Research into the musician’s professional education: a plea for artistic research

Peter Mak
October 2017

With the signing of the Bologna Declaration by all European education ministers in 1999, research was granted its rightful place across the width of higher education in the Netherlands. For higher professional education this meant that the teaching of research skills became part of the curricula of institutions for higher professional education. And not just that; colleges for higher education were also expected to conduct practice-based research together with the business sector and other social institutions, which would benefit the field for which they educate their students.

College graduates are supposed to possess the skill of ‘researching ability’ (Dutch HBO-raad 2009). In the diplomatic memorandum ‘Kwaliteit als opdracht’ (Quality as an Assignment) (2009, p.17) the council of higher college education of 2009 included the following requirement: “In our modern society it is crucial that bachelors of schools for higher professional education possess research skills which lead to reflection, to evidence-based practice and to innovation”. The expert group Protocol (2014) says that research for higher professional education students is not an objective in itself but is used in order to answer knowledge questions for carrying out the main tasks of the profession. The emphasis is on the development of new products and services, so the profession can respond to new questions posed from a society which changes continually and at an ever more rapid pace.

In this article we will look into how conservatoires apply these directives. We will focus on the music course which educates students to become professional musicians, and look especially at research related to the student’s musical artistic acting repertoire. Issues we will look at are performing music, creating music and musical interaction with pupils in a formal or non-formal educational setting and with diverse groups of people in a participative setting. We will start with the question of why it is necessary for the future musician to acquire research skills. We will then look at which kind of research will be the best match for carrying out his profession. After that we will zoom in on the term artistic research. What is it? What exactly is the role of the researcher? What kind of knowledge will this provide? Which research methods will be used? Which criteria does the research have to meet? How will the research results be disseminated? And finally, we will specify how artistic music research can be assessed and we will look into the value of this type of research for the (future) musician her or himself and for the professional music practice.

---

1 With thanks to dr. P.H.M. Cremer MSc who gave her extensive commentary on an earlier version of this article.
2 The Netherlands has a dual system for higher education which distinguishes between university education and higher professional education; professional art education (and conservatoires) in the Netherlands is part of higher professional education.
The musician as a reflective practitioner
The added value of practice-based and especially reflective research by artists is now considered to be meaningful by large groups in society. The current art practice requires reflective practitioners who know who they are and what they want, and who are able to react proactively to developments in the arts and in society. Some ten years ago the European League of Institutes of the Arts (ELIA) established that practice-based research conducted by artists is inextricably linked to the changing role of the arts and of artists in European communities (Elia, 2008). Artists no longer function alone in relative autonomy in defined art disciplines. Increasingly, their work is interwoven with other social practices, such as the creative industry, and with social themes, for example in healthcare and the social integration of minorities. Searching for new target groups and, connected with this, developing new forms of art transference and participation are important challenges for the artist of the twenty-first century. Research skills will help the musician to meet these challenges by obtaining answers to questions concerning how to act in these practices.

A researching attitude is something with which musicians are already familiar. One of the important tasks of a musician is dealing with musical sources and the performance practice which is part of this in a responsible way. Musicians are expected to express themselves and create their own path from a myriad of possibilities, in order to establish themselves as professional musicians. This implies they have to reflect on their own musical–artistic functioning all the time, understand musical traditions, their own capabilities and ambitions and the social context (environment) in which they function. This also applies to composers, who make choices concerning both the tradition to which they relate and to how to deviate from this. A composer is expected to have his own personal signature. Education and entrepreneurship are integrally interwoven with being a musician and can no longer be seen as separate roles. Musicians are making artistic choices all the time, directly related to questions such as, how do I find a foothold for my plans (entrepreneurship); how do I reach my target group? Educational activities such as workshops and special lessons (in collaboration with educational institutions) can be part of this. It is important for the musician to take a more comprehensive view, and also to research the role of music in relation to social themes, for example in the field of healthcare, social integration, healthy ageing and increasing loneliness of elderly people in our society. This results in new music practices in which participation with certain target groups is the most important thing.

In his article "Onderzoek in het kunstvakonderwijs" (Research in Professional Art Education) of 2015, Henk Borgdorff points at the roles that theory, reflective skills and research play in how an artist functions. Artists are expected to be able to interpret their own work and acting and that of others, and to be able to place these in a social, cultural, historical and ethical perspective. Learning how to reflect on the role of art while making use of various intellectual frameworks, allows artists to participate in the public debate that is taking place in the arts about maintaining, distributing and developing culture. Borgdorff puts this quite strongly in the following quote:

*The artistic contribution to culture requires a completely individual effort and attitude, which is created partly during the musician’s education. This artistic contribution only obtains*
depth and range, however, when it is not isolated from the rest of the culture, but engages in a productive connection. That is the rationale of theory, reflection and research in professional art education. (Borgdorff, 2015, p. 13).

