservations I had about becoming involved in the project. Analysis of our email exchange shows that even taking into account the higher proportion of emails that were sent by Swartz (he instigated 61% of our correspondence) this included a high level of 'Small Talk/Relationship Building' statements on Swartz's part during our first two months of contact (see Fig 4.1). Contrastingly, 'Managing Expectations' statements were my most frequent approach, perhaps reflecting our 'client-composer' roles, despite lack of formal arrangement. Another early email communication broached the topic of a legal writers' agreement, which provided a more formalised perspective of the mechanics of our collaborative arrangement, instilling assurance in me that should the finished musical achieve any financial reward, credit would be shared[29].

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[29] A writers' agreement was finalised and signed just as the final song was completed (see Appendix 3.3 - Collaboration agreement between Gary Swartz and Author, pp.175-180). This agreement formalised our industry standard share of any profits being split 33.3% to bookwriter, 33.3% to lyricist and 33.4% to composer.
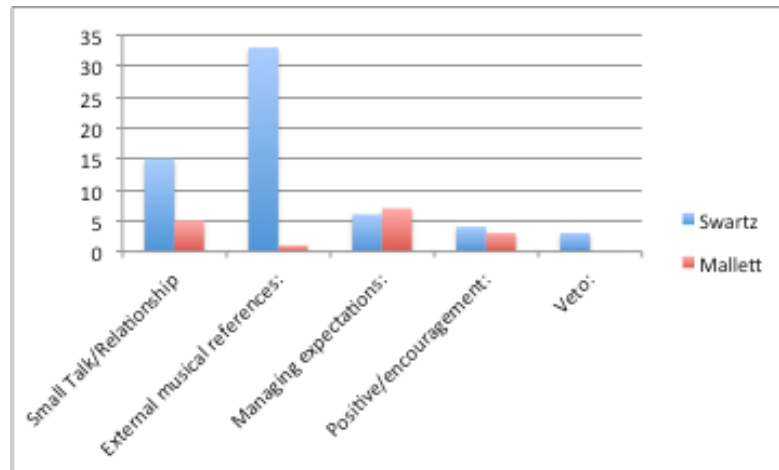
**Fig. 4.1 – Frequency of statement types in email correspondence
Feb-Mar 2014**

Having established a willingness to embark upon the project, a period of implicit negotiation began with regard to creative boundaries. From my side I was interested in how 'precious' was Swartz with his lyrical material, and how pre-set were his musical ideas for each song? Again, perhaps due to his professional experience in the advertising field, Swartz chose to be explicit about his approach to collaboration from the outset.

> So if we do collaborate, please feel free from the onset to point out stuff you don't think works…. in some perverse way I enjoy rewriting and polishing more than drafting (probably because it's more of a conscious act), so I'd be quite happy to rework stuff as needed. (Swartz, 2014a)

Although this invitation to contribute to the text of the work was encouraging, I was keen to take advantage of the freedom my 'music only' role might bring. Usually constricted by my own exacting standards and self-imposed rules of lyric writing, I resolved to try to keep Swartz's lyrics as unrefined as possible, suggesting changes only where necessary for rhythmic or diction purposes. In the early stages I felt very much that we were writing *his* show, although he welcomed (and needed) my musical input his authorial voice was the overriding presence.

After our initial introductory emails, Swartz and I shared a substantial video call that became the first step in establishing a musical language from which we would go on to develop a collaborative compositional process. As well as providing a visual reference serving to 'humanise' our interactions, in this

video conversation Swartz outlined his intentions for each of the songs in the musical, which I recorded in note form. He presented a large pre-prepared list of existing songs as a starting point for the musical style, feel and form of each song in *Whispers of the Heart*. This is a strategy often used in the film music genre, as film composer Kim Halliday (Halliday, 2013) acknowledges in his article for www.raindance.org: 'some directors have less clarity and perhaps less musical vocabulary.' Halliday advises the use of 'reference' or 'temp' tracks in order to bridge the gap in musical knowledge between director and composer, an approach that whilst being a useful starting point, also presents potential problems for a composer who values their own compositional voice or likes to avoid pastiche. Some film directors feel that temp tracks can limit composers, and indeed, some composers choose not to listen to them (Karlin and Wright, 2013), however in this case it was clear that Swartz had some pre-defined ideas with regard to musical content, and use of musical references would play a significant part in the communication of these ideas. Swartz also outlined his vision for staging and presentation of the musical, which he wanted to have the feel of a 'gig that happened to be a musical'. We discussed having a band on centre stage to emphasise the importance of the music in the piece. This to some extent defined instrumentation, as did the various musical genres he referenced.
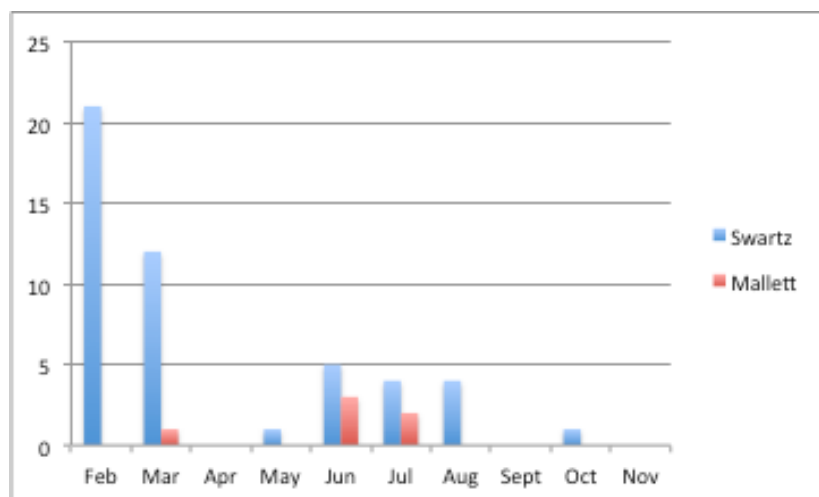

Fig. 4.2 - Frequency of External Musical References

Our Skype conversation was followed up by an extensive email from Swartz building on our initial attempts to set musical parameters, including a series of hyperlinks to existing songs. The majority of external musical references (see Fig. 4.2) were used at the beginning of the writing process, but also later on when Swartz wanted to signpost additional aspects of the musical material, or when I wanted to clarify musical direction. He retrospectively observed the advantages of this approach and also highlighted the value of on-line tools such as YouTube to increase the accessibility of musical ideas and aspects of performance.

