

Sub-theme 50: The Power of Performing in Performing Arts Organizations

The orchestra as a laboratory: In-between organizing at Spira mirabilis¹

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The orchestra as a laboratory: In-between organizing at Spira mirabilis

The raison d'être of an orchestra is the superior performance of a musical work in a concert (Marotto, Roos, & Victor, 2007, p. 393)

The time we spend together studying and experimenting is the raison d'être of Spira mirabilis (Spira mirabilis website, May 2016)

Symphonic orchestras—“a mélange of musicians, volunteers, and paid staff whose contributions must be closely coordinated” (Allmendinger, Hackman, & Lehman, 1996: 194)—have been of growing interest for scholars of organization for their creative and collaborative performance through projects and their work under pressure. While their resemblance with bureaucratic and professional service organizations has been acknowledged, they have been found also akin to coordinated internal networks of multiple identities (Glynn, 2000; Karmowska & Child, 2014). However, scholars have depicted orchestras as rather established and hierarchical creative organizations that are bound by conventions and are dedicated to the pursuit of ‘superior performance’, as the opening quote suggests. As a consequence, they have paid less attention to their learning potential. Studies of other kinds of collaborative collectives, such as teams in management and education, have demonstrated interesting tensions between learning and performing (Bunderson & Suttcliffe, 2003; Paunova & Lee, 2016).

Zooming in on a critical case of a distinctive performance arts’ organization—Spira mirabilis, also known as Spira—this paper seeks to advance understanding of new forms of organizing for learning and creativity. Spira is an international classical symphony orchestra established by four friends, whose members come together several times a year and collectively identify, investigate, interpret, rehearse, and perform pieces of work without a conductor. Unlike traditional orchestras for which performance is an end and rehearsing a means, for Spira rehearsing is an end in itself, satisfying musicians’ needs to learn and create. We are interested in advancing understanding of why and how this entrepreneurial creative collective organizes for experimentation, becoming an orchestra-cum-laboratory, and in unravelling the ensuing challenges and consequences. Based on our analysis, we suggest a conceptual model of how in-betweenness in the performing arts can be a powerful mode to organize for creativity in an

artistic domain stifled by hierarchy and convention. We start by anchoring our study in research on collective learning and performance in creative organizations.

Theoretical Background

Orchestras and other performing arts organizations exist to deliver *superior performance* of artistic and cultural works (Marotto et al., 2007). Meanwhile, performing arts organizations often serve as analytical templates to understand collective learning, creativity, and innovation (Barrett, 1998; Bathurst & Williams, 2013; DeFillippi, Grabher, & Jones, 2007; Hunt, Stelluto, & Hooijberg, 2004; Lampel, Lant, & Shamie, 2000; Kamoche & Pina e Kuna, 2001; Sawyer & DeZutter, 2009). However, performance is not always concerted with learning, creativity, and innovation, as it has been acknowledged in organization studies (March, 1991), personality and social psychology (Dweck & Leggett, 1988), and even brain and cognitive science (Cohen, McClure, & Yu, 2007). Below we overview some of the main findings at the individual, group and organizational levels of analyses related to the power and perils of performing.

At the individual level, two primary types of motivation to engage in task-oriented behavior have been contrasted: learning and performance goal orientation. Goal orientation is an interpretative framework that shapes individual affective, cognitive and behavioral responses to challenging tasks, events, and situations (Brett & VandeWalle, 1999; Button, Mathieu, & Zajac, 1996; Dweck & Leggett, 1988; Elliott & Dweck, 1988) and channels individual attention towards developing ability and competence for accomplishing future tasks (i.e., learning goal orientation), and/or towards performing well and looking well in relation to the current tasks (i.e., performance goal orientation). Learning goal orientation defines behavior oriented towards competence development or mastery of skills, ability, and knowledge, while performance goal orientation is characteristic of behavior oriented towards demonstrating competence and performing well. Specifically, learning-oriented individuals view abilities as malleable, hence prefer to set goals in terms of competence development and mastery. Performance-oriented individuals view abilities as fixed and prefer to set goals in terms of ability or competence demonstration (Dweck, 1986). While individuals may be oriented towards both learning and performance, either, or neither, individual goal orientations are often in conflict and may be difficult or counterproductive to hold simultaneously (Dweck, 2006; Payne, Youngcourt, &

Beaubien, 2007; Porter, Webb & Gogus, 2010). Given a choice between one and the other, research often highlights the longer-term benefits of learning goal orientation.

