

***“How can one best achieve a good artistic result in
chamber music / ensemble playing ?”***



by ***Yves Popow***

- **Classical Percussion** -

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chamber music / ensemble playing ?”***

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Introduction:

Why have I chosen this topic?

I have chosen this topic, because my idea is to relate my thesis research to chamber music. This is an interesting topic to me, because it is very important in chamber music to understand the impact that group dynamics plays on the success of the group. When considering the scope of this paper, I did not want to limit my research to only chamber music with classical percussion, but to also include other instruments, such as string and wind instruments.

In addition, as I have a bit of experience from having previously taken Latin, Brazilian and African percussion lessons, I think it would be also relevant to learn more about this and relate it to my thesis research. It is for this reason that I did not want to limit myself only to classical music, but to also include Latin, Rock and Jazz music in small ensembles.

To research further, I interviewed diverse ensembles from both the Netherlands and Luxembourg in order to understand how they achieve good artistic results. I had the opportunity to observe two rehearsals, *Electra* and the *Benoit Martiny Band*, and interview the performers. And on a final note, I chose this topic because I am also interested in focusing my master studies on chamber music, and thought that this might be a good start for me into this topic.

What do I hope to learn from this?

- Open further my mind and widen my experiences in different styles, which is often requested as a percussionist
- Better knowledge about how to rehearse and different ways of working in rehearsals
- Gaining a better understanding of how an ensemble works, functions and interacts
- Learn skills which are needed to function as an ensemble:
 - Breathing and feeling together
 - Knowing how to lead
 - How to adapt yourself, to subordinate yourself to the group in order to achieve a good result
 - Being more flexible in the point of waiving its opinion for example (democracy)
- Deepen my knowledge in the various different musical styles (ie. classical, contemporary music, jazz, rock and Latin)

Foreword

Based on my learning target, I built up my questions for my interviews with different ensembles.

Ensemble / band	Contact person	Style	Country
Arnold Schoenberg Quartet	Henk Guittart	Classical music	Netherlands
Ruysdael Quartet	Jeroen den Herder	Classical music	Netherlands
Percussive Rotterdam	Chris Leenders	Basically classical and contemporary music but also world music	Netherlands
Electra	Tatiana Koleva	Contemporary music	Netherlands
Timbazo	Nils Fischer	Salsa / Jazz	Netherlands
Pascal Schumacher Quartet	Pascal Schumacher	Jazz	Luxembourg / Belgium
Benoit Martiny Band	Benoit Martiny	Jazz/ Rock	Luxembourg

Questions:

- How long has your ensemble/group existed?
- What individual skills are needed to play in your ensemble?
- Do you think that prior ensemble/band experience is necessary to achieve a good artistic result?
- Do you have a leader in your group, or do you just listen to each other and give cues? How do you interact?
- How often do you rehearse? And where?
- How important are social aspects inside the group/ensemble for you?
- Is team spirit an important aspect for an ensemble in your opinion?
- Do you put value on social aspects inside your group/ensemble (such as doing things together after rehearsing)?
- Do you have certain rules in your ensemble concerning discipline?
- What happens inside the group after a bad performance? Do you point the issues, which went wrong?

Concerning percussion:

- Are your instruments provided by a sponsor, or do you always bring your own to the concerts?
- What do you prefer: playing on your own instruments, or unknown ones? Does this have an influence on your performance?

From the answers that I received, I made a collection, which is summarized in **Chapters 1, 2 and 3**.

From the responses received, I came to the following 3 main questions:

- 1) *"How do you build a good interacting ensemble?"*
- 2) *"How do you rehearse in an efficient way?"*
- 3) *"Are social aspects important?"*

Chapter 1: "How do you build a good interacting ensemble?"

Interview results

I. General information:

When interviewing the groups and ensembles, I noticed that time and chemistry inside the band matters a lot, especially if one wants to achieve a good artistic result. Most of the bands or ensembles that I interviewed have existed for at least for 8 to 10 years. In most of cases, those artistic groups had already started during their studies or conservatory times. Which means they all started from *very little* experience, and have gained together, as a group, that over time.

I also observed that the chemistry in a group is important. In most groups gender does matter, as does the choice of different instruments. Especially a group with a mix of females and males sometimes brings other problems considering in dealing with different personalities. This will be explained in more detail later on. (*View II. Chemistry*)

II. Time

By starting from *very little*, I mean that all groups did not have the working materials as they have now, like for example instruments, amplifiers and rehearsal rooms/places. The only thing they had, were the conservatory rooms that they were studying in, including the instruments and other materials. So in this point they were really lucky that they had access, because the conservatory was an ideal place for starting an artistic group.

The following step was to get concerts where they could play, be it more formal places or even informal ones such as parties. One should not be choosy at the beginning, but one should take and accept any concert. Why?

Because the financial aspect also matters.

An ensemble can't rehearse and stay forever in a conservatory, but should think about moving into their own proper rehearsal room or studio, which might be rented for example. This view is particularly relevant to percussion and band

playing. Ensembles consisting of non percussion instruments do not necessarily have to be concerned about this, as each player already has his/her own personal instruments from the beginning of his/her studies.

After having finished their studies, a group should decide if they want to continue with their musical project or not. If they want to, they need to find a new rehearsal room, and here we get to the financial confrontation: renting rooms is not that cheap. The more space one needs, the more it will cost.

For some ensembles it is not necessary to rent a room, because they do not need much space; for example string quartets or any other ensembles or bands consisting of not too many and big instruments can bring their instruments to various available locations. Sometimes bands have the chance to rehearse in the room of their drummer. Often this person has a drum kit in his cellar, so it is possible to rehearse there. The only thing they need is for the other band members to bring their instruments there.

So that is why one should not be too choosy at the beginning. The more income an ensemble has, the better for the future, also considering the view of buying their own instruments or material, if the persons do not have already. Also, if the ensemble is not too choosy with regards to playing gigs and are able to play many, many people will remember the name of the band if they did well of course. And with the time and experience, they will improve and get so-said better concerts including better conditions (money, locations, and maybe rent material).