> So while I could not necessarily describe in words or technical terms, what I thought some, not all, but maybe many of the songs wanted, or needed, or would be happy with, I could search YouTube and ultimately provide links to performances of songs that I felt had some attribute that would work for us.
>
> (Swartz, 2016)

As well as using these examples as an indication of the musical styles he wanted to explore, Swartz gave other cues as to the musical approach he had in mind: 'In my world 'commercial' is not a bad word. So if you want to push a bit in that direction....' (Swartz, 2014c) He also went on to reference the 'feel' of songs as musical starting points for my own creative processes, and particular instrumental passages in some songs, E.g. '"What Kind of Fool" could be in a similar space with interplay of guitar and piano and voice' (Swartz, 2014c). From these comments and musical references, I began to formulate a more comprehensive understanding of the show's compositional requirements, both in terms of the feel of the work as a whole, and each individual song.

Interestingly, the only real instance of veto in our partnership came after my first attempt to write music for the show's title song, 'Whispers of the Heart', another indicator that the initial stages of a collaboration (remote or otherwise) are crucial in terms of establishing both an overarching musical language and mutually agreeable working practices. Musical material was initiated from Swartz's original instructions, which I had summarised in my notes as:

- Minor key, pop
- Guy singing chick song
- Sarah MacLachlan
- Sad, but a love song

To begin the compositional process, I listened to the track he had referenced for this song ('Angels' by Sarah MacLachlan), choosing to take initial inspiration from its compound metre and piano ballad feel. My creative approach was chord driven; once I had settled on a chord structure I began to improvise vocal melodies over the top using the lyrics Swartz had given. This being the title song from the show, I also created a melodic motif that could be reiterated or developed elsewhere in the musical (see Fig. 4.3), a thematic approach that I felt I had used successfully in previous works.
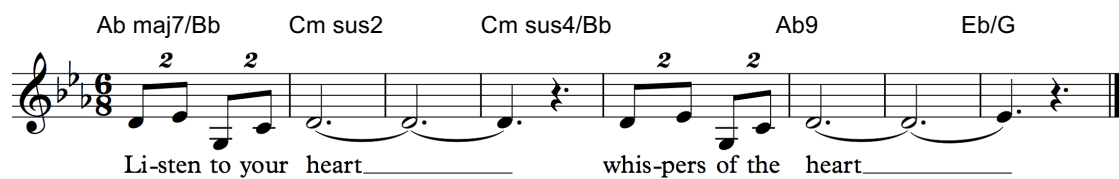

Fig. 4.3 Theme from 'Whispers of the Heart' version 1

I spent a good two weeks working on the song, composing largely at the piano, transcribing in notational form using score-writing software. I produced a rough studio demo using sequencing software that I send to Swartz as an MP3 email attachment. Swartz's reaction to the track indicated that my first attempt had not been successful. 'My first impression was that it is more musical theater than stadium rock. Maybe a bit of a Disney feel… And maybe too slow' (Swartz, 2014d). From his tone, I surmised that that the 'Disney' statement was not meant in a positive light, which meant his feedback to my first efforts had contained three 'veto' statements in a row. I initially interpreted this reaction as a blow, believing that I had done my 'musical theatre best' in the creation of this title track. I worried that our difference in musical knowledge and education would make a working relationship impossible, and that Swartz had already composed the songs in his head and actually needed them transcribed and arranged, rather than composed from scratch.

The advantage of not composing side by side with my co-writer meant that I could digest and consider my co-collaborator's feedback at my leisure. This supports the findings of Phalip et al (2009), above, that although written feedback can be harsher than the potentially more 'considerate' face-to-face delivery, asynchronous modes of communication can alleviate the negative

impact of criticism by offering space to reflect. After my original feelings of rejection began to subside, the distance offered by geographical status and the opportunity to re-read previous communications with a more objective perspective gave me the resolve to persevere with the project. I was keen to grow as a composer and knew I could only do this through learning from setbacks, and trying to adapt to the collaborative situations I found myself in. I realised I needed to learn not to take veto quite so personally. I also needed to take the advice of other more experienced composers on board. In an interview carried out in the early stages of this research, composer Tim Sutton (2012) provided a useful insight into a more positive mindset to adopt under such circumstances.

> I'm very amenable to change on the whole because it gives me an opportunity to write an alternative version, and nothing is lost; if there is an opportunity to create another song that wasn't there before, it should always be taken.

Of course, not all composers share this view, and are able to react to instances of rejection in a positive way. Composer Darren Clark (2017) reflects on a similar situation and its impact on his practice: '…for a while it affected my other collaborations. I became obsessed with the idea that I needed to have feedback in person in order to avoid misunderstanding.' After re-reading our early emails and notes from our video conversation I realised that Swartz had asked for a 'stadium rock' feel to the whole show, not a conventional musical theatre approach. I concluded that our initial attempts to collaborate had broken down in my misunderstanding of Swartz's overall aesthetic. I had misjudged the plentiful cues I had been given and completely ignored the overall 'rock gig' vibe, creating something too conventionally 'musical theatre' and musically complex. Perhaps sensing this too, Swartz sent additional resources to clarify his intentions for the song, from detailed commentaries concerning the emotional motivation of the characters to an audio recording in which he read the lyrics aloud with rhythmic inflection. He also responded to my edits of his lyrics by reworking them himself, perhaps indicating an acknowledgement of any initial limitations. He sent me several hyperlinks to performances of the Ray Charles' 'Song for You', which flagged this as a key musical reference from which to begin writing a new version. I produced "Whispers of the Heart Version

2"; in part a parody of the Ray Charles number (I documented no complex compositional process, merely penciled chord symbols over the newly drafted lyrics, which indicates the speed at which the song emerged). However, Swartz's 'works for me' affirmation to Version 2 gave me the motivation to continue working on further songs for the project.