There is strong functional equivalence (parallelism) between goal orientation and various outcomes at the individual and group levels, so that a learning orientation exhibits beneficial effects on both the individual and group levels of analysis, whereas performance orientation has a more limited influence (DeShon, Kozlowski, Schmidt, Milner, & Wiechmann, 2004). Individual learning orientation may even have multiplicative effects in a group setting, so that individual members' orientations multiplicatively and exponentially foster collective creativity under certain conditions (Hirst, van Knippenberg, & Zhou, 2009). A learning orientation promotes collaborative behavior, performance, efficacy, and commitment in groups (Porter, 2005). Goal orientation can also affect group-level adaptation. Groups oriented towards learning experience more positive group processes and outcomes than groups oriented towards performing, particularly in challenging situations and under pressure (LePine, 2005; Porter, 2005). High average performance orientation may increase intra-group competition, in addition to inter-group competition, thereby producing conflicting effects on the intra-group environment (Tauer & Harackiewicz, 1999). Goal orientation affects not only team outcomes, but also distributed and emergent group dynamics such as creativity (Hirst et al., 2009) and leadership (Paunova & Lee, 2016). Groups are more likely to distribute decision-making and leadership when they are oriented towards learning or performance but not both, highlighting a trade-off between learning and performance. Although a collective learning orientation can encourage creativity and adaptive behaviors that lead to improved group performance, it is also possible for groups to compromise performance in the near term by overemphasizing learning, particularly when they have been performing well. This argument has found solid support in a sample of business unit management team (Bunderson & Sutcliffe, 2003). Overall, research strongly suggests that learning and performance need to be balanced for group effectiveness.

Research on learning and performance goal orientation has not been directly extended to the organizational level. Yet, to some extent, the learning versus performance dilemma reflects that of exploration and exploitation. As March (1991, p. 71) summarizes: "Exploration includes things captured by terms such as search, variation, risk taking, experimentation, play, flexibility, discovery, innovation. Exploitation includes such things as refinement, choice, production, efficiency, selection, implementation, execution". The trade-off between exploration and

exploitation has been studied extensively at the organizational level, and a well-known solution, namely ambidexterity—a balancing act—has been proposed (Tushman & O'Reilly, 1996; see also Raisch, Birkinshaw, Probst, & Tushman, 2009). However, at the level of the human brain, there is no known generally optimal cognitive solution to the exploration versus exploitation problem, and a solution to the general case may indeed not be possible (although scholars have identified a number of contingencies that affect how humans and animals respond to this problem under particular experimental conditions: Cohen et al., 2007). It may be that individuals who focus on learning, creativity, and exploration even differ in personality from those who emphasize implementation and exploitation activities (Amabile, 1996). At the group level, this challenge has been described by Edmondson (2002), who showed that groups have tremendous difficulty balancing between exploration, experimentation, radical learning, and “doing new things” versus exploitation, implementation, incremental learning, and “doing things better”. Next, we introduce the case of Spira, a creative collective that needs to find such balance. We examine the entrepreneurial drive for its establishment and how it operates as a learning-driven performance arts organization.

Empirical Setting, Data, and Methods

Established in 2007, Spira has been officially based in Formigine (Italy) since December 2013, when an auditorium was built for and named after it. The orchestra comprises 41 high-profile international and Italian members (website, May 2016), although its size and musician roster is variable and project-based. Many of the musicians are permanently employed in other international orchestras, while some are pursuing freelance careers (e.g., as soloists or in chamber music ensembles). The ensemble convenes for a new project approximately once every two months, rehearsing for three to five days and delivering one or more concerts immediately thereafter—all this without a conductor.

Our study of Spira was initiated in 2012 and is ongoing. To date, data collection has involved archival data sources, observations during the preparations of two projects, and interviews. The orchestra's webpage was accessed for updates on numerous occasions (the webpage was considerably updated in February 2016; archives of the earlier version had been saved). A documentary film about Spira and an interview booklet accompanying it provided further insight into its operation (Caillat, 2013), along with media coverage. We also gathered

historical data on other conductor-led and conductor-less orchestras (e.g. Orpheus) to grasp significant distinctions and similarities between Spira and them. The first co-author carried out unobtrusive observation and recorded the rehearsals and subsequent concerts during two of the orchestra's recent projects, 2012 in Barcelona and 2014 in Formigine. During the second observation period, she was also invited to all social events, including meals and drinks. Unstructured interviews ranging between 30 and 90 minutes were carried out with 14 musicians, including founding and core members, as well as peripheral and/or first-time members. In addition, two interviews were conducted with Formigine locals, including the president and a member of the town's association 'Amici della Spira mirabilis', which supports Spira financially and otherwise. Handwritten notes were taken during or immediately following all interviews that could not be recorded.

Findings

Below we highlight our findings, which reveal how musicians' entrepreneurial drive for learning is realized through organizing an orchestra akin to a laboratory.

Entrepreneurial drive for learning

What drives entrepreneurs, particularly in the performing arts, to step away from hierarchy and convention, and create new organizational forms? Members of Spira note that they are largely motivated by intrinsic, artistic and personal factors, which is not uncommon for cultural and creative entrepreneurs (Amabile, 1988; Svejenova, Slavich, & Abdelgawad, 2015; Wilson & Stokes, 2005). The 'idea' to form Spira came out of a need:

... The need to have more space, to give more space to the study, to the rehearsal. The need to play not only following the conductor, or the leader, but really building something shared... You feel that you miss something... we really did not miss anything, in practical things. Because we were really playing in beautiful orchestras, with great conductors, so... Actually, we could have been happy (laughs). (Miriam, clarinet, core member, interview)

Three core motivations, or needs—to learn, create, and share knowledge—were noted by orchestra members. *Learning* is repeatedly mentioned as the primary motivation behind Spira

and in a way involves both creativity and knowledge sharing. This need to learn and to study (together) was espoused in all interviews, and is often highlighted on Spira's website: "Why do we do it? The answer is what makes this project unique to us. *We don't rehearse to prepare a concert. We rehearse to learn* and build a common interpretation of a score" (website, May 2016, emphasis added). Learning is often juxtaposed to the concert performance as an alternative purpose of Spira's rehearsal process, both explicitly and implicitly.