A band or ensemble needs to promote itself, especially at the start. Another advantage of rehearsing in the conservatory is that one is close to the teachers who might have relations with organizers or sponsors and can make recommendations on their behalf. Of course they will not immediately arrange a lot of concerts or provide you directly with the best instruments, but they might be able to provide you some limited assistance. You never know what can happen in the future. They could perhaps help you be more than just regular conservatory students, so it always helps to have good relations with your teachers.

After all this, once having your rehearsal place organized, one can focus on rehearsing in a more professional way to achieve even better results. Also at this moment one can decide if the group should get a so-said *fulltime job* or if they rehearse only in different periods so that the group gets an *extra work*. Some people might have other interests but they still want to go on with the ensemble. So they need to make a choice. In most of the cases, the bands, which I interviewed, do not rehearse fulltime but only in a few periods in a year.

Having made a choice for a concrete future, the ensembles get more experience by playing concerts with different conditions, and they develop their own rehearsal ways that work best for their group.

Furthermore, when finally playing bigger and different events, concerts or maybe even festivals, groups will find new people such as organizers or agencies who can book concerts in the future for them. So they will not be in charge of booking any more gigs or concerts for the group, but someone else with more knowledge will take over this responsibility. With this, the ensemble could even have the

possibility to play famous events or festivals, and might get enough financial support to start making recordings if it is conform to the band or ensemble. The step to make recordings will probably give more experience in how to work in a studio but also it might give new ideas how to rehearse in a fast and efficient way.

All this, which I have described, now does not happen in 1 or 2 years, even not in 3, but it needs time and especially patience. Time is the most important for an artistic group at every beginning. Everything needs to grow and should not be forced. Of course not everything might happen as I summarized now from my interviews, but it is just to give an idea that time and patience are really important but could have big rewards in the future.

With more time, the ensemble can put more focus on interacting together. One can't be influenced or influence somebody in a short period. Time is essential to understand how other people think musically and also personally. Knowing people better could encourage musical relations and friendship. Everybody is different and can't change in a small time. Of course it is not always necessary to change yourself for somebody, if you are already on a musical or personal wavelength with that person. But most of the times being on a wavelength is only one-way, so or on a musical or on a personal length. There might be some exceptions but they are really rare.

The ideal is that people are on a musical length to have a better interaction on stage. If they are different in a personal way, this might not disturb the musical way. Of course it could help if they start doing things together after rehearsing or concerts; like going out for a drink afterwards or organizing a dinner. But this decision is up to them, because this is really personal. It can be productive in a way, but it could also be contra-productive if it does not work, because people are just too different. This is not necessarily bad.

III. Chemistry

a) Instruments

Next to the material, one also has the opportunity to meet other musicians at the conservatory. One does not only have a limited choice, but there are some more possibilities, also considering different setups of a band.

The standard setup of a band consists of: 1) drummer, 2) bass player, 3) guitar player and 4) singer. Sometimes there is an additional guitar player or even a pianist. An example avoiding the standard setup, but still a "classical" one for Jazz, is the **Pascal Schumacher Quartet** from Luxembourg / Brussels. They consist of a vibes player, a double bass player, a pianist and a drummer. Another example for a more elusive setup in Jazz Rock is the **Benoit Martiny Band** from Luxembourg, which consists of 2 saxophone players, 1 double bass, 1 guitarist and 1 drummer.

In classical music, string quartets consist of 2 violins, 1 viola and 1 cello player. Examples for this are the *Arnold Schoenberg Quartet* and the *Ruysdael Quartet* from the Netherlands.

Also in classical percussion one has basic setups from Duo to Quintet or Sextet, however the most usual ones are Duo and Quartet. An example of a classical percussion ensemble that I interviewed is *Percussive Rotterdam*.

But not everybody chooses for those standard bands or ensembles. There were, still are and will be many musicians looking for a more *unusual/special* setup. Here one example from the ensembles I interviewed:

Electra consists of 4 completely different instruments in the way getting played and producing sound. This interesting musical result comes from a singer, a block flutist, a violinist and a percussionist.

In Latin and Salsa music the setup of a band is most of the time larger and richer in different instruments. *Timbazo*, from the Netherlands is an example for this. They consist of 12 people: 2 singers, a trombone section of 3 people, a bass player, a keyboard player, a rhythm section of 3 Latin percussionists, a mallet player and a drummer.

Of course the choice of instruments as well as the quantity of people is related to the style one chooses. As said above, some styles request more people than others. And as mentioned previously, there are always those who are experimenting by searching for new sounds and timbres.

b) Gender and personalities

Another factor, which really is important to consider, is the gender. During my interviews I formed a big impression regarding the differences between females and males playing in a group. Indeed a few ensembles that I spoke with assured that this topic was very delicate and must be approached in a careful way. Others simply told me that they have never really thought about this and that their band/ensemble became by nature what it was or is now. The mix between women and men can work but sometimes it can bring problems with it. There might appear conflicts between genders; may it be in a musical or personal way. Some conflicts are the result of changing people inside the ensemble or even breaking up.

Of course it does not mean that when male and female are mixed in an ensemble that this chemistry will not work, but as I said it can be a delicate topic. Especially communicating between those two genders can be more difficult than talking from man to man or woman to woman.

One needs to be aware that one will often be together with a person that has another character, for a while to rehearse and playing on stage. And this can

happen once or twice a week. Often rehearsal takes up to six hours. So spending that much time inside a room with someone you can't identify yourself with is very difficult. This does not necessarily happen between opposite genders, but could happen between people of the same gender. In my interviews most groups told me that the mix of genders could cause problems.

Two examples of mixed ensembles are the ***Arnold Schoenberg Quartet*** (1st picture below) and the ***Ruysdael Quartet*** (2nd picture below).