Characteristic for the professional musician at the level of Higher Professional Education is that he is able to take his own practice as a research subject and let the outcomes of this research benefit the improvement of his own musical acting and that of his colleagues. The HPE professional is not a researcher, but is able to carry out core tasks (making professional products and providing services) within the framework he was educated for (Expert group protocol 2014). In order to do this he obtains the professional knowledge which enables him to do so. This way the performing musician learns how he has to set up a programme, how to rehearse, how he creates an educational or participative setting with others and how he markets himself. The composer learns the craft of composing, the use of digital means to support this, and how to obtain assignments to make compositions. The musician makes use of research when his work presents him with challenges for which existing professional methods (the small ‘k’ for body of knowledge) and existing academic knowledge (the capital ‘K’ for body of knowledge) provide no fitting solutions. In the following paragraph we give an overview of the various forms of research which relate to music. We will also indicate which form of research is the most fitting for the profession of a musician and the most instrumental to the musician’s education.

Research and music
Research in the arts has a long tradition. In established academic disciplines such as musicology, dramaturgy, the history of art and music philosophy, researchers study the arts for their theoretic and historical dimensions. The reception and the production of art, as well as the imbedding of art in society has been researched by social academics for a long time. More recent is the research into the production of art by artists.

Borgdorff (2012) distinguishes three angles in art research (the numbers 1, 2 and 4 in the summary below), to which Andriessen has added a fourth: number 3 (Andriessen, 2013). In this article we will concentrate the overview of the various types of art research on the domain of music.

1. Research on music. Based on sources (writings, scores, recordings) the characteristics of music are studied. For example, the influence Bellini had on Chopin’s piano music. It is research like this that takes place in musicology, where it looks at how characteristics of compositions by one composer (in this case Bellini) have influenced the compositions of other composers (in this example Chopin).

2. Research for music. This concerns research which provides outcomes which can be used by people who make music. Examples of such research are research into methods for controlling stress in musicians, and research into musical means which can be used artistically in compositions (for example designing new electronic sound procedures and music instruments). Also music education research which focusses on learning musical knowledge and skills can be classified under this topic. Research
such as this can originate in diverse academic fields (and be carried out by social researchers, sound technicians, information–specialists, musicologists).

3. Research supported by music (Andriessen 2013). For example research into the effects of music on improving learning skills by pupils in secondary education. In this case music is not the ultimate objective of the research, but a means by which to realise non–musical goals. Research is conducted into which music, or which kinds of musical behaviour contribute to the objective of the research, and how long and how often you should offer these. You can also think of research into the effects of music on people during a medical procedure and how quickly people recuperate after the operation. This kind of research is usually carried out by researchers in the social and medical sciences.

4. Research in and through music. For example research into combinations between jazz music and Balinese folk music, with the objective of developing an individual sound. This kind of research can only be done by a musician (in this case a composer), because the research concerns the performance or the creating of the music itself. The same thing applies to, for example, research into how to perform music from a distant or more recent past. A musicologist studies and analyses especially written, and if available, audio–visual sources, such as scores and, based on these, provides (second–hand) guidelines for the performance of music (research for music). The musician–researcher can take this a step further by studying (first–hand) musical performances himself, and articulating the performance knowledge that is intrinsic in this. This kind of research in music is sometimes also called artistic music research.

Academic research on, for and for the benefit of music is conducted from various academic disciplines and is often carried out by researchers trained in these disciplines (see the overview): musicologists, social academics and scientists. They have been trained in the academic methods of their respective areas of expertise in order to meet the methodological requirements of this kind of research. This does not imply, however, that musicians would not be able to carry out this kind of music research. It does mean that they would have to learn the research skills this particular discipline requires, in order to conduct this kind of research as it should be.

Artistic music research (research in and through music) ties in best with what it is musicians do and for what they are being educated: performing music, composing music and making music with others in an educational or participative setting. This kind of research plays to musicians’ strengths, because the research takes place through playing, creating music and making music together. The outcomes of the research are partly artistic products such as performances, compositions and guidelines about how to act musically in an educational or participative music context (see also Borgdorff, 2015a). This is why research like this can

---

3 Acting musically (a person’s musical acting repertoire) in an educational or participative context may vary from a situation in a lesson (regular lesson or workshop) during which students make music, improvise or compose, to a situation in which music is made for or with a particular target group to achieve a certain goal.
only be carried out by musicians themselves in the role of musician–researcher or as co-
researcher (when he or she is part of a (multidisciplinary) research group). It gives them the
tools to make their actions more profound and it bridges the gap to the context in which
they practice as musicians. This also makes artistic research an important tool for personal
profiling: how do I want to function as a musician? The next paragraph deals with artistic
music research, and makes the subject more concrete with three examples of this kind of
research.