Spira is ... a laboratory of rehearsing musicians. The external expression of that... looks like an orchestra playing a concert, but that is only one of the stages in a long rehearsal process. This rehearsal process is the meaning of, and the reason for, Spira. (Lorenza, violin, core member, in Caillat, 2013)

That performance for Spira is secondary to learning is true not only for the collective as a whole, but also for the individuals it comprises, including novice and peripheral members.

My colleagues at the conservatory just want to shine, as these incredible soloists... Not here, that's not the point. (Katharina, cello, peripheral member, interview)

Creating is largely about shaping own shared vision and generating new knowledge, not just executing someone else's ideas. Since Spira's members pursue vision creation together, creating and learning are closely related: producing new and novel interpretations collectively is only possible if everyone possesses curiosity to delve into the piece, 'does their homework' on it and comes to project meetings/rehearsals prepared. In order to create, Spira players need to "unlearn" some of what they have been taking for granted through years of schooling and performing as part of established orchestras.

There was this feeling that the music was usually a compromise. You play in a way because you feel that you should play in a way. Because you are in the school you belong to. You're all there to play in this preconceived way. (Miriam, clarinet, core member, interview)

Creating is intertwined with play—musically and metaphorically; it is the desire to break free from the daily grind, come together with friends, experiment, and liberate oneself from creative frustrations experienced elsewhere. It is about coming together with friends, and friends of

friends, to study a piece of music together “without worrying about selling tickets”. Play and playfulness, however, are not devoid of a deeper, creative purpose (see also Farrell, 2001).

People say that we can only do this because we are young and it's fun. Studying is associated with being young... But as a musician, you have to learn your whole life. Our goal is to show the world that there will still be Spira even when we are all 50. (Lorenza, violin, core member, interview)

Finally, *sharing knowledge* is one way to give back to society and local communities that host Spira, but also to get back their thoughts, views, and even concerns with the musical experience they have been exposed to. Entrepreneurship is inherently social, collective, and generous, in “its capacity to enhance people’s possibilities for living” (Hjorth & Holt, 2016, p. 53). But it would be incorrect to assert that everything Spira does is altruistic or geared towards societal transformation (most appears to be geared towards their own personal and collective musical advancement and mastery, that is, learning). Sharing knowledge and educating are the more social and generous facets of Spira entrepreneurship. Spira educates in several ways, some of which more obvious. For example, they frequently hold open rehearsal with children (the first author observed one such “lesson” for children in the 5-6th grade).

We had an exciting open rehearsal with 4-year old kids (never dealt with such a young audience!) in which Giacomo explained the difference between loud and fast (summarized by one of our little guest by “Forte is like this: ‘AAAAAAAAAAAAAH!!!’), and we all had a great time. This is the kind of projects we enjoy the most. We can just hope it will stay like this as long as possible. (website, May 2016)

Spira also considers as part of its agenda the “education” of grownups and contribution to society by “grounding” and “popularizing” classical music for people who otherwise would not have access to it.

Classical music is often associated with a certain audience and with certain places: concert halls, theatres, etc. Although this is not necessarily a bad thing, we felt it is just as important bringing this kind of music to people that would not usually- if ever- go to these certain places. (website, December 2015)

The needs to learn, create, and share knowledge that uphold Spira are met by envisioning the orchestra as a ‘co-laboratory’, i.e., a laboratory for collective experimentation.

Organizing an orchestra akin to a laboratory

Our data suggest that the work process at Spira is best understood as a research process conducive to learning and not as a rehearsal process aimed at performance. In that, knowledge synthesis, knowledge generation, and knowledge sharing are central. As we will argue, a “lab” analogy is well-suited to understand how Spira approaches the preparation and interpretation of every new piece, for several reasons. First, Spira musicians themselves frequently deploy the laboratory analogy to shed light on the nature of their orchestra. On its website, they acknowledge: “We are a group of committed and passionate professional musicians who want to study music together. *A ‘musical laboratory’*” (website, May 2016, emphasis added). Furthermore, Spira musicians appear to be driven by some of the same basic needs as research scientists, as outlined in the previous section (see also Amabile & Grysiewicz, 1987). Both groups value freedom in deciding how to best achieve the (learning) goals of a specific project. Successful Spira musicians, just as successful scientists, are those “impelled by curiosity”. These are people for whom the “labor of love” is the pure joy of discovering something new (Nobel laureate in physics Arthur Leonard Schawlow, 1981, Amabile, 1994).² This resonates profoundly with Spira’s members, whose “first impulse” is... “curiosity, love of our profession as musicians” (Timoti, violin, core member, in Caillat, 2013). Finally, work in Spira is organized in a manner analogous to collaborative research (Easterby-Smith & Malina, 1999; Teagarden et al., 1995), consisting of several interrelated phases: (1) defining the scope of the research; (2) forming the research team; (3) conducting the research; (4) presenting the research results (performing); and (5) reflecting on the research process and results.