With hindsight, this misunderstanding and subsequent reconciliation of a mutual musical aesthetic could only have been achieved through a period of trial and error, and was efficiently dealt with via the openness and transparency of our textual communication, and Swartz's resourcefulness. Tseng and Yeh (2013, p.8) see early disagreements as an aid to collaborative processes: 'It is advantageous to discover the struggles and conflicts earlier, to facilitate the open communication channel in teams, and to encourage individual accountability.' In terms of the development of my compositional practice, this experience also allowed me to relax and explore a more pared down songwriting style, steering away from traditional musical theatre and borrowing from the simple but effective characteristics of rock, blues and popular styles. In this sense, I welcomed Swartz's authorial ownership of the piece and settled into the role of commissioned composer, enjoying the opportunity offered by our physical distance to limit my emotional investment in the work.
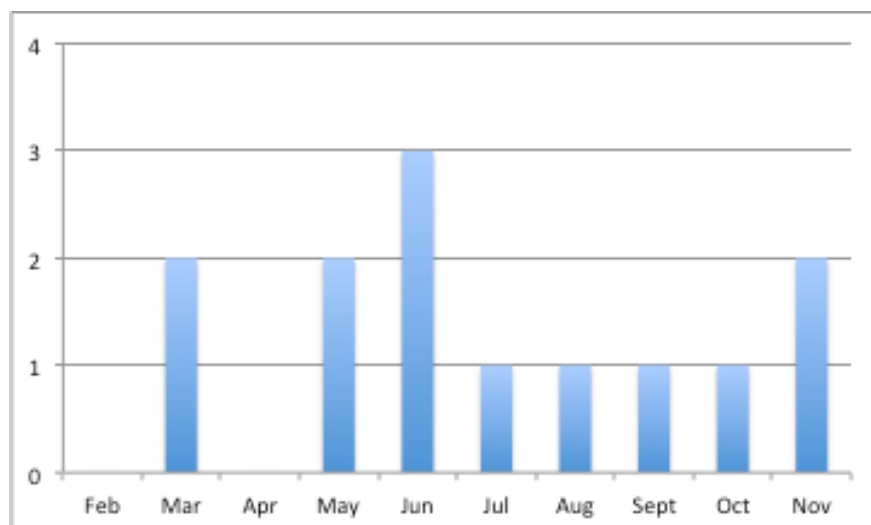

Fig. 4.4 - Song productivity for *Whispers of the Heart* Feb-Nov 2014

An initial, intense working style gradually evolved into a more laid-back way of working that worked for each of us. I composed music for further songs for the show, in no particular order, managing to provide demos at a steady rate (see Fig. 4.4). This productivity was accompanied by consistent levels of Managing Expectations statements on my part, and levels of Positive/Encouragement, and Small Talk/Relationship Building on Swartz's: "Laughing my ass off and dancing like a mad fool. I love it" (Swartz, 2014b). If obstacles appeared in my ability to deliver (e.g. family/work issues) the momentum of our regular email conversation allowed me to manage his expectations accordingly.

Once a tone of communication, pace and aesthetic had been established, Swartz and I could consciously enjoy the advantages of the remote nature of our collaborative partnership. Swartz's perspective is summarised neatly in his interview response:

> We could work at our own pace, whenever the time was available and the mood was right, and all of that stuff. I.E. No scheduled meetings which then enforce a kind of pressure to produce (which isn't necessarily bad but not always pleasant), no extended discussions and on the real upside, no interruptions, at least from the collaborator. Kids, spouses, dogs, phone calls, etc. depends on how hardcore about working one wants to be. (Swartz, 2016)

In this way, by sharing details about our home lives to each other within the friendly subtext of our emails, we were implicitly providing an ongoing commentary of our availability and ability to make progress with the work. The inclusion of details of family, health and travel commitments within our conversations not only provided a context for fluctuating levels of productivity but became a comfortable and non-confrontational method of dealing with such issues.

During this period, rather than becoming sure Swartz and I were 'writing the same show' as suggested by Sondheim (above), I became more assured that I was writing Swartz's. This was in no way a negative stance in that I did not feel as if I had relinquished my compositional voice in any way, but more that I was fulfilling a brief successfully, which again returns to the idea of our collaborative relationship as that of client-composer. The complete commission took shape in the form of 12 songs that did not require the characteristics of conventional musical theatre composition such as recurrent themes or musical

devices, but took the format of separate songs that would both serve the narrative and character development, whilst providing an entertaining rock gig performance. I quickly came to view this new approach as more straightforward than my previous works, finding pop/rock/blues parameters much simpler to work within, which in turn made the compositional process shorter and in some ways more satisfying.

4.4 Conclusions

The process of writing music for *Whispers of the Heart* has provided a useful perspective on the advantages of remote collaboration as both a model for musical theatre collaboration, and an environment for collaborative research. In terms of offering a contrasting case study, this model has challenged my previous composer-led approaches to creating musical theatre by exploring the development of a trans-global client-composer relationship in which I adopted a 'Lyric-Setting' method to the generating musical material.

In terms of establishing a positive relationship between writer and composer, a scoping phase was important not only to determine an aesthetic frame of reference for the emerging work but also to negotiate other factors such as project timeline and preferred ways of working. Findings suggest that when choosing to work with unfamiliar collaborators, trust can successfully be built via open communication and demonstrable commitment to a project. Here a legally binding contract also helped to enhance trust and cement the division of responsibility and potential revenue. Early misunderstandings did occur, however as argued by Tan, Van Den Bergh and Coninx (2014, p.92) these emotive exchanges served to signpost approaches to forging more 'favourable connections' as the work progressed. The scoping period was also aided by Swartz's considerable experience as an advertising copywriter which afforded him not only an established set of collaborative skills but also a mastery of his writing craft that ensured both tone and content of his email communication were fit for purpose. As a consequence, his frequent use of positive language eased the development of our collaborative relationship, which in turn fed the creative process. Accrued positive experience within the project contributed to Swartz's reciprocal faith in me as composer:

> I quickly reached a point where I was comfortable trusting your musical judgment over mine. You have the training and your heart is in composing in a way that is impossible for me to even imagine. And the results speak for themselves. When that is happening, the impact of my previous experience is a voice that says STFU (although I probably didn't). At the same time, if it hadn't been working, I would probably have pulled the plug. Unless you beat me to it.
>
> (Swartz, 2016)

In terms of my own compositional practice, as well as encouraging me to view negative feedback as an opportunity to create something new (Sutton, 2012), the challenge of relating Swartz's diverse musical references to the lyrical structure of each song required a new way of approaching a songwriting task which has definitely enriched my craft. During our discourse reference tracks emerged as one of the most successful methods of communicating musical ideas, demonstrating perhaps that aural examples are more effective than words, particularly in a remote collaboration. Some of the musical material Swartz referenced was completely new to me and not in a style I would usually have explored, which has extended my musical repertoire and confidence to write in these styles. By analysing these works and shaping my musical ideas according to relevant aspects I was able to let go of my own self-imposed constraints, allowing for a more efficient and emotionally detached approach to composing that is perhaps more suited to a commercial environment. This supports Pejrolo's view of the remote collaboration as an opportunity to enrich the composer's musical palette (2014).

