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Exploring interaction in chamber music ensembles by means of group exercises

Matilda Berghäll

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Author: *Matilda Berghäll*

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Supervisor: *Christina Ekström, Tilman Skowroneck*

Examiner: *Maria Bania*

ABSTRACT

The purpose of my independent project is to look more closely at interaction/communication and contact in small chamber music groups and find out if there is a way to improve that aspect of playing together with the help of exercises, that I have found in the literature about small group pedagogy, through my own experiences during studies and interwievs for my bachelor's thesis. In this project I am bringing different exercises to light with the purpose of adapting them to be used with small chamber music groups. With the chosen exercises I conducted a one-group pretest-posttest research with a duo, documenting, recording and analyzing the results. The most important results show that the selected exercises have a positive effect on many aspects of interaction and contact as well as the musical result.

Key words:

Chamber music, group dynamics, interaction, team building exercises, communication, breathing exercise

CONTENTS

First and foremost I want to thank all my colleagues who helped me try out the exercises for this thesis. I want to thank violinists Silke Ekmann Kidholm and Lotta Määttä as well as cellist Elisabeth Nilsson for their participation in the pilot study in the form of a string quartet, and of course my duo partner and cellist Isabella Warnicki, with whom I tried out all the rest of the exercises. I could not have done this project without them.

1.0 Introduction

During my studies I have had the opportunity to play in many groups with many different people and noticed that it sometimes works amazingly well and other times it has felt like a struggle. In all cases we did not find a way to solve the problems or end up having a good musical result. That is one of the reasons I decided to look more closely at communication within chamber music groups.

I have been interested in communication and group dynamics since I started studying music and I also wrote my bachelor's thesis on this subject https://urn.fi/URN:NBN:fi:amk-2021060815099. That study had a pedagogical perspective and was dealing with teaching chamber music groups, because I studied instrumental pedagogy. As I did my research on that, I interviewed some musicians, who gave me really good tips and exercises to improve interaction within chamber music. They also mentioned working together with actors and dancers and described how they used to warm up together before a rehearsal. These exercises were meant to remove any kind of tension in the atmosphere, so that everybody could feel free and safe but also improve everyone's reactiveness and focus in the moment. These exercises sounded really interesting to me, and I even wanted to try them out with my chamber music group, but it ended up not happening because there wasn't enough time. Now however, I decided to finally experiment with these exercises.

This subject is important because I have often felt that musicians work very hard and practice a lot before a performance but still struggle with ensemble playing. We often try to fix it by just playing the piece as many times as we can to make everyone know the music perfectly. I have a feeling that it's not tackling the actual problems of playing together and it's probably even making groups lose precious time. I think it is important to try to find other ways of dealing with these challenges.

1.1 My own experience of interaction and contact in chamber music groups

It's safe to say that you get to know your colleagues much better in small chamber music groups consisting of 2-4 people than larger ensembles, just simply because there's more time to interact with everyone personally. Of course it's common to end up playing with people you already know from before or even good friends, but that's not always the case. The group dynamic is different with each group because every human is different and the relationships between each member is determined by interacting and reacting to each other throughout time.
In most cases there will be someone in the group who takes the lead naturally or unvoluntary. Aho (2009) says that the typical characteristics of a leader can be a strong

interest in playing chamber music, extraversion, interest in planning the program and sometimes the fact that they are more advanced than the others. (p.26)

I have often been in situations where this role was taken by the first violinist, and I think that has to do with an old habit of the
first violinist being a kind of “concert master”, that everybody else follows. It can of course be someone else as well if they for some reason feel more motivated than the others, have more experience or just have a leaders personality. I have noticed that it can be bad for the group to just have one leader because it often leads to other members becoming too passive. It can also create an unnecessary hierarchy or an unfair distribution of responsabilities.

I think a functioning chamber music group consists of equally motivated people, who all give unique input to the group. Of course, it can sometimes be more difficult to work without one person who decides everything, because it means that discussions need to be had and compromises need to be made. I still think it can be a lot easier to play and express music freely if everyone in the group feels equal.

2.0 Aim and questions

My aim with this project was to explore how different exercises I gathered during my studies might improve the connection between players in chamber music scenarios and observe how they affect the musical result. I did experiments and wrote a study in order to see if this idea leads to anything, if I can learn something from it and of course in the hope that in the end it could interest and help someone else go further with the research within the field of chamber music. The point was simply to create a better understanding of an existing problem, try something out and see what happens as well as gather more data and information for future studies.

The main questions of this thesis are the following:

1) How can the chosen exercises for this study affect ensemble interaction and contact?
2) What can the musical effects of the exercises be?

3.0 Method

Because the research problem of this thesis concerns improving interaction and contact of ensemble playing, I am approaching it by experimenting with exercises I have gathered from previous interwievs that I did during my bachelor's thesis and exercises I have picked up during my studies in the conservatory and university and analyzing if they actually work within chamber music. When I say working, I am talking about the intended goal of the chosen exercises. During the interviews I specifically asked for exercises to improve communication and interaction in chamber music groups and now I am putting them to the test.

The method I have used for my experiments is a one-group pretest-posttest design. This method allowed me to record our playing before/during and after the exercise, so that I could compare the performances. I chose this method because my aim was to establish a cause-and-effect relationship between the recordings and because I was working with only one chamber music group. The only negative aspect of this method is that it doesn't nescessarily give the chance to make meaningful comparisons because there is no comparison group.

The materials that I am using in this project are the exercises, which I have chosen with the idea that they are all from different people/litterature/time. One exercise I adapted from Leena Ståhlberg's book Pienryhmäohjaajan opas, that is a book about pedagogy in small groups. It contains some team building exercises, that I thought would be worth trying. Another exercise came from dancers, who shared the exercise for my violinist friend, when they had a project together. It was important for me to include at least one artistically interdisciplinary exercise because I have a feeling that we could learn a lot from other art fields. The other exercises are from different music pedagogues, that I have had the honour working with during summer courses as a child as well as my bachelor and master studies.