1. Defining the scope of the research

Each Spira project begins months ahead of the week-long rehearsal period by defining the scope of the research, i.e., by selecting a period, a composer, and a piece. The piece in itself is akin to a research question, as it initiates the exploration and provides direction for the

² “When asked what made the difference between highly creative and less creative scientists he responded: ‘The labor of love aspect is important. The most successful scientists often are not the most talented. But they are the ones who are impelled by curiosity. They’ve got to know what the answer is.’” (Amabile, 1994, p. 316).

performance. In researching what to research, Spira delineates the boundary conditions of the upcoming project. This may entail deciding to work with specific or period instruments, and less frequently—with specific soloists, specific “maestros”, or even in specific places.

We always start with the piece. Other orchestras, they may be excellent orchestras, and they take time to practice and so on, but they start by booking a season, a festival, etcetera. They play what the promoter or agent wants them to play, not what they want to play. ... We want to keep it small and informal ... [so that] we can play by our own rules. Our agency is not doing so well because our product is not always selling so well.

(Lorenza, violin, core member, interview)

Unlike in traditional orchestras, where the repertoire is decided by the artistic director or other powerful stakeholders (Faulkner, 1983, as cited in Lehman, 1995), and unlike other conductorless orchestras that decide in a relatively rigid, structured manner (e.g., Orpheus selects repertoire on a rotation basis through an elected fixed-term committee: Vredenburg & He, 2003), Spira tries to remain flexible. Thus far, the process of defining the research question has been somewhat unregulated, except that the founding and core members appear to have more influence in repertoire decisions than the rest.

Repertoire decisions are taken together, by the core members, while also discussing any input from other regular members of the group... It is interesting to note that we have never got to the point of having to take a poll or vote to choose a certain piece, we more or less let the choice be randomly influenced by the development of our discussions.

(Francesco, horn, core member, in Caillat, 2013)

Despite the lack of structure, what remains consistent is the motivation behind repertoire choices, that is, the curiosity to explore uncharted territories and to go deeper and make discoveries through “going out of range” and making “instructive mistakes”, as the quotes below reveal.

We try to pick pieces from the repertoire that can help us improve, working on our weak points... We decided to ban any choice that was just a matter of personal taste in order to be forced to dig deeper into the score. (Andrea, violin, and Timoti, violin, core members, in Caillat, 2013)

The path we followed choosing out repertoire has not always been linear: sometimes we have felt the need to do something out of our range, something which forces us to make a step—or even to “jump”, whilst taking the responsibility of this risk. ... [P]articular pieces were just too much for us at the time; but on the other hand, tackling them despite the obvious difficulties forced us to make such instructive mistakes! (website, May 2016)

2. Forming the research team

Researching with whom to research is one of the most contested aspects of Spira’s organizational dynamics. As in collaborative science, harnessing international networks (Easterby-Smith & Malina, 1999) is foundational in the process of building a laboratory of rehearsing musicians. Spira members are often connected through other affiliations, such as the Chamber Orchestra of Europe, where several core members play. Starting from a very small core group, Spira grew by inviting new musicians to participate not only for their creative talent but also for their personality and like-mindedness.

And so the way to free us from this prison is to create something among people that in a way already have affinities. And so, we had to choose people not with audition, of course, but knowing each other. (Miriam, clarinet, core member, interview)

That being invited to do a project with Spira is a largely a matter of networks, being well-connected and “fitting in”, was not outside the awareness of newcomers. Also, being part of it was emotionally gratifying and a source of pride.

I had heard plenty about Spira, they are this cool group, but you cannot just apply. I have heard of people sending CVs that never received an answer. A friend of mine from the conservatory heard from [a core member] that they needed another flute for this project, and she recommended me. (Christian, flute, new peripheral member, interview)

I think I am the youngest³ musician here. This is my sixth time [with Spira] since October 2012. When they need another cello, outside of the core, they always call me! I am really happy and proud... I cried the first time. (Katharina, cello, peripheral member, interview)

³ She was 24 at the time.

Core members explain their selection process by the need for a safe learning environment. They strongly believe that learning in collaborative creation requires like-minded, knowledge-seeking musicians. Professional excellence and musical skills in potential partners is valued, but secondary to curiosity and willingness to study, observed directly or indirectly through shared performances at other orchestras and social connections.