The remote [digital] collaboration offers the musical theatre composer many benefits, if implemented with an approach that includes appropriate technology, considered communication, and a level of self-awareness. Technological tools should also be chosen carefully to suit the task, working practices and personalities of participants. In this project, digital tools were used effectively and appropriately; one initial video call followed by an ongoing communication exchange mainly taking the form of emails, MP3 attachments and file transfer. Whilst this approach was appropriate for *Whispers of the Heart* it is likely that more complex musical development could have required a lot more in the way of feedback exchange and revision, which may have benefitted from more real-time interaction in order to save time. As well as offering the obvious opportunities of being able to work with a collaborator from a different

continent (Stewart, 2015), if strategically adopted the advantages of the asynchronous nature of email and digital file exchange offers thinking space to each party that can both aid the creative process and allow for greater reflection on the formatting of responses. An email may be blunt and lacking in the subtle nuances shared with face-to-face verbal exchanges, but it can be read at the recipient's leisure and re-visited if (as in this case) re-interpretation is called for. Rather than the non-committal 'balance' of synchronous and asynchronous communication suggested by Phalip et al (2009) I would suggest that a purely asynchronous approach can be successful if co-collaborators are mindful of the directness of the written word as a means to convey and receive feedback. This in turn can enhance the collaborative skills of those involved.

Adopting the role of composer-researcher for this project required a more consistently reflective approach that I believe enhanced my own skills as collaborator. In his study of students composers completing a collaborative composition task in a virtual environment, Biasutti (2015) found that completing surveys reflecting on both their collaborative interactions and those of others, helped participants develop an awareness and consciousness of their own approach to collaboration. Following completion of the surveys, participants were seen to change their behaviours and language to that which they deemed more constructive to the creative process. For example, they chose to use less emotive responses to the contributions of others, which was considered to be a more positive method of interaction. In turn, this appeared to benefit the group as a whole:

> Participants fortified their feeling of a community of practice and developed a consciousness about what a collaborative situation implies.
>
> (Biasutti, 2015, p.126)

This is perhaps what Philips was referring to (above) as the 'spirit of collaborating' (2013) – a conscious respect for the collaborative environment and an awareness of the impact of one's interactions within it. These findings would indicate on a wider level that taking part in research into collaborative practice is beneficial to the development of collaborative skills in the individual composer and the creative team as a whole. Certainly, being on the receiving end of negative feedback in the early stages of encouraged me to be mindful of how I phrased comments of my own that could be misconstrued or viewed to be

overly critical. Despite this awareness, analysis of our email discourse showed that my levels of 'Positive/Encouragement' statements were lower than Swartz's (14 statements to his 27 over the 10-month period). Even taking into account the relative frequency of our email exchange (Swartz was a more regular communicator), this shows that there is further scope for me to improve my skills of positive communication, and supports the conclusion that the role of composer-researcher can be both insightful and transformative.

As expected, a mixed method research design proved a more structured and focused approach to providing an ethnographic perspective of the impact of this model of collaboration on the compositional and collaborative process. The action of taking notes during the compositional process was a change to my usual working practices, which brought advantages and challenges. At the beginning of the project I felt the need to annotate more during the composition process in case I forgot details, and this served as a slight distraction from the composition task, as expected. However, as I progressed through the project the act of self-reflection became part of my practice, I found I needed to take fewer notes and relied more on post-completion self-interview. Rather than interrupting creative flow, this induced a higher level of subjective consciousness of both my decision-making processes and collaborative interactions. This allowed me to question my motivation and musical direction, which I believe made me more likely to consider less familiar alternatives. As suggested by Turner and Schroeder (2007, p.9) language coding and textual analysis can provide a tangible way to find meaning in collaborative discourse. In this case it provided a structured approach to analyzing the substantial data produced during ten months of email exchange. This simple form of language classification was successful in revealing trends in types of language used by each co-collaborator, and this would be an equally valuable approach to widening perspectives on collaborative interactions in larger groups. In this project statements relating to creative decisions (i.e. lyrical/instrumental suggestions) were not included within this analysis due to time constraints, however could be included in future studies into compositional process. Importantly, this research project would not have been possible without Swartz's willingness to be scrutinised, and the openness of his interview

responses provide a qualitative context within which to reflect on the experience of this remote collaboration.

Although not included as part of this case study, Swartz and I went on to collaborate for a further eighteen months on the production of studio demos of each song, expanding the collaborative team to include two music producers and various vocalists. Although the entirety of the practical input to putting together these recordings took place in Canada, Swartz continued to involve me in musical decisions via regular email updates, and I contributed MIDI files of piano and instrumental parts to be used within the recordings. The arrival of the first CD album through the post from Canada two years into the collaboration was a surprisingly emotional and poignant moment, underlining both Swartz's continuing faith in both the musical and our creative partnership. What began as an interesting project that would challenge my compositional practice and provide an additional perspective for this research continues to grow as a collaborative relationship, and I look forward to the next step in the process: a physical production of the show.

Chapter 5 - Conclusions

This study sought to investigate how a composer negotiates their craft within the wider collaborative environment of a musical theatre team through reflecting on my experience of composing within three contrasting collaborative models:

- A co-writing partnership (*Paperwork! The Musical* and *Moulin Blue*)
- A multidisciplinary collaboration (*The Witchfinder Project*)
- A remote collaboration (*Whispers of the Heart*)

In examining these case studies, the aim was to investigate my transition from previous solo working practices into an interdisciplinary setting, identifying factors that aid effective collaborative working, and discussing its influence on the compositional process and product. This chapter will outline the key opportunities and challenges I faced within an interdisciplinary team, offering a perspective on good practice. It will also review the implications of this research as an insight into studying both the compositional process and collaborative practice.

5.1 The interdisciplinary environment as an enabler of innovative collaborative practice

The potential for creating new and exciting multi-dimensional work is arguably one of the key features of the musical theatre environment that attracts artistic practitioners to swap the simplicity of lone-working for the vibrant intermeshing of artistic talents and personalities. Through applying a theoretical framework of organisational and socio-psychological perspectives to my experiences of collaborative projects this study has shown that a musical theatre creative team is a functionally diverse environment. Within this setting, by consciously exploiting diversity as a resource, the composer can both enrich their practice and develop collaborative skill. Embracing the diversity found in collaborative arrangements by working organically with artists from other specialisms encouraged both myself and my co-collaborators to use approaches in the production of four new works of musical theatre that simply

would not have come about as a result of any one individual's efforts. My experiences strongly suggest that the musical theatre environment offers group members the opportunity to experience the rewards of the *assembly bonus affect* (Collins and Guetzkow, 1964). Consequently, those entering a multi-disciplinary setting should not do this expecting to find consistency of view or approach, but rather to encounter a variety of perspectives (Phillips and Lloyd, 2006, p.158) and be open to allowing these to influence and shape their work. This in turn should empower them to express their own views or propose alternative solutions, contributing to the rich palette of complimentary aesthetic ideas from which a new musical theatre work is borne.