For the exercises I chose exerpts from Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart's twelve duets for two horns K.V. 487, second movement menuetto, transcribed for viola and cello and Tomaso Albinoni's adagio for strings and organ in G minor transcribed for viola and cello.

3.1 The design of the project

I conducted experiments with the chosen exercises in the form of a quasi experimental research with my chamber music group, which in the end turned out to be a duo and gathered feedback/ observations from the other player as well as my own. The playing was recorded each time before an exercise or during and right after, to have documentation of the impact that each exercise had on interaction and communication in the group and to collect data that can be further analyzed. I intended to analyze my

data by comparing recordings that have been made before/during and after each exercise.

I have chosen eight exercises that are put into three categories, which I have described and motivated in chapter 5.0. From this list I chose one exercise, that I used for a pilot study that was recorded. The pilot study was formulated in the same way as the other exercises are documented in chapter 5. The only difference is that the pilot study was done with a string quartet and the rest of the exercises with a string duo.

With each exercise I have recorded two takes; one of the exercise and one after to show the result of each exercise. With the exercises that are done without instruments I have recorded the first video before the exercise and the second one after, because I wanted to demonstrate the differences by playing each time, so it would be easy to compare. The feedback was given immediately after the recordings, first on the actual exercise and then on the playing after the exercise.

I have analyzed the recordings focused on auditive aspects like sound, phrasing, intonation etc. but also visual aspects when it comes to interaction and contact. I was interested to see how the playing looks; are the players looking at each other while playing, if they use the bow in a similar way or if they move syncronised etc. I will compare all of the aspects above between the two recordings that I make before/during and after each exercise.

4.0 PREVIOUS RESEARCH

The following studies are interesting dissertations that have been published about the subject:

Dorianne Cotter-Lockard, Chamber Music Coaching Strategies and Rehearsal Techniques That Enable Collaboration (Saybrook University, 2012).

Cotter-Lockard's (2012) dissertation deals with “establishing a positive environment, psychological safety, democratic rehearsal processes and the use of gesture and body movement in chamber music collaboration”. (abstract)

Even if Cotter-Lockard (2012) talks mostly about coaching chamber music groups, it still touched my subject in the same way as Ståhlberg’s book about small group pedagogy. When chamber music is done without a teacher it is important to be aware about group dynamics.

Cotter-Lockard’s “findings indicate that relating is a primary aspect of creating a positive environment for learning in the coaching sessions. Therefore, many of the techniques are aimed at relationships. In the case of chamber music coaching, team effectiveness is enhanced through a focus on relationships” (2012, p. 204-205)

Nicola Pennill, Ensembles working towards performance: Emerging coordination and interactions in self-organised groups (The University of Sheffield, 2019).

Pennill's (2019) dissertation deals with "how small groups, including music ensembles, need to balance contradictory forces for predictability and structure with creativity and sharing of ideas." (abstract)

This dissertation included a "survey study to better understand how rehearsal activities are structured in self-organised Western Art music ensembles, how this varied by different stages of preparation and ensemble type, and how verbal and nonverbal communication varied by stage of preparation." (p. 266)

Pennill also "reported qualitative findings relating to the question of how members of newly-formed ensembles experienced the process of preparing for performance, and how stages of rehearsal are perceived and managed". (2019, p. 266)

5.0 PROCESS

The only exercises that were not recorded were the pilot study "the counting game" and the exercise "one organism". With those two exercises I decided to record the same exerpt played before and after the exercise because the exercises were done without instruments. All the other exercises were done with instruments and were therefore recorded as the first take.

All the other exercises that are listed in chapter 5.2 except the pilot study, have been executed with a duo, that consisted of myself and a cellist friend from Finland. My original idea was to experiment with a bigger chamber music group like for instance a quartet like in my pilot study, but I was unable to assemble one during the spring of 2024 because of scheduling issues.

The feedback from myself and my duo partner was given immediately after the recordings without discussing it first to not get influenced by each other's observations. After the recordings we both wrote down our own thoughts about the exercise and how we felt it affected the playing afterwards. In addition, I have also listened to the recordings and analyzed them as objectively as possible to see if the exercises affected the musical result in any way.

I have named all the exercises with my own words just to make them more memorable and to make them stand out.

5.1 THE PILOT STUDY
“The counting game”

I adapted this exercise from a book of small group pedagogy (Leena Ståhlberg-Pienryhmä-ohjaajan opas). This exercise is also mentioned later in category no. 3 (reactiveness).

Step 1: Sit down with your group without instruments and shut your eyes.

Step 2: Someone says 1, another person says 2 and someone else says 3. The point is to count numbers one by one and if two or more people say the same number at the same time the game resets. You can choose together with your group until what number you want to count up to.
This exercise can be done slowly or with a very fast tempo. If this is used with a purpose of getting fast reactions I recommend to try the fast version. For this pilot study I chose the slower version because I wanted to see if it could have a calming effect. Because we had just finished a orchestra rehearsal.

How the exercise was done:
We played the exact same passage of one of the pieces we are working on (Tchaikovsky string quartet no. 1 in D major op. 11, 1. mov.) and recorded one take first thing when we got in the room. After the first take we did the slow version of the “counting game” counting up to 30 and recorded another take of the same passage right after to see if the something changed.

Link to the first recording:

https://youtu.be/YVu5FWvbTx4

Link to the second recording:

https://youtu.be/obwIvmrYq24

My reflection:
I felt different sensations because of the long silences and the slight nervousness, with not saying a number at the same time with someone. It's difficult to feel that in the air when everybody close their eyes, but somehow you still know and feel it. I felt freer and more receptive to impulses coming from around me.

The reflection of others in the group:
The other players in my group said that they felt much calmer after doing the exercise. One of them said that it even felt a bit like doing mindfulness.

