

The *Towards Silence* Project: Multiple string quartets organize to perform a new musical form in spatially variable and distributed conditions

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Abstract

This case describes an example of a collective making process in the field of performing arts. In 2009, multiple string quartets (many considered world class) organized to perform a new musical composition by Sir John Tavener. The composition challenged four quartets at a time to perform as an integrated ensemble while sitting apart, in various configurations, and at spatial distances up to 70 feet. The process unfolded in three phases: pre-rehearsals of the first group of quartets in the United Kingdom (UK), a series of rehearsals leading to one premiere performance by the second group of quartets in New York, and a series of rehearsals integrated with additional performances in four distinct venues in the UK. Mid-way through the process, the musicians chose to integrate a simple coordinating technology into their process, to address the difficulties produced by distance. This telling of the case story describes what the musicians did to achieve these unprecedented performances, given the unusual circumstances, emphasizing how they made decisions and evaluated their work along the way. The case is based on comprehensive fieldwork, including observation, interviews, spatial measurement and diagramming, questionnaires, and analysis of videotape of the rehearsal process.

Keywords

collective creativity, collaboration, ensemble, coordination, distributed work, artful making.

Abstract

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