The diversity of skill and personality to be found within the musical theatre collaborative team will inevitably cause instances of conflict, but arguably this is a necessary part of the development of ideas, and (if managed sensitively) can be healthy, promoting convergent thinking and artistic integrity. My findings from this study support the work of Srikanth et al (2016, p.486) who recognise that 'all group processes will involve mistakes, misunderstandings, and coordination failures', arguing that there is a need for identification of factors that enable effective working in diverse teams. A variety of past research across different fields has iterated that it is possible to learn to collaborate more effectively, with some arguing that collaborative expertise can only be gained empirically (Knight, 2000; Tharp and Kornbluth, 2013). As Knight (2000, p.136) recognises; 'Effective collaboration is evidenced through actions, not just talk and espoused values.' In the process of this research, my incremental experience as a collaborator did indeed aid my progression through later projects, allowing me to use resources more wisely and avoid previous pitfalls. However, prior knowledge of a range of elements pertaining to more effective function within each stage of the creative process may have contributed to a more efficient adaptation of my craft.

Participation in case studies for this research has led to the identification of a five-stage process in the development of a collaborative musical theatre project (see Fig. 5.1). This model represents my interpretation of the creative process, illustrating the key factors influencing each phase.
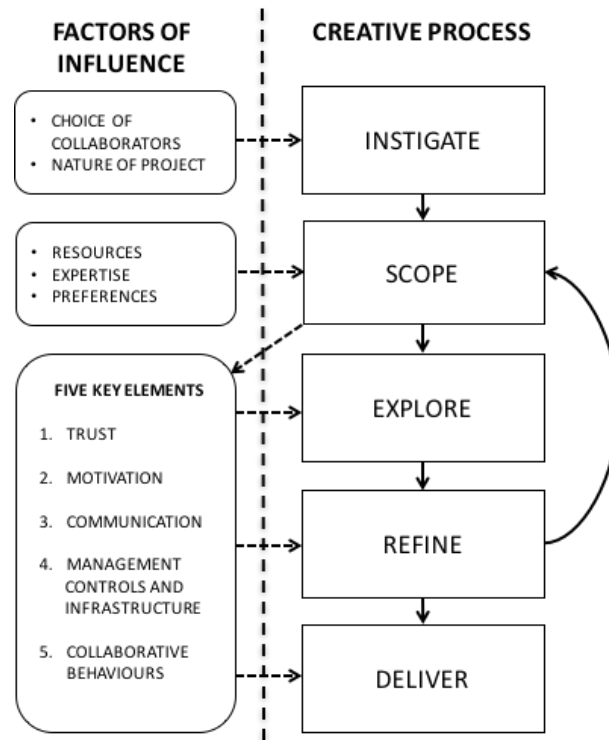
FACTORS OF INFLUENCE

- CHOICE OF COLLABORATORS
- NATURE OF PROJECT

- RESOURCES
- EXPERTISE
- PREFERENCES

FIVE KEY ELEMENTS

1. TRUST
2. MOTIVATION
3. COMMUNICATION
4. MANAGEMENT CONTROLS AND INFRASTRUCTURE
5. COLLABORATIVE BEHAVIOURS

CREATIVE PROCESS

INSTIGATE

SCOPE

EXPLORE

REFINE

DELIVER

Fig. 5.1 Factors influencing the compositional and collaborative process

5.1.1 Instigate

In instigating a collaborative project, I propose that it is advantageous to choose potential collaborators wisely – based not only on their areas of specialism but taking into account past history, preferences and personality. More experienced collaborators can provide beneficial guidance and support through to those new to this way of working. Joining forces with more established or renowned practitioners may not be a realistic prospect for early career artists but can be highly motivating. Stiles and Drewe (Stiles and Drewe, 2012) reflect on their experiences working with writers such as Julian Fellowes, Robert Harling, Ron Cowen and Dan Lipman: 'They are all such smart people in their own right, that as collaborators we upped our game working with them.'

Familiarity with co-collaborators is helpful but is not a pre-requisite, and can be compensated by commitment, motivation and potential as shown in my collaborations with Alexander, Warnes and Swartz. Knowledge outside of one's own specialism is a contributory factor to developing respect and appreciation of co-collaborators' perspectives, but again this is not essential, and is likely to be gained through experience. More vital are complementary skill sets, a

respect for the art forms, expertise and work of one's co-collaborators, and some sense of a common goal for the work in question. As noted by Sutton (2012): 'You have to have a shared aesthetic, or at least you have to respect the other person's aesthetic enough to be able to live with it and work with it.' A small-scale project or test phase such as a co-writing arrangement, or commitment to producing one or two songs, is also a useful way to test these aspects, and ascertain if a creative relationship is likely to succeed in the long term (Woolford, 2012). This can be a good indicator on which to decide whether additional investment in a project will be fruitful.

The nature of a project will also have a bearing on an artist's decision to become involved, whether it matches personal aspirations, skill sets, or offers the chance to explore new ground. Apart from the issue of obtaining rights (if considering an adaptation) there are also aesthetic considerations. The subject matter should engage its creators sufficiently to sustain interest for the long gestation period required (Woolford, 2012, p.33) but it should also lend itself to the particular nuances of dramatisation through song – in the words of Brown (2012b): 'It has to sing as an idea.'

5.1.2 Scope

Following on from project instigation, the *scope* phase of a collaborative project is vital in establishing project aims, as noted by composer Paul Whitty (2004).

> Collaborations – and for that matter the act of composition – should start with questions and not answers. How can you know what you are going to create or what your collective parameters will be when you first start working with another practitioner?

Dependent on available resources and expertise, by including an early phase of project scoping, mechanisms can be put in place to ensure a team functions as effectively as possible. This could include honing aesthetic elements such as the style or nature of the work, or more practical issues such as timescales, expectations for means and regularity of communication, and division of responsibility. More experienced collaborators' insight may greatly benefit this phase, ensuring important issues are addressed and encouraging

the proactive agreement of strategies to manage decision-making and conflict. The formality of this exercise can vary. It may take the form of drawing up legal contracts or establishing explicit 'ground rules' for collaborators jointly developing artistic material (Carter, 1990; Mercier, in Lai, 2011, p.26; Wilson, 2015) or more relaxed and exploratory arrangements.