Conclusion:
By listening to the recordings afterwards I can actually detect a big change in sound and energy. First of all, the tempo was a bit slower in the second take, but more importantly I felt that the phrasing was much calmer. I also felt that we were much more together on bow changes and did the dynamics better.

5.2 THE EXERCISES

Category no. 1 (BREATHING)

Exercise 1:
"One organism"
I heard about this exerice from one of my violinist friends, who I studied with in the Turku arts academy in 2020. She had done a project with dancers. They had started their rehearsal with this simple exercise, that was meant to unify the group through breathing.

Step 1: Stand in a circle with all of the members in your chamber music group and hold hands.
Step 2: Everyone closes their eyes and start breathing in through the nose and out of the mouth.
Step 3: The goal is to try to slowly sync up the breathing with everyone in the group, so that it starts feeling like only one breathing organism.

How the exercise was done:

We tried this exercise twice. First time seated and second time standing. We were striving for a slow breath and deep breathing pace, even if we did not discuss this before we started. We played an exerpt from Tomaso Albinoni's adagio for strings and organ in G minor transcribed for viola and cello.

Link to the first recording:

https://youtu.be/qcnxXiknZwY

Link to the second recording:

https://youtu.be/Bg1n1y9qSFY

My reflection right after the recordings:

A) The exercise

The reason we did this exercise twice was because I felt that it was extremely difficult to relax during the first try even if we are good friends. I think this exercise would be mentally easier if it's done with a bigger group. It felt very intimate when we did it as a duo.

I did feel myself relaxing after approximately 30 seconds during the first try. I felt like going on for a really long time to achieve full relaxation. My heart was beating faster than normal but we did find a common breathing rhythm despite of it.

The second time we tried this exercise we were standing. This time it was much easier for me to relax because we had already tried it once. We found each other's pace of breathing much faster and continued breathing exactly the same way for approximately one minute. During this time, I started shifting my attention away from the stress of trying to breathe together and started noticing other noises around the room and from outside. It reminded me of a meditation practice, where you close your eyes and try to listen to three different noises that you can hear in your environment. I started listening to the the clock ticking in the living room and noticed a seagull screaming outside. Because of the relaxation I really started feeling like one organism with my duo partner.

b) Playing after the exercise

When we played the same exerpt again after the exercise, I noticed that I still had my ears as open as during the exercise. Because of this I felt like I was listening to my duo partner's playing more than my own. It was as if we were playing the same instrument at times. I did feel though, that my intonation suffered a bit and I think this happened because my priorities had shifted. Before, I was so concentrated on my own playing that I sacrificed having contact with my partner. Now I felt that my bow arm was much more relaxed, and I was able to play and phrase with a very flowy bow, which made me more flexible to react to musical impulses from my duo partner. Maybe playing technically perfect was not my first priority anymore during this recording.

My duo partner's reflection right after the recordings:

a) The exercise

My duo partner felt that the exercise was exciting and very intimate. She did say that it wasn't as difficult to relax with me as it could have been with someone she doesn't know so well. Her experience was that the exercise worked better while we were seated the first time. She said that it could be because of our height difference and that she felt more like we were on the same level while seated. When we started to find each other's breath, it felt the same as when you play together and change the note at the same time. It was revolutionary to her when she realized how important it is to breathe properly while playing and that we should think about it much more.

b) Playing after the exercise

My duo partner said that she became much more sensitized to our playing after the exercise. You could sense when the other person was landing on the first beat in each bar. She felt extremely relaxed because we had done a really slow breathing exercise and said that the biggest difference was that we were much more in sync with each other.

Conclusion after analyzing the recordings:

A) Recording no. 1

I think we played generally quite well in this first recording and I think it has to do with the fact that this was our very first recording that we did. We were concentrating on sound and phrasing but I do detect some unstable intonation here and there. I also notice that we look and even sound a little bit stiff. This might have happened because neither of us have recorded our own playing for a while. You suddenly become more aware of everything you do because you know it's being recorded and that can create some tension.

B) Recording no. 2

To be honest, I didn't expect a very big difference in interpretation with this recording because I thought that the first one was quite ok. It was quite different though. We took our time already in the beginning before starting to play and our breathing was much calmer compared to the first recording. We started perfectly in sync and our sound blended nicely together. Our tempo was a bit slower and that gave us freedom to use a faster and more "flowy" bow, which I think suits this piece well. I did not detect any stiffness like in the first recording.

Exercise 2:
"I show, you show"
This exercise I picked up during a chamber music master class with an italian cello teacher in 2018. Our quartet was having a problem playing and breathing together especially in the beginning of movements, so the teacher made us all breathe and show the beginning one by one. Once we had established what kind of breathing was a good one for each movement, we practiced breathing and showing the start together. The point was that if we breathe the same way, we play the same way.

Step 1: Pick a challenging place in the piece that you are working on with the group.
Step 2: Start with someone showing the entrance and go through every member.
Step 3: Decide on the right type of breathing and practice breathing together in the same exact way.

How the exercise was done:

This exercise we recorded because I wanted to show how it sounded when I cued us in and when my duo partner cued us in. I have one recording of us showing the entrance one by one and a second recording, where we both breathe together without talking between the takes. With this exercise we played an exerpt of Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart's twelve duets for two horns K.V. 487, second movement menuetto, transcribed for viola and cello.

Link to the first recording:

https://youtu.be/6u41Fdmd8Vs

Link to the second recording:

https://youtu.be/sVjzgIP-4WQ

My reflection right after the exercise:

a) The exercise (breathing separately)

Our way of breathing was definitely very different. When I showed the entrance, we were not completely in sync because I think I had a faster tempo in mind. This created a bit of stress and affected negatively on the whole exerpt. I was also tense because I suddenly felt like I was responsible for everything during that exerpt. When my duo partner showed the entrance, we were able to play more together. Her breathing was calmer, and it affected the whole exerpt in a more positive way. I felt that there was more room for phrasing and taking care of the quality of the notes.

b) Playing after the exercise (breathing together)

We did not talk about what kind of breathing we would use together, so we had to have a lot non spoken contact before we started. The fact that we know each other really well probably helped us in this situation. I noticed that we made a kind of compromise and that made us play more in sync. Neither of us had a dominating role and I felt that I was following my duo partner much more.