We do not teach new members. It is a sharing experience. We share with each other. Feedback is important, and sometimes people get offended. For that not to happen we need to have a lot of trust, mutual trust. That is why we are so careful with the [selection of] new members. (Lorenza, violin, core member, interview)

These dynamics were well illustrated during a crisis situation documented in Caillat (2013): when one of the musicians had an accident that prevented him from playing, the hunt for a replacement was rather intuitive, involving extensive “search” and exploration. Excellent and otherwise suitable musicians were immediately disqualified if they were deemed poor fit in terms of personality or attitude.

3. Conducting the research

The core of the research involves both individual and collective exploration of the piece, mostly individual data collection and mostly collective interpretation (of the collected data). In preparing for the rehearsal period, all Spira members are expected to engage in activities akin to archival research. They identify and investigate pertinent documents (scores, text, audio, video, etc.) and use online collaborative tools to share those in-between project meetings. The following quote illustrates the nature of research conducted on Schumann’s First Symphony, a challenging project for Spira at the time.

We looked for inspiration reading Clara and Robert’s wedding diary, discussed Ferdinand David and Louis Spohr’s treatises, thought about Akio Mayeda’s “Weg zur Symphonie”, listened to a recording of the first version of the Frühlingssinfonie... We discussed, practiced and performed in Formigine. (website, May 2016)

Even before we all got together, we’d collected all kinds of material that might help us gain an insight into a work and a style that were both so new to Spira: letters, notes, a

study on the earliest version of the Symphony, a recording based on that version, various treatises, and so on. We'd all followed our own natural curiosity and discovered something that might inform our approach. (Lorenza, violin, core member, in Caillat, 2013)

Preparation for all projects follows the same pattern. In-between rehearsals, all members are expected to explore available sources that may be directly or indirectly relevant to understand and interpret a piece. Depending on interest and availability, a core member and/or section leader usually takes on the role of concert master, akin to principal investigator. The principal investigator carries the biggest responsibility to prepare in advance of the rehearsal period and to coordinate the data collection process. Those who do not contribute to this pooled search—usually peripheral and new members—individually study the sources made available by others. Home-based desk research is supplemented by joint interpretative (re)search and analysis, so that the actual rehearsal period is probably when the most intense learning and deepest “understanding” of a piece takes place, as a newer member (Katharina, cello, interview) suggests: “I prepare as much as I can but in the end I learn most here.” Once “there”, everyone in the group can take part in the interpretation, as long as he or she brings rigorous arguments based on the score or other research-based evidence, for example, related to the context in and influences under which a piece was created or where it fits as a specific milestone in a composer’s life and career. The principal investigator’s role is to guide and structure collective data analysis and interpretation during the rehearsal; yet, it is not him or her who has the final say. Final artistic decisions are made based on musicians’ convincing their colleagues by solid reasoning, “full score in hands” (Timoti, violin, core member, in Caillat, 2013).

4. Presenting the research results (performing)

For Spira, learning and performing are sometimes difficult to disentangle, insofar as performing is subordinate to learning, and a crucial part of the research process.

One of the things that amazed me most during my first Spira project was the realization that the work done in rehearsals didn't have the aim of preparing a concert. To experience that the concert itself was part of our learning process and only showed where we were with the piece at that specific time took away so much

stress and pressure and created the greatest space to learn and experiment. For me, this was the key to feeling the greatest excitement during the performance! (Marta, piccolo, peripheral member, in Caillat, 2013)

Because of their learning-first-performing-second orientation, Spira members can focus on mastery development instead of mastery demonstration, and are less afraid of failure in the challenging “performance” situation of the concert. Paradoxically, as the above quote demonstrates, this sometimes leads to the experience of superior or peak performance (see also Dweck, 2006; Marotto et al., 2007). Performing is, in fact, conceived as a two way learning process, as it also offers knowledge sharing with the audience.

It is this ambition to communicate that was behind our decision to stay with the audience after the concerts to answer questions, get feedback and hear criticism. We have had complements from conductors and locals from the little Italian town we meet in. One bar tender commented, “This Haydn is so cool” We have also had criticism.” (Andrea, violin, core member, in Caillat, 2013)

Even though dissemination is an important aspect of collaborative research (Easterby-Smith & Malina, 1999), Spira’s approach to “explaining” their research to audiences before or after performances has not remained without criticism. It is here where tensions between learning and performance in the concept of orchestra as a laboratory are most discernible.

Someone, meanwhile, should do something about their repeated references to “bringing music to the people”, as if descending on an unsuspecting proletariat from on high. It sits awkwardly with their very democratic profile... Results are ultimately what matter, however, and there is no question that they push the boundaries of potential in performance. (Tim Ashley, The Guardian, 2010)

For an event which promised such excitement and innovation, it seemed an odd decision to begin with a forty-minute ‘conversation’ between the Southbank Centre’s former head of music Marshall Marcus, conductor Sir Roger Norrington and the players of the orchestra... The conversation had the distinct flavour of a viva voce exam, where the players were forced to defend and explain their approach; an explanation which would

hardly have been necessary had we been allowed to hear the orchestra's approach for ourselves beforehand. ... A disillusioning start, but the evening promised to improve as the performers returned to the stage with their instruments. ... [E]very single musician on stage believed completely in the validity and necessity of their reworking of the repertoire. This unity of purpose is the strongest defining feature of the group and creates an atmosphere in which each player is engaged with the work as both a soloist and a member of a close-knit team. (Helen Fraser, BachTrack.com, 2012)