Artistic music research
Artistic music research is practice–based research in which the practice of creating and
performing artists have been made into object, method and context of the research. In his
dissertation Borgdoff gives the following definition of artistic research:

Art practice qualifies as research and understanding by conducting an original investigation
in and through art objects and creative processes. Art research begins by addressing
questions that are pertinent in the research context and in the art world. Researchers employ
experimental and hermeneutic methods that reveal and articulate the tacit knowledge that is
situated and embodied in specific artworks and artistic processes. Research processes and
outcomes are documented and disseminated in an appropriate manner to the research
community and the wider public (Borgdorff, 2012, p. 43).

Key in this definition is the description of the objective of artistic research: opening up and
making explicit (creating awareness) of implicit knowledge in both artistic processes and
artistic products. The artistic process and the artistic product are at the heart of the
research, they are connected. The artistic process results in an artistic product which in turn
may lead to a new artistic process.

An important question is what we mean by artistic processes and products in the musical
domain. At the heart of the artistic process are the musical decisions the musician takes
concerning his musical acting in a certain context. When the process is framed in artistic
research those decisions are taken based on a knowledge question the musician/researcher
asks himself: wat do I want to know? This question is related to the objective of the research:
what do I want to achieve with my research? Included is also the context of the research: for
whom is the research intended? Why am I doing it? Reflection (what am I going to do?);
designing (how will I do this?); and evaluation (what will be the outcome?) are all key
activities in this kind of research. Important are also the context, and especially the people
who are part of this. Their reactions and reflections form an important part of the artistic
reflection process of the musician/researcher. The artistic products will provide guidelines
which indicate how the musicians can act in order to achieve a desired artistic result. Think

These goals can be musical, such as rehearsing or composing a piece of music together, but they can also be
goals outside music, such as making contact with people with dementia or encouraging people who are seriously
ill or have undergone serious surgery. The phrase also includes the phenomenon of "collaborative music making"
as it takes place in community arts projects, often with the intention of emancipation of the target group
involved.
for example of a new composition style or improvisation style, a new interpretation of existing music and new building blocks for educational or participative music making (including composing and improvising) with a certain target group. The guidelines can be decided beforehand and then carried out in the artistic product (deductive). It is also possible to approach the subject the other way around: guidelines are deduced from the artistic experiment/outcome about how to act in order to achieve this result (inductive).

Artistic music research is characterised by a combination of creation and exploration in the form of successively following a number of reflection–design–evaluation chains until you reach an outcome which is satisfying (in a musical–artistic) way for the musician–researcher. Characteristic is also that the musician makes his own musical practice the object of his research:

*The conscious and deliberate exploration of an artist’s aesthetic universe is how I define “artistic research”, according to Vanhecke (2014, p. 94).*

Artistic music research as formulated in this sentence can take on various guises. A few examples:

**Example I**
An Indonesian student of the Prince Claus Conservatoire’s Master of Music conducted research into how he could integrate elements of Balinese music into Western jazz music. For this he researched which elements of Balinese music would be suited for this. He then looked into how he could integrate these elements into jazz standards and in his own compositions. His touchstone was the musical–artistic result obtained (does it lead to interesting music?). The research provided a number of interesting findings, such as an overview of the elements of Balinese music which are suitable for integration into jazz; insights into how many elements you can integrate and manipulate at the same time; only a comprehensive (audio) knowledge of Balinese music (including performance conventions) can lead to a result that has sufficient musical substance.

**Example II**
Research into setting up creative music workshops for vulnerable older people was carried out by the research group Lifelong Learning in Music. The research question was twofold: how do you set up workshops such as these? And which competences are required from the workshop leader? Based on a conceptual framework – how do you deal with vulnerable older people – the workshops were set up and given. In the evaluation the experiences of the stakeholders were included as well as those of the workshop leader and the researcher. The research provided a number of important guidelines for setting up the workshops concerning form and content. It was also possible to point out (through indications) which core competences are important for the person setting up and leading such workshops.
Example III
A student of classical music in the Prince Claus Conservatoire’s Master of Music conducts research into how to deal with music from the past (historical performance practice) and the transference of this to the modern piano. The research question is: what practical instructions can be given for realising music examples from the past (Haydn, Schubert) on a modern piano? The research contains analyses of early publications of this music (what does the notated music say about how it should be performed?) including studying the literature about the companion performance practices (what do the composer and his contemporaries say about this). The practical part consists of testing this knowledge on instruments of the time and subsequently, how that particular sound might be reproduced on a modern piano. The research provides fellow pianists with instructions about how the researched examples can be played on a modern instrument.