Both ensembles do have one or two women on board but majority of both consist of male players. *Jeroen den Herder* of the ***Ruysdael Quartet*** told me that the mix between genders is the first step into getting more flexible and adapting yourself. Dealing with different people, personalities and genders will change your way of thinking and one will have better facilities to more quickly adapt themselves.

On the other hand, I know an ensemble, which is mixed in instruments, but not in genders; it consists of four women. *Electra* is an extraordinary ensemble in the view of instruments and also gender. The group told me in the interview that they are already exceptional because of its instrumental setup, but they think it is more remarkable because of being four women in a team.



I also noticed that if you want to be part of this ensemble you should be able to deal with three other women, who have very strong personalities. They consider themselves as four soloists, who have different functions inside the ensemble. Everybody is important and should have the feeling of being part of the ensemble. Especially when rehearsing 4 to 6 hours thrice a week those circumstances need to be challenged. Most of the times strong personalities do not like to renounce their opinion and hold against. So the better you know a person, the better you know how to react to this person.

I was told that everybody should have space to *breath* inside the band. The better one knows a person the more comprehension one has for other people. This is a way to have a better *breathing* inside a band. The experience and routine of understanding people better and faster come after a few years of ensemble playing (Electra have been together for 11 years).

Also having the experience of sometimes playing with different people brings the benefit that one adapts itself faster to other people and is more flexible than only playing with the same three people. This is also what the members from Electra told me.

Asides from *Electra* and the two Dutch string quartets, all the other bands and ensembles that I have interviewed do not have a female player among them. According to all of them, having women in their group would not be a problem,

only their groups simply developed like they are now. Nobody paid hundred percent attentions to this topic. It just happened by nature.

Percussive Rotterdam (unfortunately no picture available) put a lot of importance to the word *personality*. Being in a group, one should identify themself with the group and try to work together as much as possible for a well developing ensemble. Personal interests are allowed but they should be at the bottom of ones priority list in order to engage the ensemble. If you do not have this mentality you are on the wrong place.

According to this quartet, the words *adapting* and *flexible* are very important. If you cannot adapt yourself to the ensemble or to the people inside, you should ask yourself the question why you are in this ensemble and what philosophy you have about playing in ensemble.

The following 2 groups, the **Pascal Schumacher Quartet** (first picture below) and the **Benoit Martiny Band** (2nd picture below) consist of 4 and 5 people.



They share the same idea about *personalities*, and being *adapting* and *flexible* as ***Percussive Rotterdam***. However, they think that strong personalities are a must to have a good cooperating group. It is required to have your own opinion and not be a follower who all the time changes his belief. Having your own opinion you need to also be very flexible and renounce sometimes on your opinion in order to the well being of your musical project. This does not mean that you are a follower but you are renouncing your opinion because it might be the best for the entire group.

The last band, ***Timbazo*** consists even of 12 male players.



Sometimes the band invites special guests who are occasionally women. But generally speaking, the frame of the band is male. *Nils Fischer* told me that during his time as a student, women hardly studied World music. This might be a reason why only many times you only see women as singers. But nowadays a lot of women chose the way of world music. The result can already been seen on stage for example during the *Full moon* event in Rotterdam.

Conclusion:

Through the interview result I came to the conclusion that the biggest two issues about knowing how to build a good interacting ensemble are time and flexibility.

On one hand we have the point about time: the more time you know a person, the better you will understand him/her.

On the other hand we have the point based on flexibility: Being more open for other/different ideas or opinion will encourage understanding better other people.

A better harmony inside a group will result from both time and flexibility.

Chapter 2: “How do you rehearse in an efficient way?”

I. Different rehearsal techniques

I've made a collection of some diverse rehearsal techniques from the groups that I have interviewed. Furthermore I had the opportunity to observe a rehearsal of ***Electra*** and the ***Benoit Martiny Band***, and I also took a look to the *chamber music preparation list* by **Marien van Staalen** who was a teacher for this subject at Codarts. I would like to start with the last mentioned topic, the list of **Marien van Staalen**.

a) List of Chamber music preparation by Marien van Staalen



In his list, he writes how to start a rehearsal process. This means starting together from zero. According to this list, the ensemble should have ready one or preferably two different recordings (as there can be different interpretations), a score for each player, and a metronome to the first rehearsal. With the score in the hand, the group should listen to the piece.

While listening, he requires one to take a good look to the (different) tempi inside the piece and compare them later once again with the metronome to get a better idea of all tempo changes. Next to that, it is very important to discuss about what you liked from the recordings and what you did not. Then the group should analyze why they think that this was good or ugly and later on imitate the good in playing and avoid the ugly. *“Better well-stolen, than invented badly”* is a citation by Marien van Staalen.

Besides this, the analysis should also consist of dynamics, articulation, vibrato and balance between instruments. In addition, in ones own score they also need

to write down information about the other players' score. Up to this point the ensemble has not played yet.

The next step is that everybody goes back to study individually until all parts are ready. The metronome is very important while the individual is studying for himself. If all players cannot yet play their part at the right tempo, the first rehearsal must be cancelled. *"In other words: in the first rehearsal, even without teacher, the learning phase is already over"*, another citation by Marien van Staelen.

When the ensemble comes together for the first rehearsal after all these preparations, the artistic result will be completely different than if they would have done it differently. The player will stand above their parts by controlling their notes. Clarity and certainty will be present at the rehearsal. The final result is much closer than one would have thought possible.

Moreover, finishing every rehearsal by recording the part or excerpt being worked on will show how the group will come across as a chamber music ensemble. Also when listening to it, one should make marks inside the score on what still can be improved.

Lastly, only now the teacher appears into the musical picture. He/she can help you to go further, because a person from outside will judge differently than a person from inside, who belongs to the ensemble. People from outside hear and see differently than people the inside. However, the ensemble has done most of the work already.

b) Interviews

During my research, I noticed that not all ensembles have the same approach in rehearsing. However, the end result is very convincing and striking. Some ensembles rehearse more, some do less. Some do start very early; others start later because they prefer working under pressure. A few ensembles also want every player to know all his/her part(s) when coming together to rehearse for the first time. Next to that, there are also groups that prefer rehearsing in sections, while others just simply rehearse all together. Furthermore, most of the groups have one leader (or sometimes two). A few even do not have a proper leader, but they listen and react together on each other.

