

Identity and research: the Conservatory of music as an artistic workshop?

by

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Today, we are here to discuss the topic of artistic musical research. But most of all, I would really much appreciate if today's meeting could be able to start a debate that I hope will be useful to define a new and more complex identity of conservatories, which I believe are now asked to offer something more than their well-established "educational" and "formative" functions in the musical field.

The reflection on the third cycle of studies and the definition and development of a number of artistic doctoral programmes have made us aware of the necessity to reflect more on music as research. As a matter of fact, music research is an activity we conduct spontaneously on a daily basis. But when the moment came to define and document our actions with operational and measurable answers, due to the "practicalness" of these activities, everyone of us was found disoriented.

I actually think I am quite right in saying that a lot of conservatory teachers feel a certain uneasiness - if not distrust - when they think of music as research, believing that this dimension necessarily transfers the musical work to the scientific rather than the artistic field, where the word "scientific" indicates everything that is measurable and the word "artistic" refers to the creative world which, being creative, appears and claims its right to change, be manifold and "intangible".

This is the problem: to identify the operational field of artistic musical research, its aims and the dimension in which and through which its activity develops, in order to provide points of reference for all those who have so far worked in the name of tradition, common sense or personal skills.

In fact, this new situation of artistic-musical studies causes a number of different attitudes:

- Some people may choose to pretend this problem doesn't exist and simply carry on things the way they are, risking to be excluded from the major institutions of Higher Artistic Musical Education;
- Some people may let personal initiative to start a virtuous but still random motion of intellectual and artistic resources, risking to build "private fields" in which, with undeniable professionalism and energy, personal restricted areas of action are cultivated by the parties concerned;
- In my opinion we have a third choice: to bet on synergy and constructive dialogue and attempt to work on institutional projects which are not just occasional, more or less fortunate adventures of individuals, but projects studied, shared and promoted according to well-defined objectives *a priori*.

Starting from this new sensitivity, we need to clarify what musical research is and what it involves in practice (on a creative, formative and productive level) in order to plan consequential actions to give way to what has been outlined in the theoretical discussion.

I think the reason why we are here today with the intention of creating a container for discussion and comparison for different institutional realities such as those represented here, is to identify some guidelines: we need to discuss what these guidelines can be and disclose our proposals, creating a virtuous circle of confrontation and growth through which, with subsequent and constant "adjustments", we can help promote a deeper awareness of the areas and objectives of artistic musical research.

I say this because, in the current confusion we experience, I often envisage the risk of mixing up what is now acquired as musicological research (with its fields, methods and clearly defined purposes), already widely and authoritatively discussed mainly in academic circles and universities, with what we are trying to define *ex novo* as musical research, a dimension in which Conservatories need to operate in response to their true specific vocation.

It is therefore necessary for Conservatories to explain to themselves their personal identity, defining the areas within which they would like to focus to promote targeted actions, hopefully shared with other research fields.

Whereas, on one side, the universities that offer well-established musicology programmes have clearly in mind their defined scope and, as it seems, the same occurs for private institutions which, in their rise, have entrusted to their Statutes the delineation of their identity, as far as research is concerned, I observe that Conservatories still have to define all that.

Conservatories have been identified (and often they still are - I'm not asserting it is right or wrong, it depends on the case) by academic representatives only as a nursery of "practical musicians", implying with this apparently innocent and objective observation (you actually do music in Conservatories, don't you?) an archaic legacy due to which the action of "doing" seems inferior than the action of "reflecting". Thus, if we want to overcome the hidden complex, envisaged by someone, of conservatories versus universities, the risk is that conservatories will indulge in the thought that they must necessarily bow to the demands and areas of musicology (which are not strictly their own), rather than define and support areas, methods and purposes for the creative and re-creative dimensions of music which are specific to them.

The work of conservatories, indeed, is eminently creative and involves at one time the intellectual, psychological, spiritual and physical sphere of the individual. I noticed that the attitude of the majority of people is to promote *sic et simpliciter* musicological research into an environment which, for its vocation and tradition, has always been dedicated to something else (with the risk of creating a mere duplicate, if not a rough copy, of an existing, updated and running model).