Example IV
Dissertation research into the musical acting of music teachers in immediate educational situations in secondary schools. This concerns making music with pupils in situations in which the teacher cannot fall back on his routine or instructions he made up beforehand. Situations in which the teacher has to improvise (didactic–musical). The research is especially aimed at musical behaviour which will benefit the musical interaction with pupils. The objective is to study the effectiveness of these actions. Moreover the outcomes could contribute to the development of a new range of behavioural patterns. The researcher recorded his own lessons and observed the immediate educational situations with a special focus on the musical interactions and their quality. Based on the bottom–up analysis of the video fragments a dozen musical acting categories surfaced which provided insights in the relationship between the teacher’s musical behaviour and the musical interaction with the pupils (for more on this see De Baets, 2015).

In all these examples the musical acting of the musician, related to a certain context (the music practice), is the subject of the research. The context of the research – developing a new jazz style (example I), how to interact musically with vulnerable older people (example II), performing piano music from the past on a modern grand piano (example III) and the musical interaction with pupils from secondary education (example IV) – determines what the research questions are, which methods will be used and by which criteria the musical acting is assessed. What all four examples have in common is the reflection–action–evaluation chains which underpin (artistic) research. Preceding these actions there is reflection about how to act. Important are consulting documentation (written, visual and audio); becoming acquainted with the situation in which the action takes place and imagination. This phase of the research will provide a number of specifications which the musical product has to meet. Based on this a musical set up is designed and tried out. It may consist of musical instructions for making a composition or for improvising, instructions concerning the musical acting for a musical performance of existing music, or musical behaviour guidelines for an educational or participative setting in which you make music for or with a particular target group. After these musical actions have taken place there will be an evaluation of the (musical) design principles which underpin the actions. Both artistic criteria and context–
related criteria are important considerations in this. In example I the key issue is whether the behaviour has led to an interesting musical composition / improvisation which meets the musician's own criterion and the endorsement of his colleagues. In the example of the creative musical workshops (example II) the musical artistic acting is measured against the degree to which the musician is able to reach the vulnerable older person in a musical way. Here the following criteria are important: (1) is the musician capable of making a musical connection with the older person?; (2) is the progression of the musical dialogue such that the musician is able to maintain the musical contact with the older person?; (3) can we say that there is a satisfactory musical conclusion? (Dons, Mak & Bisschop Boele, 2015). The context in which the musical actions take place is part of the criteria by which the success is measured.

The given that the musician is also the researcher in artistic music research, who in most cases researches his own musical acting, does raise the question under which conditions these musical actions can be called research. In the following paragraph we will look into the characteristics and methodological aspects of artistic music research.

**Characteristics of artistic music research**
What exactly characterises this kind of research? And how does it differ from other kinds of practice-based research? We will examine the following aspects:
- The role of the researcher
- The knowledge that is the outcome of the research
- The methodology that is used
- Which quality requirements apply
- How the outcomes are disseminated

**The role of the researcher**
In artistic research the musician makes his own musical acting the object of the research. The overlapping of the roles of musician and researcher is unavoidable, because the research takes place in and through making music (creating). This requires knowledge and skills which only the musician possesses. Turning musical actions into the subject of artistic research, while using subjectivism in order to arrive at objectivism (outcomes with a wider validity than the concrete research situation) demands certain research skills from the musician.

Artistic research requires great effort concerning the reflective skills of the musician–researcher. The quality of the research is determined by the research questions the musician/researcher asks himself (related to what he intends to achieve with the research), the way he describes and analyses his experiences and how he interprets the outcomes. This requires a very meticulous description of the process (both from a research and an artistic perspective) that the musician is going through and what this process brings him. The description of the process is reflected in the use of language (the description of the research