As both of these excerpts illustrate, the status quo in classical musical dictates that “performance” is what ultimately defines the orchestra. Spira is perceived as a performing arts group first foremost, and a research group second (if at all) by both critics and audiences; thus, its musicians’ discussing of their research process with audiences seems to add little or no value. Even though Spira itself experiences few tensions between learning and performing—because they clearly define the performance episode as part of the learning experience—the learning aspect of performing is less visible and compatible for observers. Spira’s success, as judged by critics, has little to do with the research process and everything to do with the research “results” (i.e., performance). The innovation of sharing both the learning experience and the musical piece with audiences during concerts is not unanimously appreciated. However, observers do tend to agree that Spira “performs” well, as the above quotes suggest.

5. Reflecting on the research process and results

Following the performance and as a “final” phase of each project, Spira engages in reflection on the research process and results in several ways. First, its members typically conduct a Q&A/feedback session with audiences after having performed for them—a practice that is one part performance and one part learning. In addition to reflecting together with audiences, there is an internal collective reflection between core and peripheral members. When one of the authors observed the orchestra, this reflection happened during dinner immediately following the concert. The mood was celebratory, but the discussion, particularly that between core members, focused heavily on the work completed and pending, rather than on personal or other professional matters. Following another project which resulted in private performances at two families’ homes, Spira reflected:

Two performances, two octets, two parties. Finally we could experience firsthand that contradiction hidden in many moments of this masterpiece, that atmosphere that tries to be joyful because ‘so it must be’, but that clashes with the real mood of its creator. It’s difficult to experience all this in a big, cool concert hall. In a big concert hall it’s not likely that you can feel as in a party with friends in which you are forced to be in a good mood. In a big concert hall walls don’t shake in the Forte passages, and you cannot really whisper, because then the audience can’t hear you anymore... Maybe coming from this experience we performed in London an Octet that, despite the appreciation and warmth of the audience, wasn’t convincing for everybody. In fact, we didn’t build an Octet for the Queen Elizabeth Hall, but an Octet above all for the families..., for their intimate living rooms and tight kitchens. It was like if an actor of the ancient Greece had performed without the mask, hoping that the audience sat in the further last rows of a big theatre would have anyway understood his facial expressions. Maybe the problem was that we didn’t have the possibility to speak and share with the audience the main goals of our study; or maybe that in the presentation of our concert, made by the season of Queen Elizabeth Hall, many aspects were pointed out, that are not really the main features and priorities of Spira, so creating wrong expectations for something that wouldn’t have happened. (website, May 2016)

Reflection on the research process, of course, happens during each of the other phases. In particular, during phase 3, once the group is at the rehearsal venue, core members meet to discuss the progress of the ongoing research project. They exchange some preliminary ideas about how current and past work ties up to potential upcoming projects, that is, how what they have just learned can potentially fit into a new “spiral”. This discussion effectively is a new start of phases 1 and 2. Collective reflection is supplemented by the individual reflection of members. The focus is on how learning acquired during the current project can tie into other work members do, not only as part of Spira, but also elsewhere.

Musically, I certainly carry my learning from Spira to other work. Otherwise, no. In the beginning, I made the mistake to try to translate the approach from Spira to the other orchestra [Chamber Orchestra of Europe]. That was a big mistake. Sometimes I have to

lead and I tried to discuss this and that. With them you have to be a dictator. You have to set clear direction. (Lorenza, violin, core member, interview)

During interviews, several core members brought up the notion of Spira's "weird learning curve". They suggested that project-specific learning follows the typical pattern of a rapid increase during the first day or two of collective interpretation, but is then succeeded by a "dip" (i.e., a decrease rather than a stall) halfway through, due to "overpractice" and "overthinking". Finally, though learning picks up again, it may or may not culminate during the performance episode. Overall, learning is achieved through selecting a piece to perform and conducting a historical research to understand a score in-depth, studying the context in which the piece had been created and existing interpretations, getting to know and practicing on period instruments, and developing as team players (i.e., learning how to create a shared understanding together). Most but not all of these learning points are generalizable beyond the context of the single project.

Discussion

Organizing 'in-between'

To conciliate the idea of orchestra as a laboratory of *learning* with the commercial realities of being a self-sustaining *performing* arts organization, Spira has adopted various organizing practices of in-betweenness. The literature points to two ways in which we can understand in-betweenness (Beech, 2011). On one hand, the anthropological notion of liminality refers to the temporary, transitional state 'betwixt and between' the separation and the aggregation stage in a rite of passage (Turner, 1967). On the other hand, the organizational studies notion involves no ritual and no identifiable stages; rather in-betweenness is often a formalized strategy, a combination of logics of action, such as, for example, the tendency of organizations to contain both institutional and anti-institutional elements (Lindsay, 2010). In other words, in-betweenness is at once a phenomenological state of liminality, a transitional subjective experience, and a powerful property of organizations that defy classification. In both cases, in-betweenness has been associated with ambiguity and uncertainty, but also creativity and flexibility (e.g., Garsten, 1999; Lindsay, 2010). Here we examine how organizational practices of

multiple in-betweenness, namely spatial, temporal, relational, and ideological, are employed by this entrepreneurial, learning-oriented performing arts collective.