My duo partner's reflection right after the exercise:

a) The exercise

The first thing that my duo partner said was that it felt very natural to her when I showed the entrance. Probably because we had been practicing the pieces like that all the time. When it was her turn to show, she suddenly felt very strange. She became nervous and showed the entrance in a way that she didn't plan on doing. She said that she felt that this affected our playing negatively. In rehearsals we had been relying on my cue for the entrance and now the roles changed, which felt uncomfortable.

B) Playing after the exercise

My duo partner thought that it felt very natural to play after the exercise even if we had cued each other in in a very different manner. She said that it has to do with the fact that we are able to anticipate what the other is going to do next musically.

Conclusion after analysing the video:

A) Recording no. 1

When I showed I did it in a much faster and vigorous manner than we actually played, and the duration of my breath was one quarter note. I had intended a faster tempo but wasn't able to lead us to it like I wanted. The reason for this might be that I didn't start playing immediately after showing because i felt that I had to wait for the cellist. There was a weird silence after my breathing before we started playing together. If I had started playing confidently, I might have been able to lead us into the character that I wanted. One of my chamber music teachers once told me that the point of showing the entrance is not to show it to ourselves and start playing confidently in our own bubble but to show, wait for the others to react and then start playing when you are sure that the impulse

got through to your chamber music group. In this exercise I might have overdone it slightly. (kamarimusiikin taito?)

Our playing sounded more relaxed when my duo partner showed the entrance. She did breathe in a calmer and slower way than me and the duration of her breath was one whole bar. Our first note was played with the same character and had the same length. We also did a very organic ritenuto in the end of the exerpt that was not planned. When I listened to this recording I did think that our eight notes were slightly more together when I showed maybe because we played in a faster tempo.

B) Recording no. 2

I think it's quite amazing how we both adjusted our breathing a bit towards each others way of breathing without discussing it at all. We were much more in sync this time because I slowed my breathing down and my duo partner changed the duration of her breath from one bar to one quarter note. I still notice that I have a tendency to wait a bit too long before playing and this waiting makes our first note a bit out of sync.

I think it's always important to have the same idea of how to start a piece in a way that serves the chosen character and tempo in the best way. I've heard from teachers many times that players should talk less and play more during chamber music rehearsals, so I thought that this exercise could be a good way of finding common ground without having to discuss everything separately. If a group is bigger, it might be more difficult to find a compromise if there are too many ideas. In that situation I think this exercise could be used as a helpful tool in addition to discussing ideas. At least you would notice which ideas work and which don't.

Category no. 2 (CONTACT)

Exercise 1:

"The dark room"
This exercise came up during an interview I made for my bachelor's thesis in 2020. It came from a violin pedagogue, who said that it can help with feeling contact with your chamber music group if you play in complete darkness , so that you can't see your collegues or your music.

Step 1: Choose any place in the piece you are working on and maybe decide on it before hand so that everyone can play it by heart.
Step 2: Have someone shut the lights after you have been seated on your place and start playing.

How the exercise was done: This exercise was a little bit difficult to execute because we couldn't get the space we were playing in as dark as I had planned. We did however manage to get the room dark enough so that it was uncomfortable to read the music. We made the first recording of us playing in the dark room and the second recording of us playing the same exerpt in a well-lit room. For this

exercise I chose an exerpt from Tomaso Albinoni's adagio for strings and organ in G minor transcribed for viola and cello.

Link to the exercise:

https://youtu.be/B--KkU8AriY

Link to the recording that was made after the exercise:

https://youtu.be/JQ7djWgb_UA

My reflection right after the exercise:

A) The exercise

I felt very uncomfortable during this exercise because even if I had the score in front of me, I couldn't read it properly. That's why I wasn't able to focus on my duo partner's playing. It was also difficult because I couldn't see her properly. If a piece is very well prepared it could even be quite atmospheric to play in a darker room. It made me understand the candlelight concerts that are being performed all over the world at the moment.

B) Playing after the exercise

My priorities had shifted from playing my own part perfectly to being perfectly connected with my duo partner through body language and facial expressions. Now I even felt like looking up from my own score more because I felt more trusting being able to see things around me. I was able to take up more space with my playing like after exercise like "eyes shut" and "turn around". In all of these exercises it felt like we were put in an uncomfortable situation so that the normal way of playing would afterwards feel extremely easy and natural. This is actually what I do when I practice some difficult passages by myself. I make the passage more difficult, for instance rhythmically, by changing the bowing or dynamically etc. so that the original passage will start to feel easy. I'm sure this method can work within chamber music as well to ensure a better musical result.

My duo partner's reflection right after the exercise:

A) The exercise

My duo partner said that it felt difficult to play in the dark room because even if she could see the score, it was too dark to see everything properly. She had to concentrate way too much on reading the music so that she didn't play a wrong note.

B) Playing after the exercise

Our cellist's first thought was that it felt extremely easy to play the same exerpt in a well-lit room because she could see the score and see me. She said that playing from the score gives a big feeling of security when you can trust in what you see in front of you. It takes away a lot of nervousness from playing when you can always check the music and be sure that you are playing the right notes. It doesn't mean that you automatically play well and sound good if you play from the score but it does bring a certain calmness, she says.

Conclusion after analyzing the recordings:

A) Recording no. 1

I immediately detect that we both have a very careful sound and there is a wrong note in the accompaniment already in the first bar. We definitely don't listen to each other because we are both focused on reading the music correctly. It sounds like we are sight reading from a very badly hand-written score if you don't look at the video. There is a little lingering before playing the following note because we were not completely sure that it was going to be the right one. Neither one of us is focusing on sound quality or phrasing. The accompaniment is not leading to the next bar and the sound of my long notes is quite flat. There are more and more wrong notes when we approach the end of the exerpt and I even hear the cellist laughing a bit because of it.