Nevertheless, not every band or ensemble cues in the same way. Every group has their own philosophy on cueing and tuning. There are many different ways of rehearsing, but the target is always the same: They all want to have a good artistic result at the end of a performance. There are diversities in approaching a rehearsal structure.

Starting with the two Dutch string quartets, I would like to compare them. The first common and obvious thing is that both quartets do not rehearse regularly, but in periods. This is due to the fact that some members live abroad, which

makes it difficult to rehearse frequently. Therefore, both rehearse in short periods but then up to eight hours.

Besides this, the two quartets give importance on being well prepared from the first rehearsal on to save time and make fast progress. According to both, knowing all your music parts is already half of the work accomplished. They also consider page turning as supposed to be known perfectly as well as writing in your part what others play while you have for example a rest. This will make it easier to follow your part without being stuck the whole time on counting. Moreover, the two quartets do not put really focus on one permanent leader, but they try to divide this task inside the group.

Henk Guittart told me in the interview that:

"A quartet is a collection of 4 interesting musicians, no leader needed."

Contrariwise Jeroen den Herder made a different citation about this subject:

"There is not really a boss. One should let everyone be from time to time the leader. It is important to feel that you are part of it!"

Both people told me somewhat a different story about leading, but they have in one point the same idea: There is no permanent leader needed. A string quartet is a really small ensemble in which people can interact between themselves by listening and reacting on each other. Those musicians have such advanced skills in this task that a leader is not needed at all.

Staying in classical and contemporary music, but changing instruments, we are going now to the world of percussion. I am going to write about **Percussive Rotterdam** what I've learned during my interviews.

The first thing to talk about is the individual preparation. Idem, as the Dutch string quartet, this percussion quartet also puts focus on the individual preparation. *Chris Leenders*, a member of this quartet, told me that everybody needs to know their own parts before coming all together to rehearse (same as the 2 string quartets). If everyone knows exactly his parts and has some information about their fellow players written in their part, already more than half of the work is done. Next to that you don't waste time by stopping during the rehearsal when someone needs to revise his part because he or she is not able to play a lick or an excerpt.

When everybody is well prepared the starting level of the ensemble is really high and they can focus on other things than only playing the right notes and rhythms. The rest of work is actually based on putting the four parts together and working on the musical interpretation.

Besides all the playing and interpreting, I also learned that one should also choose a direction where to go to during or maybe already before a rehearsal. By writing this I mean, choosing a leader and being aware of having a democracy inside the quartet. This means that they should agree together by making decisions all together. Only having dominant people in one group will not work

out at all as one will never come to one decision with which everybody agrees and could live with.

So the fact of being flexible in the way of adapting yourself to other people as well as *giving and taking* is very important for any ensemble. By *giving and taking*, I mean that you give something from your part and you received something back from other parts for yours.

Next to that "*trust*" is also a very important issue. By "trust" I do not only mean trusting somebody in a musical way, but also having confidence into other people in the point of how they organize things for the ensemble. This last mentioned point might not sound very important related with *rehearsing efficiently*, but all the trust and the well playing together comes by knowing people well.

If a group is divided and organized from the start of the work, everybody will have a task other than playing to focus on. This might, for example, be that one manages the ensemble (organizing concerts, interviews or publicity), another is in charge of making copies, arrangements, or looking for new material, the next one is the leader during rehearsals as well as concerts, and the last one works together with composers to understand the piece better, records rehearsal and analyses those.

This is just a simple example of dividing a group, which was explained by ***Percussive Rotterdam***. If there is a division of work in the group, which works out positively, the harmony inside the entire group will raise in the view of social aspect and especially the harmony in playing will increase.

Of course as I told in **Chapter I**, time is needed for this. People cannot always harmonize well just after a small amount time. Therefore time and patience is needed.

The whole idea of dividing the group is that one harmonizes better during rehearsals and concerts. There will be much more trust in each other than otherwise. Everyone will notice the strength and weakness points of his or her fellow members. While the weak points of someone can be compensated inside the ensemble, the strength of someone can be used in a positive way and expressed during rehearsing or performing on concerts. A better harmony inside any ensemble will automatically bring a better rehearsal process.

Besides this percussion group, I have also received important information from the groups not yet mentioned in this chapter.

Therefore let's go to the next one.

The female group *Electra* also divides the different work for rehearsing inside the ensemble. Every member gets charged with a function primarily depending on her instrument.

As *Tatiana Koleva* plays the only instrument with a percussive sound and attack (in this case any percussion instruments), she is the leader who gives cues. While cueing, the others should response to it, to express their understanding. If Tatiana cues, she is aware of her body language as well as of the eye contact with the others.

Cueing is really important while playing with other people, especially here with four completely different instruments. As the percussion player has the most clear gesture to make a sound as well as the sharpest direct sound, it is much easier to understand this than if the singer of the band would cue.

Generally speaking, the gestures do not need to be exaggerated, but they need to be clear. Normally the smaller they are, the clearer they are. However one should be aware while giving cues with small gestures that all others are watching you or at least the part of your body you are giving cues with.

Giving cues is not always the same gesture, especially when the tempo is different. Having a slow tempo, the gesture of the body should adapt this in a slow motion. The spirit of this slow movement needs to be represented in the gesture. This cue can be big and long. On the other side, when having a fast tempo the gesture should very short and staccato like.

When cueing one should also breathe to make it clearer, especially to feel it better for oneself. When one plays as a percussionist together with a wind instrument one should take the same breath to start, as a woodwind would need. So giving signs should be always combined with breathing. If one is aware of well breathing and cueing, rehearsing gets much easier and more efficient.

The next member, *Monica Germino*, is responsible for the tuning during rehearsals and concerts as she plays the only melodic instruments, the violin. (In this case I considered the marimba or vibraphone as a more percussive than melodic instrument).