---

4 This does not mean that the musician cannot make use of the experiences of other people in his research. Another option is that the musician/researcher is part of a research group, which includes members from other disciplines (musicians, academics). In all imaginable varieties of how the research group is put together, the role of the musician in the research remains an important one, as that of co-researcher.
process), the artistic result of this on the music (in the form of a performance, a composition or improvisation, or guidelines for musical actions in a certain context). An important job for the musician–researcher is making meaningful connections between both, while safeguarding the sensitive nature for each medium (Schwab, 2014). This means that the verbal research report and the musical results should not be presented as separate worlds, but rather as a combined unit. What can be more clearly expressed in language, is reflected in the verbal part of the research report and what can be explained more clearly with music, is presented as a performance, a recording, a musical notation of a visual or audio registration. The researcher not only reflects on the research questions he asks himself, the actions he undertakes and the outcomes, but in the reflections he can also include the assessments of colleagues (peers) and the available knowledge concerning what he is researching. Important are not only the outcomes of research or practical knowledge, but also relevant musical examples that the musician–researcher can use in order to mirror his findings. Reflections such as these will enrich his research and make it less introverted.

Artistic music research distinguishes itself from the usual artistic music practice because expanding knowledge about and understanding of making music (either creating or recreating) is the objective. Or, as Borgdorff says:

“Art practice qualifies as research if its purpose is to expand our knowledge and understanding by conducting an original investigation in and through art objects and creative processes” (Borgdorff, 2012, p. 160).

It is research when there is a research process as described above, which has been meticulously documented, both verbally and musically, so it can be reproduced by third parties.

The process the artist–researcher is going through demands a lot of creative imagination. He has to be open to unexpected ideas and events in the working process. Hunt describes this kind of flexibility as follows:

‘Part of the real fun of exhibit developing for me is that you have an idea about something to do, but along the way, you’ll notice something else and go in a different direction. That’s what’s really thrilling about being an artist, or a scientist or an exhibit developer – the idea that, if you start along this path, something cool is going to happen that you never thought of’ (Hunt, 2009, p. Q14).

**The knowledge that is the outcome of the research**

The meaning of the research ranges beyond the professional practice of the artist. By making use of exploration and hermeneutical methods (aimed at reflection and insight) the musician–researcher articulates knowledge which is situated and embodied in the artistic musical acting within a certain context such as concerts, the concert practice, healthcare or education; not only knowledge about how to act in this particular context, but also music you can hear.
Artistic research – embedded in artistic and academic contexts – is the articulation of the unreflective, non-conceptual content enclosed in aesthetic experiences, enacted in creative practices and embodied in artistic products (Borgdorff, 2012, p. 149).

Art and making art is seen by many researchers as a higher form of thinking because of the connections that are made between creativity and imagination (Lutters, 2015). Art interprets and imagines reality in its own way. This makes it a source of knowledge which tells us something about reality and how, in a visionary sense, it can be shaped. With the aid of artistic research knowledge can be acquired about how this imagination can be stimulated and how it can be put into effect in individual works of art. An example of this is, for example, how a composer can deal musically with the theme of social integration of different cultures in a certain country. How can he give meaning to this in a musical way, and what insights will this provide which go beyond the domain of music? Music, art and, more comprehensively formulated, artistic experiences and imagination can generate new insights concerning social themes. In this situation we also speak of the articulation of the creative process and experiencing the product in the form of music that can be heard.

Artistic research does not lead to absolute knowledge. It does not prove anything or, as Raes put it:

*Research in art does not prove anything. Instead it has to show, demonstrate, and extend possibilities, and where possible, to convince* (Raes, 2014, p. 58).

The wider significance of this knowledge lies in the power with which our aesthetic experience or the artistic–musical acting repertoire of the musician is enhanced. It brings to light new perspectives on making art and it leads to new experiences in how artworks are received. Think for example of new interpretations of existing music, new music and new improvisation styles. The rationale behind this is made visible through the research and is formulated in the verbal part of the research report. The same applies to the composer who explores new tonalities for his compositions. A good example of this is the idea of the ‘tonal clock’, based on which the composer Peter Schat developed a new kind of ‘chromatic tonality’ which he applied in his compositions (Schat, 1993). The musician who makes music for and with older people with dementia and who links this to artistic research contributes to the knowledge of which musical actions and interactions enhance musical contact with elderly people.

Because this knowledge has been made transferrable it can be used by colleagues in comparable situations. By following the same trajectory they can arrive at comparable artistic results. Follow–up research may involve a widening the scope of the research results and include non–identical (already researched) practice situations. The results may also lead to new ways to research the subject, which may generate fresh knowledge and new artistic results. In this way new artistic music research continues to build on existing artistic music

---

5 Within the framework of artistic research the focal point is the musical contact. When the emphasis lies on making contact as such, you can say that music is used purely therapeutically. In that case, you can say it concerns research *with the aid* of music.
research and increases the knowledge base concerning this particular subject and the musical products that are the result of it.