B) Recording no. 2

The biggest difference I hear immediately is the flow of the accompaniment. The cellist is playing with much more confidence and her quarter notes are moving nicely from bar to bar with the phrasing. This is probably the reason our tempo is slightly faster. My cadenza on the other hand is freer and I'm taking more time than in the first recording. This probably happened because we were both feeling more relaxed and able to make music and take small risks because we were feeling safer and more comfortable in the normal setting.

Exercise no. 2:
"eyes shut"
This exercise is basically the same as exercise no. 1 but I wanted to try another version of it. They turned out quite different.

Step 1: Choose an exerpt of the piece that you are working on with your group and try to learn it by heart.
Step 2: Everyone shuts their eyes and start playing.

How the exercise was done:

This exercise was also recorded because the exercise was done while playing. The first recording was done playing with the eyes shut and the second one with the eyes open. During this exercise we played an exerpt from Tomaso Albinoni's adagio for strings and organ in G minor transcribed for viola and cello.

Link to the first recording:

https://youtu.be/xIsW4IfGcOQ

Link to the second recording:

https://youtu.be/Tf34zVbzlo4

My reflection right after the exercise:

A) The exercise

The exercise felt a little bit difficult because we studied the exerpt by heart very fast. It's the same feeling every time you play something by heart, and you are not really sure that you can remember the next passage. I was also constantly worried about my duo partner remembering the right notes.

B) Playing after the exercise

Playing after the exercise felt extremely easy because we got our scores back. The only thing missing was a certain kind of musical flow that we had playing by heart. Playing by heart always gives me freedom to concentrate more on phrasing when I don't have to use energy to read the score. I felt that my other senses were heightened when I played with my eyes shut. (I think that this exercise might be very good for certain exerpts that are difficult to puzzle together.) When you put yourself in an uncomfortable situation it feels really easy to play when you are comfortable again.

My duo partner's reflection right after the exercise:

A) The exercise

My duo partner thought that it was really difficult to play with the eyes shut and it surprised her. She said that it felt like her sense of perception was taken away. She said that it was especially difficult to start playing because even if she heard me breathe, she wasn't sure about playing. It felt like trying to climb up some stairs in complete darkness when she wasn't able to see her own hands and instrument. This made her realize how much she is relying on her visual sense. She said that when

she plays by heart, she is used to visualizing her fingers and seeing the chords. She said that she even played some wrong notes because of this. She was also wondering why it is so much easier to play by heart with open eyes. It was definitely uncomfortable.

B) Playing after the exercise

My duo partner said it was a huge relief to play with her eyes open and to read from the score. It felt almost too easy. She also said that it was strange to notice how difficult it was playing with closed eyes when she in fact has a tendency to do so in concerts when she is in a flow-like state. When it was forced on her it didn't feel natural at all.

Conclusion after analyzing the videos:

A) Recording no. 1

During the first recording we played with our eyes shut from beginning to end. We chose a short exerpt because we didn't have so much time to learn by heart and I kind of regretted that when I listened to the recordings because I feel it would have required a bit more playing to be able to notice any differences. Of course, it's also possible that there would not have been more differences, which indicates that this exercise maybe wasn't that effective. In my own feedback I stated that I was able to concentrate more on phrasing but as I listened to this recording, I felt that it was more about the calm and flexible sound that we had. Another thing that I detect in the first recording is that the cellist is playing some wrong notes because like she stated in her feedback, she was feeling very uncomfortable not only playing by heart but also not being able to see anything.

B) Recording no. 2

In the second recording there are no wrong notes and I noticed that we are playing a bit louder. It could be that we were playing quieter with our eyes shut because we were a bit unsure compared to this recording, during which we played with our eyes open and reading from the score. I don't think playing this intro louder is necessarily a good thing, so I can't say that this exercise would have improved the musical result or contact. Because I liked the first recording better than the second one, I think this exercise could be a good tool to remind us about the freedom of playing by heart and how much energy we use when we are reading from a score.

Exercise no. 3:
"Turn around"

I remember this exercise from a summer music course I attended in Finland in 2011, where we had a chamber music lesson with a violin teacher. The concept is similar to the two previous exercises because the point is to play without seeing your collegues and just having to feel the contact anyway.

Step 1: Place yourself as you would usually sit with your group but turn your

chair around and place your stand in front of you.
Step 2: The group can play even one whole movement with the backs turned to each other.

How the exercise was done:

We simply turned our chairs around and played with our backs turned against each other during this exercise. For this exercise we used an exerpt from Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart's twelve duets for two horns K.V. 487, second movement menuetto, transcribed for viola and cello.

Link to the first recording:

https://youtu.be/OyhNyeCHv4Q

Link to the second recording:

https://youtu.be/zISKO339NF0

My reflection right after the exercise:

A) The exercise

For me this exercise was confusing but not in the same way as the previous exercise. During this exercise we could still see ourselves and our instruments, so it felt safer. It was still difficult to play completely in sync because we couldn't rely on each other's body language.

B) Playing after the exercise

We were able to play despite of not seeing each other but it yet again feels so much safer playing face to face. Even if we weren't completely sure of each other's musical ideas, we could still constantly adjust by looking at each other. I noticed that I looked away from my score much more than when we played with our backs turned because I had realized the importance of visual contact. With our backs turned we were forced to just play by intuition.

My duo partner's reflection right after the exercise:

A) The exercise

My duo partner said that she felt the same effect as with the exercise where we played with our eyes shut but it was easier because we didn't close our eyes to our own hands and instruments. It felt ok to play together and she even felt that she heard my breathing better than with the eyes closed.