In general, *Monica* told me that they almost never tune their instruments too low. This is also related to the fact that on the mallets one only can produce normal tones as well as overtones. Especially playing with four completely different instruments, the tuning must be ambient in sound and be convincing to the audience.

In this case, the electronics and mallets already have a defined pitch that almost cannot be changed. So the biggest issue in tuning is the singer and violin. Nevertheless, both players have one small advantage, which is that they can determine very exactly the pitch of the notes. They can go into detail to quartertones if needed.

Concerning the method of tuning, we have a balance of 2 pairs, which have a different system of tuning. However there must be one responsible for this, and for Electra it is *Monica Germino*. If the tuning is well done in a rehearsal the sound quality is already much higher than usual. Of course one needs to have a certain idea of a sound and tuning which you think is ideal and fits to the ensemble and pieces, which are being performed.

The next person in the ensemble is the singer, *Michaela Riener*, who does not have that big a function concerning the rehearsing system. She always has to be seen and heard as she has the less powerful sound possibilities compared to the three other instruments. Of course she is the most amplified, and is the target on stage if there are no cues coming or tuning issues.

Most of the times she is in the front or in the center of the stage or the place where they are rehearsing. So all of the sounds which are produced from the four during rehearsal, are built up from *Michaela*. On stage or anywhere while playing, she is the center focal point.

The sound result depends a lot where one stands and which instruments are close by. Some louder instruments, like percussion, might cover less strong instruments, a violin for instance. Therefore this quartet has a specific setup on stage. So the task of the singer seems not that important but it actually is a major topic in many ensembles like it is also here the case.

Lastly, we have the player, who is actually a very unique player.

Most of the times she plays unusual electronic instruments, although in a few pieces she also plays the block flute. Next to her playing, she is also responsible for adding recordings during the performances. On stage *Susanna Borsch* does attract the audience by playing very unknown instruments.

As she is familiar with electronics and recordings, *Susanna* also takes charge of the lighting during rehearsals. She tries to get a balance between the four players, so that everyone sticks out and that there is not difference in appearing on stage. Next to dividing some work inside the group, the women also put value on having a full score in the rehearsal.

There is always one who is following two parts during a rehearsal: her own part and the full score. She does follow the second to be sure that everything is together and that dynamics are well respected. Also it is useful that one has an overview of all parts during the rehearsal, for example when something is not clear or when one or more bars do not sound like they should. So someone can always verify how it should be.

After having described the rehearsing approach of classical and contemporary ensemble, let's move on to Jazz, Rock and Latin music.

The ***Pascal Schumacher Quartet*** rehearses only in periods.

Due to also distance problems similar to the 2 string quartets, this jazz quartet rehearses as well in periods. Another reason why they do not rehearse more often is that they take time to compose new works. Everybody is supposed to write songs inside the group, even the drummer.

When new songs are ready, they come all together except the drummer to rehearse, to make a fundament of the music. By this I mean the musical aspect: harmony, melody, rhythm etc.

They want to have the frame of the new work ready before the drummer joins. When this is ready, the drummer will join the rehearsals to add more precise rhythm and groove to the music. This is the basic idea of how the ***Pascal Schumacher*** approaches rehearsing.

Here there is a completely different attitude in rehearsing than in classical music.

It is not that strictly required to know all your own parts by heart, because the first rehearsal serves as a *putting together session* and some parts of a new composition might get skipped or changed. Sometimes they leave some parts open for a while. There is no pressure when doing this. A good song can never be written /composed by forcing, pushing or being in a hurry.

Next to this, there comes also a free part where the different artists are solo improving. Jazz music has much more freedom regarding composing and performing. Performers rarely play with scores during concerts, and if, then only having some harmony indications in some bars, to fill those up with chords. In general Jazz is freer than classical music. A good example of this is the solo improvisation. The most important thing here is the groove and as already described the freedom in music.

"In classical music there are more risks than in Jazz", a citation by *Pascal Schumacher* about that Jazz is about *deciding free*.

Another efficient method of rehearsing is to enter the studio to make a record. But before entering, most of the rehearsing process is already done; only a few details are left to get almost perfect result. Those last details will be fixed while recording.

When in the studio one sometimes gets completely other views of a song as if one only would have rehearsed in their own room. Sometimes the unexpected happens and a song gets completely changed (in a positive way).

Also one might find new ideas to add to the song or its melody. However this is not always the case. Having this entirely ready, a perfection of the songs and their instruments is reached while recording. Spending hours and days playing and repeating over and over the songs will lead to a personalization and perfection of the songs. Also there will be a higher harmonization between the group members than only rehearsing in their rehearsal room.

“During recording some borders can be crossed, especially the feeling ones”, another citation by Pascal Schumacher. By this he means, that some people will express emotions while playing a certain piece, which they would never have done before.

Most of the time, the quartet immediately books some concerts or even a tour after this, because then they are better prepared than with any other rehearsing technique.

The next ensemble from Luxemburg, which I have asked a few questions about how to rehearse in an efficient way, is the ***Benoit Martiny Band***, officially abbreviated through ***BMB***.

As with the ***Pascal Schumacher Quartet***, ***BMB*** rehearses most of the time in short periods related to distance issues of the members. When possible they can rehearse twice a month, but if not possible they come together for an extended weekend (Thursday to Sunday) and rehearse up to 6 hours each day. Those extended weekends are a must when the band is planning new concert especially with a new set of songs or when entering the study.

Benoit Martiny told me that after those exhausting weekends and especially after a few concerts some members could no longer listen to the songs they have written. Therefore to keep the motivation and high playing level, they change their concert programs by mixing up new songs with some older ones.

Those songs which they think, that they should no longer be played for a while will get replaced by other songs which might not have been recently played. This is also a potent way of efficiently rehearsing, although it does not sound that important. But do not forget that motivation is one of the most important aspects for an efficiently playing ensemble. Therefore the band makes compromises about which songs to skip and add to the set list.