The methodology that is used
The Expert Group Protocol has arrived at the following definition, adapted for schools for Higher Professional Education, which ties in effortlessly with artistic research:

Research is the methodological answering of questions which leads to relevant knowledge. (Expert Group Protocol, 2014, p. 31).

Research is used to gather specific knowledge, necessary to make the products and provide the services the highly educated professional is supposed to be able to make and provide. Important here is producing (person-related) tailor-made products or services or innovating these.

In artistic music research making music and composing is not only the subject, context and the outcome of the research, but also the method of research (see Borgdorff, 2015). By means of reflection and action aspects of the musical acting are prepared, performed and evaluated. This makes artistic music research similar to design research in which, depending on the research question and the context in which the research takes place, the preconditions for the design are determined. The next step is the design and testing of a prototype, after which an evaluation takes place and the question is asked whether the design meets the set requirements. One difference compared to design research, which takes place in for example technical professions, is that the specifications of the end product are less stringently set. Indeed, the artistic research often contributes to gaining a greater insight into the specifications of the final product. In that sense artistic research is linked to action–research, in which practitioners explore a problem in their practice step–by–step, come up with a solution and then decide how effective this solution is (Boog, Slagter, Jacobs & Meijering, 2005; see also Borgdorff, 2015b). Here also we can speak of an iterative process, in which the researchers repeat the steps in the cycle until they come up with a satisfying solution. Every step in the research (the whole reflection–action–evaluation chain) leads to a clearer insight into the final product and into a more focussed follow–up research question. An important method of research, in addition to musical designing and acting, is reflection. This means reflection prior to, during and after the musical action. With artistic research the practitioner reflects continually on what he is about to do, what he has achieved and what conclusions he can draw for himself (artistically speaking). These conclusions are also deciding factors for the nature of the next steps in the research. Will I continue to collect more material, or do I have enough to make the musical design? Is the outcome musically satisfying? Will I continue on the same way with my research and will I pose myself a follow–up question? Or do I choose a different pathway and will I formulate a new research question? In order to record these considerations and decisions, because they are a deciding factor in your research, it is important to document them in a log. This log will be the foundation for the verbal part of the research report.
For reflection and design the musician–researcher uses professional knowledge from both his own domain and from outside this particular domain. For example, the musician who conducts research into the performance practice of a certain period in music history, will consult important documents from the past (historical sources) and the present (academic articles, reviews, treatises, performance methods, letters, clarifications of programmes and, when available, sound recordings of that time). The musician who conducts research into the musical interaction with elderly people with dementia is supposed to acquire knowledge about the practical and academic literature in this field. For the evaluation of his musical acting in this context, he makes use of his own and others’ observations and he interviews those involved so he can include their experiences in his research. The jazz musician who is looking to enhance his jazz style with traditional music elements from his country of origin, will make use of written material about music theory which describe this tradition, of practical knowledge of musicians in this tradition and of audio–visual sources that are available. Depending on the research the researcher learns the academic jargon and the skills he needs to carry this out. He could, for example, consult the humanities and the social sciences for this.

**Which quality requirements apply**

There is a difference of opinion in the academic world about the question whether artistic research is really academic research. De Baets (2015) quotes De Graeve (2010, p. 18) who says the following: ‘The artist researches, but the knowledge he acquires is not science but art.’ The criticism originates particularly from the fact that artistic research creates knowledge especially from within (the musician researches himself), through participation, while science adheres to distance and neutrality (De Baets, 2015, p. 21). However, participative research is not an exclusive characteristic of artistic research. It also occurs in the social sciences and in ethnomusicology. Differing views exist about what research really is, sometimes also called research paradigms (Andriessen, 2011). Artistic (music) research is part of the research paradigm ‘pragmatism’, in which knowledge is expressly knowing how to act successfully and what works in which situation.

Language is another important aspect in artistic research, as well as the art discipline which is the subject (music, dance, etc.). The researchers’ reflections, the experiences of those involved (participants, listeners) are usually presented through language. This makes artistic research often qualitative in nature; the researcher describes and interprets his reflections and experiences to a large extent with the aid of language. This in contrast to quantitative research, in which the researcher reduces reality to numbers (see Baarda, De Goede & Teunissen, 1997). This does not mean that quantitative artistic research is not possible. For example, the appreciation or effectiveness of certain musical solutions or actions can be measured in a quantitative way through questionnaires or observation research.