First, the orchestra now has a permanent base in Formigine, which has been their informal semi-base all along. Formigine was “the only municipality to respond to their appeal for places where they could be regularly hosted” (website, December 2015), providing free accommodation in an unoccupied wing of a retirement home and local residents’ homes, and spaces to play, such as the local Polisportiva (sports hall). Nonetheless, Spira’s vision includes moving between venues, towns and places, always looking for “new places”, “where you would not expect to find classical music” (website, December 2015). Similarly, even though they now have a dedicated auditorium, whenever they are in town, they rehearse and perform between the auditorium, the Polisportiva, Caffè Centrale, Villa Sabbatini and various open spaces such as streets and squares. *Spatial in-betweenness*, i.e., between the nomadic and the sedentary, is based on a belief that it affords them with space for creating new knowledge as well meaningful connections with the audience: “we look... for venues in which we could experiment” but also “directly connect to the locals during the rehearsal period” (website, December 2015). Through these connections with audiences in untraditional, liminal spaces, they can also share what they have learned.

To facilitate learning and creativity, Spira also seeks *temporal in-betweenness*. The orchestra exists only in-between musicians’ main means of livelihood, their day-to-day work and employment and the rehearsals and performances associated with their permanent and other pertinent occupations. Playing with Spira is synonymous to spending time away from work. Conversely, while play is afforded by them coming together on occasion between their day jobs, much of the learning actually happens in-between Spira projects. Older members insist that “each one of us works alone for months between the weeks in which we meet” (Simone, viola, core member, interview)—and they expect new members to do the same. Learning and creativity are also afforded by routinely switching between period and modern instruments, “a new and challenging experience” for most musicians.

Relational in-betweenness is manifested in several ways. First, Spira strives for interpersonal in-betweenness: it is not one person that creates the interpretation of a piece; instead, the interpretation is created between the musicians, involving lengthy episodes of conscious interpersonal communication. Relatedly, the interpretation evolves between Spira and

the audience, so that “Spira ... shares with the audience the reasons why it exists, and, by sharing them, gets the audience itself involved as an active part of its experience” (website, December 2015). In addition, Spira stays with the audience after concerts, responding to questions and getting feedback, including criticism.

Finally, in realizing its drive for learning, creating, and sharing knowledge, the ensemble strives for *ideological in-betweenness* reflected in the very idea about how to manage and organize artistic and creative decision making. While observers have repeatedly called Spira “the democratic orchestra”, this could be misleading, since “it is not important who speaks first or speaks most... It is important that they think about it first” (Lorenza, violin, core member, in Caillat, 2013). In other words, not every word and not everyone’s word counts. As explained by Timoti (violin, core member, in Caillat, 2013), “what we do is hopefully a kind of ‘enlightened oligarchy’, with a group of people in charge of making the final decisions – the section leaders in the first place, but also other musicians who share a bigger part of the Spira path and have a deeper awareness of its musical identity”. Spira, in fact, strives for the middle ground between “democracy” and “coherence” (website, December 2015).

Spira’s multiple in-betweenness seeks to allow flexible ordering, open to curiosity and experimentation , yet also demands highest level of professionalism and coherence. In-betweenness can be a powerful organizational mode for learning and creativity in performing arts, but it brings about a number of challenges. While meeting the learning needs of musicians as an intended consequence by design, this way of organizing also gives rise to unintended consequences, particularly regarding uncertainty, coordination, and administration, as related below.

Challenges and unintended consequences in arts entrepreneurship and organizing in-between

Spatial in-betweenness creates a need for perpetual organizing (of dozens of people), more complex and demanding than what a purely sedentary organization requires. Temporal in-betweenness similarly makes scheduling complex. As members acknowledge, the project-based nature of Spira requires prioritizing the calendars of a small number of core members, inadvertently having implications for ideological in-betweenness. Finally, relational in-betweenness demands selectivity when inviting new musicians for projects. It also calls for a common language, education and socialization of newcomers, as well as audiences.

Spira's organizing has consequences also for its individual members due to the intrapersonal in-betweenness members experience as a result of the in-between organizing described above, and on the new individual demands that this creates. The organizational in-betweenness of Spira creates subjective, phenomenological state of intrapersonal in-betweenness for many of its members. This state parallels the 'betwixt and between' phase (Turner, 1967) in rites of passage in several striking ways. First, many experience ambiguity and stress. Unversed in the "Spira language", which is essential for partaking in the collective creative and learning process, new and peripheral members sometimes report feeling outsiders (see also Garsten, 1999). Long-standing members are often ambiguous about the fact that leadership requires both "plumbing" and "poetry" (March, in Augier, 2004: 173). In other words, the growing need to switch between creator and administrator roles is anxiety-inducing.