Lastly, the 12 men ensemble ***Timbazo***, chooses the same rehearsing directions as the ***Pascal Schumacher Quartet*** and the ***Benoit Martiny Band***.

Before coming together to rehearse, all members meet for a talking session to discuss which pieces to choose. Of course with 12 people it is difficult to come to an agreement therefore every section has a representative. In total four representatives will lead the conversation in determining which pieces to chose. It also depends what the idea or context of the concerts is. One decided, all members go back to practice their parts.

This usually takes about one week time, depending on the time that all sections meet separately before coming together to rehearse one or twice in the section they were divided into. For example the percussion section rehearses for itself, the same counts as for the trombone sections and singer.

Nils Fischer, Latin percussion player, told me that the most important thing to know and be aware of, before the whole band comes together, is that the percussion player knows all the songs by heart, especially the need to be aware of the cues, licks which are played together with other instruments, breaks and solos they need to play. So he needs to have a clear vision of the structures of the songs.

In Latin percussion it is not only about playing the right rhythms and accompaniment, but what they are playing has to groove. It is all about dancing and therefore the groove is essential. If the audience does not feel the groove, they will not dance. That's the first thing, which is important. The next is that every percussion player needs to be tight in accompanying. They really need to listen to what other players are playing to be together. All the single and different patterns or groove of any instruments will interlock and a polyrhythmic played by six percussionist will be created.

After all this, all members come together to rehearse with the entire group. Usually they will need up to 2 or 3 days to make all songs ready. The majority of work has been already done during the section rehearsal.

The points that they still need to pay attention to are:

- 1) If the ensemble is together
- 2) If the ensemble grooves
- 3) If the sound balance is correct, especially not to cover the singers

Repeating the songs during this time will resolve those problems if they occur. This is the method they are using for preparing concerts and when going to record.

Conclusion:

In comparing the list of *Marien van Staalen* and the interview results, I discovered different rehearsing methods, which I learned more about during my research. However in considering all these different ways of rehearsing, I concluded that there is no right or wrong way. It simply is about which approach of rehearsing an ensemble prefers. The way one chooses depends also the musical style of the band. Classical ensembles approach to rehearsing differs from the approach of Jazz or Latin groups.

c) *Observation of rehearsals*

I had the luck to observe and listen to a rehearsal of *Electra* and the *Benoit Martiny Band*.

1) *Electra*

Starting by observing how the women quartet rehearses, I must say that I noticed a few small things, which I did not expect to see and hear. Moreover some things, which I was told during the interviews, I can confirm.

The first thing is that all members were not on time, so the rehearsal started finally 20 minutes later than planned. In my interview with them, they did not mention anything about being on time, so I can suppose that it is normal for them not to always start on time. Rehearsing longer will compensate for this.

The second thing is that I noticed that all members tuned their instruments first on their own and then verified through the one responsible, *Monica Germino*, as written in my interview results in this chapter.

Another thing, which I can confirm from interviewing this quartet, is that they indeed rehearsed during the whole rehearsal having a full score next to one player. I noticed that avoids misunderstandings by showing everyone the full score if there are questions or problems. One gained time instead of comparing all individual parts with themselves. Using this method of rehearsing will lead to a faster satisfying result. Knowing well all entrances of their fellow players brings more security to an individual and to the group as a whole.

One last thing I observed which I did not really expect, but surprised me in a way, was the atmosphere that the quartet created during the rehearsal. The musical atmosphere during the pieces was very exciting, because I never had the feeling to lose attention while listening although it was a rehearsal and the fact that sometimes someone got lost or might have played wrong notes.

Also even when stopping once in a while, the concentration level as well as the level of playing were very high. When occasionally stopping, the group quickly pointed out the problems and tried it a few times slower or by playing only 2 or 3 instruments together. However with stopping and those occasional mistakes, I really never lost the focus. They created a very special atmosphere while playing which is difficult to describe.

After having figured and solved the 'not working parts', they tried to make a few runs through the pieces. I must say that those run throughs almost sounded like performing already for an audience. It was a really good high level of playing. Besides the good playing, the expression of each player while playing was also important for me not to lose the track. I could really feel their "stage presence" even though they were only rehearsing in a studio having one listener. Maybe because of my presence they had a higher motivation than usual, but this is just estimation, not more.

2) Benoit Martiny Band

While observing this band, I noticed a few remarkable things from which I learned.

First, and in opposite to *Electra*, the male quintet was on time so that the rehearsal started as planned. I was asking them what they were thinking about being on time, and the received answers were always the same. They told me that being on time is important for creating a team spirit. One needs to respect the times of the appointments to function well as a group. When things get discussed and decided together, they should be respected. Playing in a band is not about functioning as an individual but as a group. And the first thing to start with, is being on time. One should not only think about oneself, but about the fellow player, your friends. When one is late, the rehearsal will be shorter or will last longer as actually planned. This will bring 2 consequences:

- If the rehearsal is shorter the result will be less good than if they had the full time to work
- If the rehearsal will last longer than actually planned, the agenda is thrown into chaos.

Having to move or cancel appointments scheduled after the rehearsal is frustrating and the group as a whole is frustrated and unmotivated.

So one really needs to think as a group and of a group. This is the first step into the world of team spirit.

Furthermore I observed in this rehearsal that this band puts a lot of focus into improvising and jamming. First they played older songs to warm up and then focused on rehearsing a new song. The second half of the rehearsal was a kind of jam session.

As some members, who usually write songs, did not have time to compose, the band used the time left to jam. *Benoit Martiny* told me that jamming is one their favorite rehearsing methods. Actually it is meant to serve for composing/writing new songs instead of rehearsing. They spontaneously create new musical ideas, which do not all get kept or written down. Sometimes many good ideas emerge from jamming, but most of them are only a snapshot. If they would keep all the ideas, they would have too many songs after a while.

Also the *BMB* does not force on writing new songs during the rehearsals. At times when some people inside the band are uninspired or do not find a suitable part to go on with a song, they just leave it. Then they come again back to jamming.