B) Playing after the exercise

She compares this exercise again to the previous one where we played with our eyes closed. It feels the same when you are forced to give up one sense and then get it back. Suddenly the normal way of playing feels so much easier than before. When you don't see each other it's difficult to feel each other's playing. She said that it was interesting that the breathing exercises (one organism, I show/you show) made us very connected during the exercise and the other exercises have done the opposite but the result feels similar. It always feels easier to play and feel each other after the exercises. She also thought that the playing sounded better after this exercise.

Conclusion after analysing the recordings:

A) Recording no. 1

Even if our first note was out of sync in the beginning and the repeat, I thought we did quite well with everything else. The singing second part sounds really good, because we are clearly listening to each other very carefully. We have a nice legato sound and vibrato, that gives a nice contrast to the rhythmical part.

B) Recording no. 2

It's very interesting to notice that the same thing happened after this exercise as with the previous exercise (eyes shut). I felt that our playing in all it's carefulness was better during the exercise when we didn't look at each other than after the exercise. Maybe we became more careful and open to each other's impulses when we couldn't see one another. These exercises should maybe be done a couple more times to be able to transfer that same feeling of the exercise to the normal setting where we play from the score facing each other or maybe it would even be a good idea to get rid of the score all together and just play and perform by heart.

Category no. 3 REACTIVENESS

Exercise 1
"You play, I listen"
If the ensemble is having trouble putting some passages together it can be because of not being able to listen to what the rest of the players in the group are doing. From my current teacher in the academy of music and drama in Gothenburg I have learned that in these kinds of situations you can stop playing and act as a listener. I will use a quartet as an example.

Step 1: Choose any two players in the group and let them play a challenging passage together so that the other two only listen and try to think of their own part at the same time.
Step 2: Do this so many times that everyone has played with everyone and then play the same passage all together.

Note: Comment on your colleagues playing and help them play together even better when you are listening.

How the exercise was done:

The first recording includes the exercise, where we both play the same exerpt of Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart's twelve duets for two horns K.V. 487, second movement menuetto, transcribed for viola and cello for each other while the other one listens. The second recording is of us playing the same exerpt together after the exercise.

Link to recording no. 1

https://youtu.be/gTBXZEl4D6Y

Link to recording no. 2

https://youtu.be/4290GYLeGuI

My reflection right after the exercise:

a) The exercise

When I played alone, I realized that I really had to be sure of my frasing and decide what I wanted to do musically. I noticed that I wasn't able to play everything as I wanted to and that it would have required more practice.

It was really interesting to listen to my duo partner because she did some things that sounded good and made me want to imitate it. It was refreshing to completely concentrate on my chamber music partner playing without any distractions.

b) Playing after the exercise

We had clearly listened very carefully to each other playing because I felt that we both adjusted our own playing towards the interpretation of the other. I felt that our playing was much more uniformed than the previous times we played the exerpt. The beginning and the end of the exerpt were especially good in my opinion. I also felt more free to react to musical impulses from the cellist.

My duo partner's reflection right after the exercise:

a) The exercise

Our cellist said that she thinks that the point of this exercise is to make players listen to each other more and for those people it could probably be a really helpful exercise. For her it didn't feel so helpful because she said that she has had problems with listening to others too much. That has affected her playing in a way, that she doesn't always do what she wants to do musically. In her opinion it might be good in chamber to always listen to each other but when playing a soloistic piece with a pianist for example you have to be able to impose your own musical ideas while playing.

She didn't feel that she played differently alone than together with me, and she also didn't hear anything new from my playing that she hadn't heard while playing together. In her opinion it might ruin the spontaneity of music making if too much is decided and rehearsed beforehand.

b) Playing after the exercise

My duo partner said that this was the first exercise that affected negatively on her playing because she felt that she has to only concentrate on my playing and not her own. She said that it might have still sounded alright, but she just felt uncomfortable.

Conclusion after analyzing the recordings:

A) Recording no. 1

Even if we played alone, we had the exact same tempo, but my quarter notes were much shorter than the cellists. Our eight notes were similar though.

B) Recording no. 2

This recording was in my opinion the best and most in sync of all the recordings we have done. We automatically breathe together in the beginning, the length of our quarter notes and eight notes are exactly the same and we even do an organic ritenuto in the end, that we didn't do when we played the exerpt alone. I think I was right in my feedback when I said that we both adjusted our playing a bit towards the other player's interpretation.

I don't have anything negative to say about this recording so I would conclude that this exercise is very effective if you are trying to find a way of playing more together and improving the musical result. It is interesting that our feedback was so different. I wrote that I felt good about our playing after the exercise and my duo partner said that the exercise affected negatively on her playing. We are definitely playing extremely well together in this recording so maybe she was feeling that she had to adjust to something she didn't agree with musically. I think it is still a better solution to imitate the other player/players as much as you can during a performance instead of imposing your own musical ideas in the moment. The audience will probably enjoy it more if the players are in sync regardless of the interpretation of the piece.

Exercise 2:
"The counting game"
I adapted this exercise from a book of small group pedagogy (Leena Ståhlberg-Pienryhmä-ohjaajan opas) and did my pilot study with it.

Step 1: Sit down with your group without instruments and shut your eyes.
Step 2: Someone says 1, another person says 2 and someone else says 3. The point is to count numbers one by one and if two or more people say the same number at the same time the game resets. You can decide together with your group until what number you want to count.
This exercise can be done slowly (like I did in my pilot study) or with a very fast tempo. If this is used with a purpose of getting fast reactions, I recommend to try the fast version.

For feedback and conclusion see the pilot study on page ---

Exercise 3:
"Surprise me"
This exercise is adapted from exercise 2 in cathegory 1 (breathing) and was discovered during the same master class.

Step 1: The exercise has the same base as the before mentioned breathing exercise because it starts with everyone showing entrances one by one with the help of breathing.
Step 2: Now the point is to surprise your colleagues with different kind of impulses. You could try breathing in a very slow and lazy way or in a very fast an aggressive way and see how your group reacts to those impulses.

How the exercise was done:

In the first recording we both show two different cues for the beginning of an exerpt from Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart's twelve duets for two horns K.V. 487, second movement menuetto, transcribed for viola and cello by breathing. The second recording was done after we had decided which way of breathing was the best for this exerpt.

