

## A SHARED VISION

The term ‘collaboration’ provokes mixed feelings: as an artistic practice it’s as old as the hills, and as alive, but probably we have read too many justificatory blurbs over-emphasising some ‘unique collaborative process’ (or even found ourselves using the word in this way, albeit reluctantly) and so its value has been stealthily eroded. Let us think again about what collaboration means, and the ways in which we may rekindle a more precise and optimistic definition.

It is important to distinguish between a natural rubbing-off and purposeful collaboration. Few examples of art are created in true isolation: to avoid the influence and inspiration of others requires quite some detachment; most art points at the participatory experience of existence, of engagement with one’s time and one’s environment. Christopher Fox, in this issue’s ‘On My Mind’, ruminates on the necessity of positive engagement in new music, highlighting the problems with stale oppositional strategies and encouraging us to ‘fall in love again’. Being engaged with, influenced or inspired by social issues, one’s environment, other artists or artistic disciplines, however, does not equal collaboration.

We should also acknowledge the distinct value of non-collaborative affiliations: employing somebody’s skills in a creative process which is resolutely not shared, but remains firmly under the directive vision of a single person, or specific people, is often a good idea. Not every artistic relationship need be collaborative, of course, and we would do well to dispel the creeping notion that there is a hierarchy to these various practices.

Italo Calvino, writing about the heterogeneity of the modern novel in one of his *Six Memos for the Next Millennium*, states that ‘what matters is not the enclosure of the work within a harmonious figure, but the centrifugal force produced by it – a plurality of languages as a guarantee of a truth that is not merely partial’. No matter what the art form, recognising that we take from and contribute to the ‘centrifugal force’, that all of our individual and multifarious projects are part of a larger, over-arching construction of the canon, is freeing.

True collaboration seeks to find in creative partnership between multiple artists a shared vision to which each can bring his or her art, even a mutual commitment to the prioritising of process over outcome. Georges Aperghis is my Profile subject in this issue, and he speaks of the continuous back-and-forth of the process, and of the trust required. Collaboration is not a glib, incidental or accidental concern: it requires a gentle dismantling of the ego, a going-beyond of one’s own practices and a relinquishing and recalibration that can be deeply challenging. This is why it is worth reclaiming the term.

Nick Williams’ article on Hocketus investigates the impact of this Dutch ensemble’s particular model of collaboration, which led not only to an extensive new repertoire but also redefined the performer–composer relationship in which the performer component is a collective. No time for ‘too many cooks here’: the traditional boundaries

of ensemble work – which all too often dictate that ‘someone’ should represent the group during any collaborative work with other parties – are blown wide open, and a creative fecundity and cohesion emerges.

Several of the reviews in *TEMPO* 273 also touch on collaboration. A recent publication on Cathy Berberian highlights the creative perils and privileges of being a modernist muse, whilst Calvino’s plurality of truths finds echoes in the pluralism found at this year’s Borealis Festival; the practice of file-sharing reveals new forms of symbiosis in the latest release from Bruno Plant, Ryoko Akama and Dominic Lash, and the London Sinfonietta’s recent collaboration with the White Cube Gallery inspires a worthwhile debate about cross-artform exploits.

I imagine that we are all in favour of understanding and appreciating the diversity found in the creation of new music and multidisciplinary works, but I fear that the pressure coming from funding bodies (and passed on to promoters) to justify a work, often before it has even been created, has led to a general blurring and cheapening of our terminology.

Meaningful collaboration demands and produces a certain pluralism, in outlook if not necessarily in the final outcome; keeping pluralism truthful, keeping collaboration truthful, keeping the language with which we describe our art truthful is of the utmost importance.