In cases when they have a good melody or accompaniment and agree on it, they try to develop it further.

This is how the band approaches writing new songs when the composer(s) did not have enough time.

The last thing that stood out from rehearsing was the way that the drummer cues. When starting a new section or part the drummer plays a cue and then the band knows to go to the next part. While rehearsing the drummer tries different

fill ins/breaks, which are used to cue the band into something. The drummer tries to avoid using the same cues most of the time. Therefore he adapts his cueing to the entire different piece.

When a piece is slower and calmer, his call gets adapted to this. On the other hand when a song is faster, he tries to fill up his break with a more exciting break. But sometimes the easiest and shortest fill ins are the most convincing or the most impressive: "*Less is more*" is a citation by Benoit Martiny.

Chapter 3: “ Are social aspects important?”

a) *Interview results:*

Not everybody gave me a clear answer to this subject, which was helpful for my research. In comparing my interviews I came to the conclusion that there are three relations, which must be considered:

- 1) Music relation
- 2) Friendship
- 3) Love relation

Those three relations will appear throughout the interview results and will be explained more in detail.

The two string quartets assured me that social aspects are indeed important inside an ensemble or a band, but they need to be well dosed. Of course it is important inside a group, besides music, to talk, to have fun and doing something together. If one would only have a musical relation with your partner(s), ignoring social aspects, this would not create a harmony between the people. It would be a rough/primitive relation between musicians, which could have been more sophisticated if social aspect would matter. But this is almost never the case in any ensemble. It is nearly impossible, as music is about feelings.

“Music is more than only performing” a citation by *Henk Guittart*. He wants to explain that music usually brings fun and harmony between people, summarized as socialism. That is why I can say: social aspects matter in music. Now the next point is to clarify how deep one could go with social aspects. Also in this point, both quartets had the same opinion.

They said that talking not only about music is good. One can talk about your life, what you are planning in the future etc.

Also undertaking something after a rehearsal can be healthy for the atmosphere inside the group. A music relation also often develops into a friend relation. Both relations are about communication; talking to and reacting to somebody in music, and talking to somebody as a friend outside of music.

But here comes the point where dosing and separating is the biggest issue and of course having the time and energy therefore. Going for lunch or a drink between morning and afternoon rehearsals is quite common in both string quartets.

But what happens mostly after the rehearsals is totally different. Most people almost never undertake something after the rehearsals because they still have other things planned. Some may have appointments with other friends, some might need to work, and some might to travel back, some have a family waiting at home, or some just simply want to have free time for themselves.

For example when *Henk Guittart*, from the **Arnold Schoenberg Quartet**, comes from Canada to the Netherlands for only a couple of days, it can be that he prefers staying most of the time alone at the hotel after the rehearsal. This is first due to

the jetlag, which occurs through passing many time zones. In addition still not being recovered from the jetlag, he needs to rehearse for many hours day. Therefore it is possible that he simply stays at the hotel while his partners may go out for a drink.

After rehearsing up to 6 or 8 hours a day and being together for that long amount of time, all people are happy to leave and do something else, often something not related to music, to switch off their brains.

Jeroen den Herder from the **Ruysdael Quartet** told me that a difference between ensemble/band and family should be made. A working relation has different borders than a love relation. One needs to be aware of that this working relation is more about music, fun and socialism. On the other hand, a love relation is about being there for somebody (taking care), marriage and founding a family. You are not married with the people from your group, so it is not necessary to spend even more time together as you already do while rehearsing and maybe having lunch. The suffering person in both relations will be the one waiting for you at home if you neglect them and your children.

If you do not spend additional time with your musical friends, they will not be disappointed or be angry about this, because they know that you have other priorities which they also have. They will understand it. So you also take time to be with the person you love and care about.

The positive side of spending some time together is mentioned already in **Chapter 2 'How to build a good interacting ensemble?'**

Indeed spending some time together with your artistic partner(s) will encourage a more harmonized team on and off stage. You will have more comprehension and sympathy for those people, as you will know them better personally. This might also help to have a better musical interaction on stage. So in general there are positive and negative arguments to spending additional time with your ensemble/band players. The most important thing is to have a balance between both relations. Both should get attention, which will encourage them. It is all up to you how to divide your time.

In opposite to the **Arnold Schoenberg** and the **Ruysdael Quartet**, *Tatiana Koleva* from **Electra** told me that members of any group are not required to be *best friends*, to have something in common besides music or to have the same taste for things. The top priority is being together to make music for a few hours time, that's already a lot that you give from yourself. One will anyway know people better after some time; how they think, play, breath etc. Everything else is luxury which is not necessary, but possible.

Of course there are some things in common with the members of **Electra**. Two of them go once in a while together to the cinema for example. But as all of them have a full/overbooked agenda, there is less time for doing things together in a group. However in this particular situation, all of the four assured me that social aspects are important in any group, it is just about how you create space for it.

Some prefer talking a lot during rehearsal, while others like to talk afterwards while having a drink. Others do both, other don't do anything. It simply depends on the character of people. Each person has a different personality. To make a long story short, *Electra* puts more effort into musical relations than a friend relation. Do not misunderstand me, a musical relation involves a certain level of friendship, but it is not that strongly emphasized. There is not right or wrong, one should just do whatever one feels the best for them.

Pascal Schumacher's point of view is similar to that of *Electra*. He explained to me that this topic is very delicate. One needs to tread lightly. Basically, that social aspects encourage a better team spirit, but it also requests additional free time that not everybody can afford. This is also the case in his jazz quartet. Due to the fact that all members live in different places/countries, it is difficult to spend more time together. Even when coming together to rehearse for some days, they mostly decide to finish the day alone. Of course they are happy to see each other again as they are also good friends, but they simply have different interests to do in their free time.