In earlier case studies for this research such agreements were largely implicit and a product of early creative discussion, however it could be argued that more formal agreements encourage efficiency and save fraught negotiations and compromising of roles later on in the project lifecycle. For example, an explicit scoping phase for *Witchfinder* may have better prepared the team for the logistical and organisational issues we faced upon receiving Arts Council funding. In this case, our inexperience led to a shortened scope phase which focused mainly on aesthetic issues and skipped quickly into the experimental idea generation of an *explore* period. Rather than focusing on tasks relating to our individual skill sets and working preferences, some members of the team found themselves with responsibilities outside of their specialism. Contrastingly, in the case of *Whispers of the Heart*, time management, division of labour and expectations were more explicitly defined via forthright and clear email exchanges, and a legal agreement drawn up within the project's scoping stage.

Most importantly, this research strongly suggests that work carried out during the scope phase is instrumental in establishing a foundation of the following five key elements that will go on to play an integral part in the success of latter stages of a musical theatre project.

1. Trust

Evidence collected in this study has shown that the generation and development of creative ideas benefits from the early nurturing of positive relationships between collaborators. This supports the view of Mamykina, et al (2002, p.99) who argue that 'the importance of creating an emotional as well as physical environment that encourages creativity should not be underestimated'. In terms of establishing a firm basis for effective interpersonal dynamics, experienced collaborative facilitator Romero (2008) believes collaborative team members should prioritise

building relationships by 'framing conversation pleasantly, actively engaging others to find commonalities; using humour; being aware of and sensitive to cultural preferences and differences; and disclosing that which is useful and relevant about you, the situation, and the organisation' (2008, p.37). These positive behaviours serve to build a grounding of trust between team members, from which creativity and productivity can flourish in the *explore* and *refine* stages.

When nurturing a sense of trust, the importance of initial team-building activities (as well as the socialising that takes place within the creative process) should not be overlooked, as this is often when decisions are made. As performing arts students, we are used to participating in games and exercises promoting teamwork and trust, whereas as adult artist-practitioners these practices are often replaced by a less explicit social get-together such as a working lunch, dinner or drink. This view is shared by Bennett (2014, p.241) who believes that 'biscuits are important' and that the sharing of 'general social chit-chat over tea' can include aesthetic inclinations and references that may contribute to later creative choices. In the remote collaborative model in this study, regular *Small Talk/Relationship Building* statements within email communications helped to manifest and reinforce a sense of trust, suggesting that sharing personal information unrelated to the project aims can reinforce relationships. In each collaborative model, trust was seen as a highly important commodity, and essential to the successful function of the team. As outlined by collaborative theatre makers Bicat and Baldwin (2002, p.151): 'From trust and good communication skills will grow a group competent in making good decisions and thus reduce the chances of things going wrong later down the path.' However, from my perspective, both *The Witchfinder Project* and *Whispers of the Heart* lacked the established emotional security afforded by the trust shared between co-writing partners in chapter two, a factor I would attribute to the strength of prior relationships. Previous knowledge of each other's attributes and experience allowed for more instinctive decision-making and the free exchange of constructive criticism. It also offered a reassuring buffer for instances requiring problem solving and I believe

contributed to my greater levels of satisfaction with both process and product.

2. Motivation

The relationship-building dimension of a collaborative project is further supported by efforts to understand and appreciate the motivations of others (Romero, 2008, p.14) and also be open about our own goals and intentions. Each group member will have their own individual and team motivations for participating in the project, and being aware of these from the start can aid interpersonal relationships. This motivation need not take the tangible form of economic or artistic reward. Team members may be motivated by an experimental creative journey and its impact on their practice, by their belief in a centralised vision, or by a combination of these, and other motivations. West, in Svich (2003, p.183) suggests that rather than fixed ideas for outcome, a successful collaboration in an artistic environment will often benefit from a sense of exploration, envisioning the end product as something 'out there to be found and discovered.'

In the case of musical theatre, I would argue that these case studies have shown that collectivist values such as a sense of emotional attachment or commitment to the project can form the glue that ensures a show survives inevitable hitches and complications and reaches production. The format of the show or its aesthetic vision may change as the creative process advances (as in *Paperwork*), however if founded on truly integrative ideas will generate mutual feelings of ownership throughout the team that provide a shared motivational force. Research by Grill-Childers (2016) examines the success of musicals *Oklahoma!* and *The Lion King* claiming that despite adversity 'both shows succeeded because they put unity of concept at the centre of every major developmental decision, and because they chose to take significant artistic risks in pursuit of their visions' (2016, p.62). In the case of *Witchfinder*, a solid foundation of research (in this case historical) helped bind team members' ideas together to form and maintain our

belief that we could achieve a common goal, even if for a long period we did not know exactly what shape this would take.

3. Communication

Researchers from a variety of backgrounds agree that communication skills are essential for a healthy and productive collaboration (Mannix and Neale, 2005, p.15; Roe, 2007, p.209; Sawyer, 2008, p.71). Regular and positive communication can be used to support the management of expectations, divergence and convergence of ideas in project teams of all types. In musical theatre, where co-collaborators commonly do not share specialist knowledge, aesthetic ideas can be difficult to communicate due to the conventions, terminology and format of artistic artefact. Taylor (2017, p.571) believes that 'such sharing depends on there being a medium common to the participants in which the inner speech can be expressed and mutually understood.' It is perhaps more realistic to argue that all media have their limitations (e.g. the set designer's sketch or scale model to represent their full vision, the choreographer's solo demonstration of movement to demonstrate a full cast production number) and it is up to the creative imagination of the artists involved to interpret and envision the potential of each proposed aspect.

The act of entering into a diverse creative project pre-supposes an acceptance of our own limitations, a trust in the abilities of others outside our specialism, and a willingness to transcend such differences by developing resourceful and creative approaches to communicating ideas across artistic specialisms. For example, the use of external musical references (via hyperlinks) and a combination of technological approaches (such as scratch recordings, sequencing and notation software) to communicate musical ideas in *Whispers of the Heart* proved successful in overcoming the lack of traditional musical expertise in my co-writer. Attempts to use another discipline's 'language' to express thoughts and ideas show willing even if it they are only partially effective. Mamykina et al (2002, p.98) advocate making an effort to use technology to assist in this task: 'These demonstrations of creative ideas and

visions, when the right tools are available, greatly reduce the risk of misunderstanding and fruitless arguments.' Previous experience outside of one's own specialism can not only help this communication of ideas, but aid group understanding of the different approaches to the creative process presented by each discipline.

4. Management controls/infrastructure

This research supports the view that to be successful, a diverse collaborative team requires both management controls and infrastructure appropriate to the size of the team and nature of the project. In the smaller collaborative models studied a more egalitarian sharing of responsibilities was sufficient, however it is likely that the larger the team, and more complex the parameters and scale of the work, the more useful it will be to have a defined hierarchy and clear division of responsibility.