Link to the first recording:

https://youtu.be/Kk0WUKag2Qw

Link to the second recording:

https://youtu.be/k7EGr2xTtnQ

My reflection right after the exercise:

A) The exercise

I didn't feel that it was difficult to show the beginnings but rather fun because I got to surprise my duo partner. There was a similar feeling as with the previous exercise (I show, you show) when I felt that I had to be very sure of my breathing. I wanted to make my intensions regarding the interpretation very clear even if I didn't think that the cues were necessarily done in a way that would be optimal for this exact exerpt in the end.

I was feeling extremely anxious and excited when I waited for the cellist to show the entrances. There was so much speculation going on in my head during the few seconds I had to wait for her que. It felt more like minutes because of that. I was mentally preparing to react to any kind of impuls that was thrown at me. That made me think how amazing it would be if I could always be as alert while playing in a chamber music group.

B) Playing after the exercise

We decided to choose our cellist's second way of breathing because it was so energetic and gave the perfect kind of character to the exerpt. It was in fact so energetic that we decided to dial it down a touch because it did make our tempo slightly too fast. I think it worked quite well and I got a bit more poise to my own breathing. We laughed a lot after this exercise because it was so loaded with exitement and surprise. The playing might have been a little bit too agressive but I liked the new tempo and character that we found.

My duo partner's reflection right after the exercise:

A) The exercise

My duo partner said that the exercise felt so exiting because you had to be very quick to react to whatever the other player was going to do. When it was her turn to show, she even felt a little bit mischievous and wanted to wait quite long before showing the entrance to make me more nervous. She said that this exercise could be a very good way to get to know a new chamber music partner/partners because it's fun and keeps the atmosphere light.

B) Playing after the exercise

My duo partner had the same feeling as me that the new type of breathing that we decided on after the exercise brought some energy to the whole exerpt.
Conclusion:

(i think this could be a very good way of improving group dynamic and making everyone relaxed and comfortable in the group.)

Conclusion after analysing the recordings:

A) Recording no. 1

You can of course hear that we are not in sync each time we play the exerpt with a surprising start, but we do catch up with each other's tempo and articulation towards the end. I think we both noticed how clear we need to show the beginnings but also how fast you need to react in order to play perfectly together. When I look at this video, I remember how much excitement there was and that we laughed a lot afterwards because we were trying to keep up with each other not always so successfully.

B) Recording no. 2

I think this recording was the second best of all the recordings we did. The second recording of the previous exercise (you play, I listen) was clearly the best but this recording is a close second. After the exercise we chose my duo partner's second breath but decided to dial the tempo down slightly, because it felt somewhat stressed during the first recording. Even if it's only me breathing us in this time, we both start playing perfectly in sync and play all the notes with the same length. I also notice that we have similar body language that probably helped us with articulation and phrasing.

6.0 DISCUSSION

In the following subchapters I mainly discuss the methodology and results of this thesis and mention the previous research I named in chapter 4.0.

Cotter-Lockard's (2012) dissertation made me think that the exercises I chose also give the chamber music group a chance to shift the focus on something else than playing perfectly and create a safe space to try out different things together, which support the points of her study. Pennill's (2019) study was interesting because it supports my ideas to try something new and creative to try to improve interaction and contact in chamber music groups. She also talks about the importance of sharing ideas and I did that in the form of feedback from my duo partner. It definitely gave me a better idea of how she felt about the exercises and playing compared to me.

6.1 Method discussion

I chose Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart's twelve duets for two horns K.V. 487, second movement menuetto, transcribed for viola and cello and Tomaso Albinoni's adagio for strings and organ in G minor transcribed for viola and cello because I wanted to use exerpts from a slow, beautiful and

athmospheric piece, that could be played very legato with a sustained sound and vibrato and a more rhythmical fast piece, that has similar rhythms for both instruments and could be played articulated with a short staccato-like bow stroke. My initial thought was that the slower piece could be used for the more meditative breathing exercises as well as the one we had to play by heart, and that the faster piece could be used for exercises regarding reactiveness and contact. I wanted the pieces to have different characters so that's why I chose Mozart's light and fun menuetto and Albinoni's melancholic and pensative adagio. I think the faster piece worked well because I was able to analyze our contact on the basis of how we played the same rhythms together and if the length of notes were the same. The slow piece also worked because it was not too difficult to learn by heart and I was able to observe the sound and tension. With some exercises I think we could have played longer exerpts, in order to get more information on how the exercises affected our playing.

My initial plan was to make these experiments with a string quartet like I did with the pilot study but because of scheduling issues I had to settle for the string duo. The study could have been more informative with a bigger group, from which I would have gotten feedback and opinions from more players, but I think that the duo served the purpose of this study quite well in the end because we did get results.

The recordings were made within the one-group pretest-posttest research method, and I think it was a very good way of documenting my experiment. It was simple analyzing the recordings afterwards because I could just compare the two videos with each other and see the differences clearly. If I had realized it earlier, I could have recorded three takes with exercises "counting game" and "one organism", that were made without instruments. All the other exercises were recorded because they were done while playing. I realized that it could have been interesting for the readers to see the other two exercises as well when I was analyzing the recordings.

The feedback was taken immediately after the two recordings had been made. As I explained earlier, the point was to give reflections on the exercise and the playing afterwards without discussing anything to not get influenced by each other's observations. Our feedback was in most cases in line with the actual results, which was expected. It was also interesting to notice that for instance in exercise "you play, I listen" my duo partner's feedback was completely different from the result of my analyzing of the recordings. She said that she played extremely badly and added that it might have sounded alright anyway. The result of my analyzation was that this exercise was clearly the most effective one, because it improved our playing significantly. Maybe this shows that the way we feel about our playing for instance after a performance, does not always tell the truth. That sounds quite comforting to me.