This is also related to an older age. *Pascal Schumacher* told me that being over the age of 30, can prompt everybody to go their own way. They already know each other for a long time, so they do not need to spend more time all together to get a better atmosphere inside the band. Since the quartet has existed for more than 10 years, they know each other very well, and the harmony is wonderful. Everybody chooses his own way. They are happier seeing themselves again after a long time to rehearse rather than doing other stuff in a group.

He also told me that when one is younger and the group is new, the tendency to go for a drink or the cinema after a rehearsal is bigger than when one gets older and they already know each other for some time. When one gets older, they develop other interests and priorities; they are more mature and not interested in doing things that they when they were younger. Using free time gets a bigger subject. This could be spending with the family (if away from them, calling them), writing music for other projects, watching TV, or anything else which helps to relax. This quartet put also more focus into a musical relation, although they are good friends.

Benoit Martiny will explain a complete different opinion about this topic now from *BMB*. He thinks that due to not being able to rehearse regularly, and so not seeing each other for sometimes-longer periods of time, spending additional time besides rehearsing is fun and supports the harmony inside the band. As they have not seen each other in a while, they like to spend time outside of music catching up with each other. During the rehearsal they hardly can talk about this, so they talk about it after the rehearsal.

Moreover he told me that they are not only friends because they do music, but they want also to have a friendship outside of music. That's why *Benoit* is sure that being together after working is good for their friend relations. When they were younger during their study time in Rotterdam, they mostly went out after

rehearsing. Now no longer being a student brings the consequence that they live in different places, so they see each other less frequently. But this does not mean that they should not go for a drink when they see each other again. Young or old, the friendship stays the same and must not be changed. It depends a lot on a person's personality and opinion about this topic.

A reason for having a more easy opinion on this subject is that most members of **BMB** have not yet started a family or are married yet. Then one approaches this delicate topic in another way. Fine said, this band is more interested in a musical and friendship relation.

b) *Comparison*

Having described five ensembles with more less different opinions on this subject, I would like to compare them.

While three quartets (2 string and women quartets) put more focus on a musical relation as well as on their love attachment, **BMB** and the **Pascal Schumacher Quartet** try to emphasize their musical as well as their friendship relation. However the jazz group tries to further highlight their musical relation, because their friendship is already intact. No need to put more effort into it.

On the contrary, **Electra's** opinion is that the music and love attachment are on the first rank. After the amity only follows. The same sounds for **the Arnold Schoenberg** and **Ruysdael Quartet**.

c) *My own experience*

In my opinion social interests are important for an ensemble, especially when it's newly founded and people do not know each other well.

During this stage, one tries to change it by spending more time together. This will encourage a better communication and harmony between people. One will also have more comprehension for somebody who might have his/her tics. If one would not know those tics, they would react differently to this person. But by knowing this point, they can show compassion and understanding.

To be honest, I did not really notice that a good harmony between people would also help to raise the musical level. I always thought that this would not be dependent on harmony. I was also not aware of making a distinction between the three different relations that I have described above. I simply thought that if one plays in a band, it is natural and understandable that they would spend more time together apart from rehearsing. I tried to spend as much as possible time with those people. I thought only one way, if I compare it now with my interviews. The result however, was that we had a very intact friendship and understood ourselves without words. But interviewing these artists showed me another way. Mine way works out for me, but may not work for others. Now it might be the time to try another way, which I have not experienced yet.

Due to the interview results, I can also say that I also now notice that the musical level of my friends and I was positively influenced, which I did not notice at that time. Now with all those examples and making reflections about this subject, it all is much clearer to me. The musical level grew because I was not aware of it and I did not put too much concentration and focus on it. During my studies I noticed that forcing myself to make faster progress, would sometimes lead into the wrong direction. The recipe is time and reflection.

Final Conclusion

The goal of my research was to get a broader experience and knowledge in chamber music and ensemble playing. Through the answers obtained from the interviews, I expanded my knowledge, which will be useful to my future projects. I will briefly explain the three topics, which are important for a good musical interaction.

First, I learned how to cue, breath and lead, as well as how an ensemble functions and interacts. Thanks to all those different ensembles and styles, I discovered several ways of cueing for example.

Next to that, I have a bigger idea about being flexible and adapting myself to others. Being open-minded in an ensemble is an important issue, which I will remember for the future.

Moreover, the fact that most ensembles had different rehearsing methods, I must remember that there is no right or wrong one. As long as the final result is satisfying to the group, one can use any rehearsing style. I also learned that some methods are also a matter of style, people and time. Everybody is different, and so has a different opinion. One should choose the best way for his self or the ensemble.

Another thing which is important and about which surprised me a lot was the point that most ensembles or bands are well prepared for the first rehearsal. This is an issue, which stays stuck in my head. As a student I am used to the fact that people are not always well prepared or not at all prepared for the first rehearsal. Perhaps I should change my attitude about this, and keep the professional attitude in mind.

Secondly, however these musical aspects, the most striking and shocking point (in a positive way) was the fact that the setup of the ensemble needs to be musically conformed. The choice of instruments and especially people that you will work with for the future needs to be well considered. I got a deep conception into gender and personality. Some people are difficult to work with, some easier. This needs to be considered. I never would have thought that this issue would determine if there is a future for an artistic group. Besides the chemistry of a group, socialism is another big issue in this whole subject.

Finally, I came to another conclusion about this topic- social aspects matter inside a band or ensemble. As music is about feelings and contact, it is very important to know your fellow players better than only knowing their name. Knowing people better will encourage the harmony inside the group and automatically bring a better level of ensemble playing. One just needs to be careful about how deep they want to go.

A musical relation can be a friendship relation, but not always. Furthermore one needs to distinguish between a musical relation and love attachment. In both relations there are different borders. Some borders can be crossed but some

should not be. There is no obligation to spend more time with your musical partner. It just might be helpful for a better interaction on stage and to achieve a better friendship outside music. The important thing is to choose well what one wants to do. There is not right and wrong.

To end, I would like to say that I learned many theoretical things and I also saw a lot of practical work in ensemble playing which was indeed my target. Now the next step is to use my knowledge and experience it myself.

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