While freeing artists from the conductor, in-between organizing makes Spira members "in a certain manner less free" (Paolo, violin, core member, in Caillat, 2013) and more dependent on each other for learning and for the development of shared interpretation of the chosen piece. Several ask themselves whether they would not have been happier just keeping to their day jobs, "Who is to say my life isn't better without Spira?" (Timoti, violin, core member, in Caillat, 2013). At times, members acknowledge missing a "maestro", a master of ceremonies of sorts who can guide the collective through the threshold of learning (see also Hawkins & Edwards, 2015). This is particularly understandable for newer members who are not accustomed to the nature of Spira's rehearsals, which are "LONG! And extremely tough. You can't ever switch your brain off ... You have to present arguments... and convince your colleagues. We work hard to build one common vision together" (Timoti, violin, core member, in Caillat, 2013).

Working without a single "leading mind", makes members appreciative of the transformational experiences that more experienced "teachers" have afforded in moving the collective "from A to B", providing structure to learning and play, and bringing in an informed vision and direction for interpretation. Creating novel interpretations in-between members rather than from within members requires that all members "speak a common language". One maestro in particular, Lorenzo Coppola, an expert in period instruments, has played a key role in establishing this common language. Prior to Spira's experiences with Coppola, "it was very difficult to interpret one symbol in the same way... very difficult to have a common understanding" (Lorenza, violin, core member, in Caillat, 2013). Our informants agree that

working with Coppola was a major step in developing Spira's language. Other maestros with profound understanding of a period, a composer, or a piece have also been invited to facilitate some of Spira's projects, thereby expanding the learning space.

Implications

This study advances understanding of new forms of organizing based on a critical case of a distinctive performing arts organization. The laboratory organizational form identified in the case provides organizational members with the freedom to choose what, when, where, and with whom to play, and what to make out of it, satisfying their need to learn and—as a result—to create and share new knowledge (Amabile & Gyskiewicz, 1987). Learning has rarely been the focus of organizing in the performing arts; however, creating—in addition to performing—are deemed to be defining features of the performing arts. Insofar as creativity in the performing arts is taken for granted, the inherent tension between learning and performing is underexplored. Learning in any creative organization is critical because novel and unique perspectives have to regularly be brought in to support creativity in groups (Hinsz, Tindale, & Vollrath, 1997). Collective creativity is best facilitated when the group's performance orientation is matched or balanced with a learning orientation (Hirst et al., 2009). The orchestra-as-a-laboratory analogy brings attention to some of the tensions between the learning needs and goals of creative individuals and groups and the external demands for their superior performance.

In-betweenness is a multifaceted heuristic that captures the possibility of balancing between an orchestra and a laboratory, and between performing and learning, thereby enacting creativity between space, time, people, and ideas. The notion that learning and creativity emerge from *between* individuals within groups, rather than from within individuals, is extensively debated in information-processing theories of group functioning (Hinsz et al., 1997; Ickes & Gonzales, 1994; Sawyer & DeZutter, 2009). In order to learn and therefore create, “project teams need to attend to, encode, store, and retrieve information both within and *between* the minds of the team members” (Ellis, Hollenbeck, Ilgen, Porter, West, & Moon, 2003, p. 830, emphasis added). Organizing in-between relationally—but also spatially, temporally and ideologically—is one entrepreneurial approach to finding balance and reconciling the conflicting demands of creating and performing arts.

As a conceptual alternative to ambidexterity, in-betweenness is arguably better suited to understand not only the organizational but also the individual and interpersonal dynamics and tensions that result from balancing learning and exploration with performance and exploitation. Our study reveals the challenges for performing entrepreneurial acts while performing artistically, revealing how the mundane activities of organizing such initiative by projects can become overwhelming for those involved in them, as they also seek to continue their main career and life projects. Thus, in-betweenness has implications for project-based collaborative organizing and organizing in the collaborative economy more broadly, where multiple individuals co-create and power together a common vision (e.g., Adler, Heckscher, & Prusak, 2011; Hargadon & Bechky, 2006). It seems to suggest in order to benefit from the learning experience with depth and intensity, the members of such lab-like collectives need to complement their search for new knowledge with an engagement in other more permanent and performance-driven organizations, in which someone else takes the organizing responsibility. This is so because entrepreneurial, project-based initiatives pose strong organizational strain that is added on the demands posed by learning and performing.

The study also has implications for arts' entrepreneurship and for other forms of entrepreneurial and innovative activities and processes for which both learning and performance are essential. Enacting societal change beyond the performance is acknowledged to be important aspect that drives entrepreneurship and innovation in artistic domains (Hjorth & Holt, 2016). Our study shows that developing and disseminating knowledge are by-products of entrepreneurially organizing for learning first and performing second. In particular, the study shows how a drive for learning can lead to an entrepreneurial effort that involves challenging and changing traditional ways of thinking about the power of performance in performing arts organizations. This could open up possibilities for bringing in new energy to such organizations and enhance the engagement of creatives in their activities.

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