Artistic research has to meet the same requirements as traditional academic research, be it that these standards have to relate to the nature of the kind of research and to the individual and subjective nature of the artistic practice (Working Group European Platform for Artistic

---

6 This does not mean that the musician-researcher cannot make use of quantitative research methods and data for his (qualitative) research. The outcomes of this are interpreted in a qualitative way.
Research in Music, 2005). Research should not only be reproducible and verifiable, but also reliable and valid. These quality requirements have been specified for qualitative research as follows (see also Baarda et. al, 1998 and Flick, 2009):

**Reproducibility**
Every step and every decision should be reproducible for third parties, so they can determine the value of the research and the range of the outcomes. The research report should be produced in a format that can be checked by third parties, so they can see for themselves what has been researched (objective and research question), how the research was conducted (the steps taken and the methods used), what the findings were (the research results)
7 and which conclusions were drawn (the interpretation of research outcomes in light of the research objective and the research question).

**Reliability**
The way the research data has been collected and analysed determines the reliability of the research itself. It is important that the researcher keeps a meticulous record during the process of collection and analysis of the research data, of how this went and which decisions he took. The extent to which the methodological steps taken can be reproduced and checked, determines to a large extent the reliability of the research. One way to increase the reliability of the research is for the researcher to stay as close as possible to reality during the phase of data collection, and to distinguish the registrations of reality from personal impressions and reflections.

**Validity**
The key question here is whether the research gives an adequate reflection of the practice situation that was researched. One important advantage of qualitative research is that the practice situation is left intact as much as possible. Qualitative researchers strive as much as possible to describe and interpret the research situation based on the viewpoint of those involved. This can also be the researcher himself, as is usually the case in artistic research. In order to increase the validity of the research the following questions are important. Have you read the appropriate documents (literature)? Have you interviewed the right people? Have you checked whether your interpretation of the data is correct? This last question can be answered by consulting colleagues about your interpretation of the sources you used and by letting the people you interviewed read the reports of the interviews. Can the research findings also be explained in another way than yours? This last question touches on the triangulation approach. With this method the researcher consults various sources, combines different research methods and generates several data sources (more than one case), analyses and interprets the research data with different methods and based on various theoretical sources in order to arrive at a well-founded outcome (Baarda et. al, 1998). This kind of thorough approach can usually not be achieved by conducting one research; usually several are required in order to meet academic requirements.

---

7 The research results consist of the collected research data and the analysis of the data.
8 Added to this the comments concerning the strong points and the weak points of the research and the suggestions for follow-up research.
9 In methodological terms this is about the validity of the research.
Usefulness

The main issue here is to which extent the research results are relevant for the practice about which it draws conclusions. Relevant in this case means whether the researched practice situation has led to an approach which works (or is better than an existing one) and how transferrable this approach is to comparable practice situations. Requirements such as these also apply to artistic music research. For example, it is important to know which musical actions are important for the musical interaction with people with dementia in the setting of a creative music workshop. And the question how broadly applicable these actions are should be answered as well. In artistic music research the usefulness of the research is often measured according to what it adds to the musical artistic knowledge domain. This could be a new interpretation of existing music, for example, or a new style of composing. With this the musician enhances the artistic practice, and at the same time endorses his own musical practice over that of others.

The way the outcomes are disseminated

The description of the research and all steps taken is reflected in a research report. This includes the objective of the research (to what should it make a contribution), the leading research question, the steps in the research – sub-questions, methods used for data collection and analysis, discussion of the outcomes – and the final conclusion (what are the outcomes of the research, which recommendations can be made and what are the suggestions for further research). The research report can include examples of notations and sound recordings in order to clarify the artistic research process the researcher went through. In addition to a description of the research process artistic music research also consists of making audible the musical product that was the outcome of the research. This can be done in different ways: by means of a CD or DVD and/or by giving a lecture recital. This last one is a musical presentation in which the guidelines for the musical acting repertoire are presented and demonstrated in a particular context. Here the musician–researcher lets people hear what the research has produced musically.

The assessment and recognition of artistic music research

In the assessment of artistic music research two aspects are key: how the research was carried out and the level of quality of the musical–artistic product that is the outcome of the research. Strictly speaking, the last issue is not a quality requirement; a positive outcome is no better than a negative outcome. But the artistic outcome of the artistic research can be assessed for artistic criteria. By means of (artistic) research an (artistic) solution is generated for a(n) (artistic) problem. This solution (the artistic product) can be more or less satisfactory. For carrying out the research, the research report is the object that has to be assessed. If it concerns a school setting the presentation of the research is added to this.