Whilst diversity can aid divergent thinking, it can also hinder the convergence of these ideas into solutions without the expertise of a strong facilitator. Bercovitz and Feldman (2011, p.84) believe that this proficiency is necessary in order to make the most of a collaborative team's creative potential.

> Bringing individuals together into a coherent team requires strong internal coordination processes to insure the efficient deployment of resources to identify and exploit opportunities. Both coordination capabilities and communication skills can be developed over time as team members interact, developing routines and an effective division of responsibilities.

In the business environment, this collaborative expertise is sometimes found outside the remit of the formal project manager role, where external 'facilitators' are hired in specifically to manage the collaborative element of a project or task. Bicat and Baldwin (2002, p.11) argue that when devising collaborative theatre 'rather than being at the top of a hierarchical structure, the director is at the centre of the rehearsal fulcrum, ensuring that everyone is working together', depicting the role of director as the enabler of the collaborative element of the team. Contrastingly, this study supports the view that during the creation of a musical theatre other individual team members may prove to be a

mediating force, or even combine their expertise to ensure that egos are managed, creative potential is maximised and conflict handled sensitively. Again, experience and trust are useful enablers for this. However, when moving into the production phase a more explicit division of responsibility and appropriate control measures become important in ensuring that a musical reaches a quality performance standard.

5. Collaborative behaviours

As well as the relationship and trust building behaviours useful in the early stages of a project, other personal qualities and facets of behaviour and proved beneficial throughout all three models of collaboration. As composer, I found that perhaps the most significant was my ability to adapt between solo and group working environments to complete introverted and extroverted tasks. Roe (2007, p.187) argues that any composer requires courage to work collaboratively, and I would further this argument by asserting that a composer making the leap from a previously solo approach to the duality required by the musical theatre environment is also taking an even wider leap of faith. Findings from this research support the notion that more flexible a composer can be in adapting their working practices to suit the needs of the project, the more rewarding the outcome. For me, this meant setting aside assumptions I might have made regarding my own abilities and working preferences, and adopting an openness to the feedback and artistic input of others. The space in between periods of collaborative and lone working (whether in a proximate or remote model) encouraged and developed my ability to think reflectively and allowing me to take on board criticism and feedback, using it as an opportunity to enrich work. To fully appreciate the value of this discourse required other attributes such as courtesy and humility (Bennett, 2014, p.231), and a sensitivity to the perspectives of others. Perhaps it is the combination of these traits and behaviours, together with willingness to both share one's ideas and listen to those of others, that form the enigmatic 'spirit of collaborating' regarded by Romero (2008, p.13) and Phillips (2013) to be at the heart of a successful collaboration.

5.1.3 Explore

Engaging in my compositional practice as part of a wider creative team offered opportunities to expand my creative thinking skills through group brainstorming, regular workshopping of musical material, and informative feedback. In each case study, involving others in the *explore* stage of the composition process stimulated a higher level of divergence, generating an abundance of complimentary material with which to work. This took the form of brainstorming lyrical and musical ideas (*Paperwork and Moulin Blue*) experimentation with edited Foley sounds and electro-acoustic outputs (*Witchfinder*), lyric setting and use of rock/blues conventions (*Whispers of the Heart*). Some of these approaches required familiarisation with new technology and the acquisition of new skills and knowledge, which widened my practice, further increasing creative potential and my versatility as an artist.

Learning to compose collaboratively meant a making significant departure from my previous solo practices, requiring the development of a new level of flexibility in order to successfully negotiate the duality of composing for musical theatre. This takes two forms; firstly, the ability to transition between the solo environment of the act of composing and the collaborative setting of the team, which requires a mixture of introvert and extrovert behaviours (Roe, 2007, p.207), and a conscious awareness that even when physically alone we are working collaboratively. Secondly, the nature of the task of composing for this genre involves retaining a multi-level perspective: considering the microcosm of each individual song within the macrocosm of the musical as a whole (Stiles and Drewe, 2012).

This duality and continual shift of perspective required when composing for musical theatre can feel uncomfortable at first, but embracing the involvement of co-collaborators within the creative process can help to alleviate this pressure.

5.1.4 Refine

When collaborating, I found that access to the feedback and critique providing by co-collaborators during the *refine* phases of each project helped me build and grow my craft by allowing me to relinquish the burden of full creative control. In previous solo composition efforts, I had relied on my own instinct and experience when finalising musical material, often finding it difficult to decide when to stop reshaping and fine tuning. In commercial musical fields the problem of achieving objectivity over a musical work is addressed by utilising the subjective listening skills of mastering engineers who have played no part in the recording or mixing process (Cousins and Hepworth-Sawyer, 2013, p.43). Within the musical theatre environments experienced in this study, input from co-writers, cast, and other artists both within and outside the creative team often contributed to quicker decision making and consequently a more efficient process. It is important to stress however that in each collaborative model, this part of the process was supported by trust, respect and a positive critique style, underlining the significance of these as key elements of influence.

In the case study *Whispers of the Heart* the *refine* stage was particularly aided by the time and space offered by the asynchronous nature of our correspondence. This presented room in which to digest and cogitate the feedback given by my trans-global writing partner that softened the impact of 'bad news' through opportunities for deeper reflection.

When working collaboratively, this stage of the creative process can often escalate issues of composer voice, as edits and cuts are made to their work. Established composers rely on an intuitive element to knowing when to fight for their ideas during the collaborative process (Schwartz, no date; Menken in Rees, 2010; Goodhand, 2012; Sutton, 2012), expressing the view that composers should not be 'precious' when faced with letting go of elements of their ideas for the good of the project. At this point in the compositional process, collective motivation (and the good of the show as a whole) should help to overcome any personal feelings of rejection. From my perspective, participating in each case study made me progressively more grateful for the perspectives of others whilst making final touches to musical and lyrical material. I learned to air any niggling doubts I had about particular sections, and appreciate the satisfaction of the sense of finality provided. Playwright David Greig (in Svich,

2003, p.158) notes that over time it is possible to learn how to handle collaboration 'to the best advantage of the work', which again supports the view that the integrity and quality of a musical can be enhanced through maximisation of collaborative relationships.

5.1.5 Deliver

A composer's level of participation in the final *deliver* stage of a musical theatre project will vary, mainly according to the project's infrastructure and pre-prescribed roles and responsibilities. In this study, my involvement ranged from participating in a public performance as performer or musician, (*Paperwork*, *Moulin Blue* and *Witchfinder*) to providing input to produce a CD demo and branding of a work not yet staged (*Whispers of the Heart*). For each project, a level of 'audience' joined the collaboration at this point, offering yet another (and perhaps the most vital) perspective on the work. As observed by lyricist Anthony Drewe (2012): 'affirmation comes when there's an audience there.' If a show reaches production, again trust is an influential factor, with the creative team placing their faith onto the cast and technical team responsible, laying the work and themselves open to the opinions of the audience. I found this sense of shared responsibility another advantage to working within a collaboration, where in my view 'success' did not rise or fall with my own efforts, but that of the whole team. Again, levels of satisfaction will vary according to the motivations of both the individual and the group; for some it will be enough to see your work come to fruition, others may crave favourable press critique, or financial return.