By no means I want to say that musicological research doesn't need to be promoted also by conservatories, especially in those cases where specific programmes have been already activated; but, all the same, I believe that all our energies should be invested in those fields that make conservatories unique, in order to promote a synergy that can take full advantage of the specificities set up by universities, conservatories and all the institutions which could be involved in complex and wide-ranging research projects.

I therefore think we need to outline the profile of conservatories as “artistic workshops” (from this perspective, the doctoral programmes are a golden opportunity that cannot be wasted with an obvious *dejà vu*), encourage and enhance positive exchanges between different fields of study.

This would contribute to a shared, wide-ranging growth: we must not forget that musicology would not exist if music didn't provide for the sources (meaning both stimuli and documentary material) that gave origin to the many fields of investigation musicology consists of; the sound dimension of music, in its concrete manifestation through the activity of a composer, performer or interpreter, cannot omit the results of musicological reflections in terms of historical and critical awareness.

I believe this confrontation between institutional representatives who want to know each other and get in the game together is extremely useful. A meeting where everyone can identify in music or musicological research their own activity, field of interest, scientific and/or artistic skills and where everybody can recognize the skills they need to extend their reach, benefiting from and appreciating differences and specificities.

Furthermore, regarding the purposes of the Statute of the Conservatory of Pescara, which I represent here, one of the crucial points outlined in Article 4 refers to the quality and effectiveness "of their training activities, ensuring a close connection between research, teaching and artistic production "(c.5)

My own contribution to the reflection aiming to studying a definition of artistic musical research is expressed in the following considerations, hoping they can provide useful elements for debate.

Art is by nature "creation" and "re-creation" (meaning the interpretation of an already existing reality). From its activities cultural products are derived, recognized for their ethical, aesthetic and social values. Art implies a sort of “workshop” dimension where creativity, rules, reference techniques, experience and theoretical study converge to fulfil a certain reality.

In this sense, we can define art as a creative or reflective (re-creative) investigation.

Now, the problem is not how to conduct artistic musical research, since this activity already possesses her own identity: rather, the problem lies in the necessity of finding a method to communicate this particular way of developing knowledge, in order to spread it, make it acceptable and in some way "measurable ".

One may object that an artistic product is in itself a way to share and spread the intellectual and spiritual thoughts of the individuals who made it. This is very true, but the “end” product does not tell how it came to be as it appears. Artistic research, in my opinion, needs to answer the question concerning how we get to obtain an artistic product if it wants to provide fields of discussion and stimulate further creativity.

I think we need to focus attention on the phenomenology of art, where the narration of the poietic and esthetic processes in relation to the “end” product can be a vehicle to reach a new dimension of artistic research bringing together, in a synthetic dimension, both theoretical reflection ("oral narration") and practical activity ("musical narrative"), where the former occurs in a deliberate, conscious and fruitful partnership with the latter.

Outlining a set of grids with some kind of guidelines, such as :

- Which problem am I trying to address (what do I want to do);
- How have I tried to solve it (have I drawn on tradition, my inspiration, my imagination...);

- Which objective did I want to achieve with what I have produced;
- Have the expectations been met? If so, why? If not, why not? (identify positive and critical elements);

can be a useful tool to address artistic research in a "documentary" way, to give art a social value, leading it to build shared awareness and knowledge, to open to a growing debate, increase or modify the results from previous studies. This is, in my opinion, the utmost objective of artistic musical research and the ultimate aim of artistic doctoral programmes.

In conclusion, I would like to pose some final questions:

- Where can we place artistic musical research with respect to musicology?
- It is a counterpart or does it represent the other side of the same coin?
- Can it or should it be considered as a further branch of Applied Musicology, in which the elements of Historical and Systematic Musicology converge in a dimension strictly connected to "reality"? In other words, does it continue, in a vertical direction, the already existing communication between the various disciplines of musicology, or should we place it alongside musicology, encouraging a system of horizontal communication that, while safeguarding its own identity, also encourages the development of a fruitful dialogue ?

The answers to all these questions will lead conservatories to identify with a new cultural and social profile and more consciously equate themselves to an "artistic workshop", in a contemporary sense.