Some ten years ago artistic music research was introduced in music courses in schools for higher professional education. First in master programmes and then in the bachelor programmes (this last one only very recently). In the Master of Music of the Prince Claus Conservatoire the conclusion of the module practice–based research (4 semesters) consists of writing a research report and giving a presentation in the form of a lecture recital. Here
the research is presented orally and integrated with the performance of the musical outcomes. The research (reporting and presentation) leads to one round grade; the grade of the report is averaged out with the grade on the presentation. The following criteria apply to the research report:

- **The student demonstrates research ability**
  The research has a clearly formulated research question, the research design is appropriate to the research question, adequate use of research methods, defendable conclusions and a visible relation to the professional practice of the student and contribution to the field.

- **The student uses adequate sources**
  The sources used are relevant, current when available and of good quality.

- **Language and layout**
  Good use of language and clear structure. Good reporting of the research process and results. When applicable: good quality of audio(-visual) elements of the report.

- **Ability to manage the project**
  Student made good use of the coaching process, was self-reliant and completed assessments in a timely manner.

The assessment is done by the two teachers (the research method coach and the research content coach) who have supervised the student during his research.

The following criteria apply for the presentation of the research, which also includes the presentation of the musical-artistic outcomes of his research:

- **Focus on conclusions and applicability of results**
  The research presentation focuses on the presentation of the conclusions and the applicability of the results.

- **Argumentation, use of audio–visual elements, and quality of conveyance**
  The student is able to make a structured argument, and knows how convey the essence of the research in a clear and convincing way. There is a clear relation to the musical part of the lecture-recital or good integration of audio(-visual) elements in the presentation. The presentation stays within the set time limit.

- **Response to questions**
  The student responds adequately to the questions that are asked.

The presentation of the musical artistic outcomes is assessed by the teachers who are able to judge that particular subject. For the grading the research report and the presentation of the research a 'rubric' was set up, based on which the assessors can motivate their grade.
The assessment of artistic music research says nothing about its intrinsic value. This aspect concerns the question: what does it provide? What is the added value of artistic research compared to what musicians do anyway: make music (compose and perform) and finding their own way in this? These are interesting questions which also touch on the legitimising of the subject of research in in the curricula for music education. When the writer of this article attended a conference about artistic music research, organised by the AEC\(^{10}\), in Belgrade in 2011, the response of the professional music education representatives was somewhat reserved. What they encountered in music education was especially research of very mediocre quality, even if it frequently had quite interesting musical outcomes. The reverse was also true: excellent research but disappointing artistic musical outcomes. A happy combination of both was the exception then. Meanwhile, seven years have passed. A research culture is cautiously rearing its head at conservatoires. The teachers who supervise the students’ research have by now acquired research competences. Some of them conduct their own research. In the Netherlands this often happens in music research groups. Also, there’s an increasing number of good practices of artistic music research by teachers and students which can serve as examples for current and future music students. It is expected that the quality of artistic music research (from the point of view of research as well as in an artistic sense) will increase because of this. This leaves the question which was also asked in Belgrade at the time: does artistic music research lead to better music?

The writer of this article wonders whether this claim of artistic music research is quite justified. The musician can make use of artistic research when he is confronted with challenges in his professional music practice for which his musical knowledge and abilities are insufficient. The objective of the research is gaining the practical knowledge which will enable him to meet these challenges successfully. The outcome of the research can be more or less satisfactory from an artistic perspective. But an artistically unsatisfactory outcome is an outcome as well. In all cases the musician has documented his research well, and by doing so has created (practical) knowledge which can be shared with colleagues. They can make use of this knowledge in their own professional practice, or continue this research, or start up counter research by taking a different approach altogether. This creates a knowledge base per subject, which helps the music practice to move forward, and which contributes to the quality improvement of the musical acting, and also to what this delivers musically. This development also makes a contribution to answering the question of what music stands for. Not having this means that musicians are often defenceless in discussions about the meaning and the use of music and music education. Artistic research makes musicians more aware of what they are doing and it sharpens their awareness to, as Borgdorff (2015) puts it, to interpret their work and place it in a (social, cultural, historical, aesthetical) perspective. In other words: the musician becomes a reflective practitioner.

\(^{10}\)Association Européenne des Conservatoires, Académies de Musique and Musikhochschulen


**Literature**


**Peter Mak (PhD)**

The writer of this article, researcher Peter Mak (PhD), was connected to the research group Lifelong Learning in Music until his retirement in 2016. He now works as an independent researcher, and publishes about various themes in music psychology and music education. He can be contacted at this email address: peter.mak1950@gmail.com