Whilst not all composers will be comfortable involving others in their creative process, the consideration of others' agenda can be stimulating and invigorating - 'If nothing else – collaborating helps composers to keep asking fundamental questions about their practice' (Whitty, 2004). This stimulation can contribute to the production of new and exciting works which enrich both the practice of the artists involved and the current field. For me, a factor common to each case study was the necessity to challenge my preferred and usual practices by trying new approaches, conventions and stimulae, resulting in the production of musical material that has induced varying degrees of satisfaction but arguably always retained the integrity of each collaborative endeavour.

5.2 Insights into studying collaboration

This work supports the views of Mamykina et al (2002) that it is possible to learn to collaborate more effectively, and that research has a role to play in this. They argue that 'observations and analysis of the creative work of an interdisciplinary team, whether in industry or in academic settings, can greatly increase our understanding of the factors that influence it and the driving forces behind it' (2002, p.99). However, two key barriers to this type of research are also applicable within a musical theatre setting; firstly, the intrusive nature of inquiries of this kind, and secondly the fear of exposure generated by attempts to de-mystify the artist's process (Coessens et al, 2009, p.158). A solution that addresses both of these issues is the role of the composer-researcher, who (once ethical issues of consent have been resolved) can use their participant status to observe from within the collaborative team. Adopting this stance presupposes a willingness on the part of the composer to interrogate their own processes and interactions, and the position of researcher empowers them to adopt methods appropriate to the situation, and depth of investigation.

In this case, engaging in multiple collaborative projects over time allowed for a degree of refining of the chosen composer-researcher methodology, indicating that auto-ethnographic research can have its advantages, if combined with a mixed method approach applied with consistency, discipline and integrity. In observing aspects of the creative process, self-scrutiny is distracting to the composer-researcher but can help develop a sense of self-awareness that aids the compositional process and promotes innovation and development of artistic practice. As this study progressed, the mental act of self-observation became more integrated with my craft, and in later projects almost become embedded in my practice. Consequently, one of the most useful outcomes of this project has been the provision of a model of self-reflexive critical analysis for artist researchers, which aids the development of one's craft through the integration of a conscious awareness and questioning of decision-making.

Still to be refined however, is the physical act of documenting the creative thought process, as this remained an unwelcome interruption, whether ongoing or retrospective. In early case studies documentary evidence was sporadic, due to the pressures of adapting to new ways of working, and the

imminent deadlines of projects. In later projects a more regimented approach was adopted that was supported by structured interview and stimulated recall. Composer notes and sketches go some way to recording the key steps in the compositional process, however there remains a need to find a more reliable and consistent approach to recording decision-making. One possibility for the development of approaches to investigating the compositional process is the notion of experienced composer-researchers observing other composers (working in independent or collaborative settings). The benefit of a high level of competence and confidence in both their own craft and research skills could be applied to the sensitive selection and implementation of suitable methods designed to minimise disruption of the creative process whilst generating useful data for analysis.

Findings suggest that the musical theatre environment is an ideal setting for research into collaborative creativity. In particular, remote or virtual models of collaboration are useful for investigation into collaborative working practices due to their contained nature and the availability of evidence produced. In the case of *Whispers of the Heart* textual analysis provided a useful starting point for studying the types of language used in collaborative interchange. This method could provide more profound evidence if expanded to include deeper linguistic analysis of discourse transcripts. Scrutiny of video communication where expression and gesture are also taken into account would also add a physical dimension to studies of this type, and once refined, observational methods could be transferred into a real environment.

Just as we need to learn to collaborate by collaborating, we need to learn how to observe this process by composer-researcher practice; yet another duality requiring flexibility of thought and practice, and a willingness to adopt a multi-perspective view to gain a deeper understanding of the nature of our creativity. Neatly summarised by Coessens et al (2009, p.158): 'the question of the vulnerability of the artist-researcher uncovers double roles and expectations for the artist, balancing between new objective understandings and hidden subjective and personally situated aspects.'

5.3 Further work

Perhaps the most significant area requiring further investigation is what the arts may learn from business and vice versa with regard to good practice for managing collaborative enterprise. The business environment tends to use more formal approaches to collaboration such as:

- The explicit definition of roles and responsibilities (via corresponding job descriptions) and a formal hierarchy
- Pre-determined agenda for meetings, project plans and self-assessment review
- Use of third party facilitators as mediators of collaborative behaviour
- Risk analyses to minimise and manage the impact of potential problems
- Policies for dealing with conflict (bullying and harassment, whistle-blowing, capability procedures)

Whereas artistic projects can offer an exploratory approach to idea generation, creative and resourceful communication methods to abridge issues relating to functional diversity, and scope for fluidity in project outcomes, measures and roles. Both areas may learn from the other. However, the factors seen to aid the collaborative efforts of a musical theatre team (outlined above) appear to be common to both fields.

Musical theatre is a truly collaborative genre in which music plays an integral role. As explained by Frankel (2000, p.59):

> A score works to integrate all parts of a musical. There is a set of powers out of music alone – establishing songs, reprises, segues, underscoring, and relief and comment songs – which weave the musical into one fabric. Accomplishing this depends completely on how much all the collaborators share every decision.

Consequently, a composer deciding to write music for this genre is not only making a commitment to produce a significant body of work, but to combine their own ideas with those of an extended creative team of artists from distinct disciplines. There is certainly more work to be done to investigate the differences between these disciplines – in particular how can we better understand cultural artistic nuances and use this knowledge to our advantage (e.g. to solve communication issues).

This research raises significant questions concerning the value of collaborative working not only as a developmental tool, but also potentially as a catalyst for personal change. Little (2011) concludes his paper on personality and motivation by asking 'Can protractedly acting out of character lead to actual biogenic changes?'. In this scenario, can repeatedly working within collaborative environments change not only the composer's practices but also aspects of their personality? Little's work pre-supposes a tendency for individuals to intrinsically prefer either introverted or extroverted practices, but it may be possible to embrace both. This study certainly identifies many dichotomies within the musical theatre composer's role, but whether their ability to fulfil the duality of this art form occurs out of necessity or is intrinsically embedded within their personality remains to be seen.

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