6.2 Result discussion

I put the eight exercises in three categories and named them "breathing", "contact" and "reactiveness" because I wanted to organise them based on their character. Exercises in cathegory "reactiveness" (counting game, you play/I listen and surprise me) all had a huge positive effect on the playing afterwards. After all three exercises, players of the quartet/duo were much more in sync, were breathing together, played notes with the same exact length and had better phrasing. Exercises "you play, I listen" and "surprise me" even made us so reactive that we did spontaneous things with

the interpretation, that we hadn't done before. The two exercises in category "breathing" both affected our breathing in a positive way. The "One organism" exercise relaxed us and made us breathe in a calmer way. That affected the tempo and sound in a positive way. The "I show, you show"-exercise made us breathe in a similar way in the beginning of the exerpt and that resulted in better contact between us.

The most disappointing category was the one I named "contact", that contained exercises "The dark room", "eyes shut" and "turn around". Our playing especially after "eyes shut" and "turn around" was possibly negatively affected because we played better during the exercises. It could also mean that they didn't have an effect at all or that we should have done the exercises more times to see any positive changes. I can say that the exercise "one organism" was done two times and it definitely had a more calming effect after the second try. My conclusion is still that because both exercises take the visual sense away from the players, it might have given us room to use that energy for something else, like listening. Maybe they are good exercises to remind us that playing by heart can sometimes be good and maybe we should consider leaving the scores away more often, at least as an exercise. Pennill (2019) writes that "rehearsal time is generally a scarce resource for musicians, requiring effort to organise. It requires decisions to be made regarding how to allocate the time available and to allow the combined experience to adapt to different musical demands" (p.58). It depends on what the group feels needs to change in order to achieve a better musical result. I think it is valuable to be able to discuss these things with your chamber music colleagues and then maybe choose an exercise according to that. I'm sure this would save an immense amount of time.

Miron (2013) has written an article about a professional string quartet called the Chiara quartet, that have decided to always perform like that because of before mentioned reasons.

Even if the two exercises that were done without instruments (the counting game, one organism) were put in different categories they still both had a calming effect on us. In both results I wrote that we had slower tempos and used our bow more freely. When I checked the feedback on both exercises, I noticed that my pilot study-group had commented, that the exercise felt like mindfulness and after the exercise "one organism" my duo partner said that she was extremely relaxed and I commented that it felt like a meditation exercise. Maybe that was the reason both exercises had a similar outcome. Pennill says that "the rehearsal provides the space, time, and opportunity for group members to develop the necessary familiarity with each other, and their own and other's parts, and to develop expressive interpretations." (2019, p. 29). I think that especially the exercises in this category give space to really relax in front of each other and get rid of any tension and nervousness, which affected the musical result in a positive way. Ståhlberg says that "even shy individuals usually become more receptive to the exercises after they try one out and start noticing the benefits" (2019, p.93).

7.0 CONCLUSION

The purpose of this thesis was to find out if there was a way to improve interaction and contact in small chamber music groups with the help of exercises, that I found in the litterature about small group pedagogy, through my own experiences during studies and interwievs for my bachelor's thesis. I did these experiments to see if there would be an improvement in musical interpretation and playing together after trying the selected exercises. In the beginning when I started planning this thesis, I was worried that it could also result in nothing. Of course that is a result as well, but it was something that raised a question in me. I had a thought that maybe musicians don't use these kinds of exercises because they just don't work in this field, but I also didn't see any research or proof of it not working so I think it was worth trying. Thanks to the pilot study I started feeling very hopeful because it already showed a big improvement in communication as well as an improved musical result.

A lot of things can probably be solved by discussing or just rehearsing a piece but this thesis has shown me that adapting exercises, that try to tackle problems regarding interaction and contact in groups can also be used as a helpful tool. I was pleased with the way the chosen exercises affected interaction and contact. We started breathing calmer, imitated each other's body language, found similar use of bow, became relaxed and got rid off stiffness, reacted faster to each other's impulses and became more flexible with our instruments. For the musical effects I can say that we had a more blended sound and after some exercises a more confident sound quality, clearer articulation, better dynamics, more suitable tempos, clearer phrasing, playing notes with the same length and did spontaneious interpretations by following each other more. After the first exercises I was a bit worried, that maybe we just play better after the exercise because we play the exerpt again because the result can sometimes be better just because of that. After I started noticing improvement on so many levels after the exercises I became convinced that the exercises must have something to do with it. Some of the exercises did not create a better musical result afterwards but rather indicated that we at least played better with for instance the visual sense restricted. Something I found interesting in Cotter-Lockard's dissertation was when she said that "A topic in my findings that was not directly addressed in the literature was the idea of moving energy across the group and into the audience as exemplified by Play to the Center and the concept of moving a sphere of energy around the room or hall. This topic warrants further research as it touches on the use of gesture in music, but from a mental and energetic perspective" (2012, p.204). I think some of the exercises I used did affect our energy in a way that made sensations and effects a bit difficult to describe. It would be interesting to find even more exercises like "one organism" and "the counting game" that reminded us of mindfuness or meditation. If it helps so many people on a daily basis to relax and perhaps even get rid of negative feelings like anxiety, it would make sense that it could have a big effect on interaction in chamber music as well.

I only used one exercise from another field of art and that was "one organism", that I got from dancers through my friend. I think it could possibly be a gold mine of exercises, that could be adapted to chamber music if someone wanted to look into other performative fields of art. This is

one of the most interesting ideas I had during this project and I really hope this thesis inspires future studies on the subject.

Even if the results of every exercise weren't always so mind blowing, I still feel that they are worth to be tried out with any chamber music group that has trouble finding contact between each other. These exercises might also have a different effect on other players, but I want to encourage musicians to adapt even more group exercises to chamber music settings and to try them out. Some day it would be nice to have a handbook, that would contain different exercises for improving interaction and contact in chamber music. I would definitely use it with colleagues and I think it would come in hand for chamber music teachers as well.

8.0 SOURCES

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