Talking the Intangible

Contemporary Classical Pianists on Elusive Aspects of Music-Making

Kirsty Guster

BMus (1st Class Honours), MMus

Queensland Conservatorium
Arts, Education and Law
Griffith University

Submitted in fulfilment of the requirements of the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

June 2012
If I attempt to speak about music, it is because the impossible has always attracted me more than the difficult. If there is some sense behind it, to attempt the impossible is, by definition, an adventure and gives me a feeling of activity, which I find highly attractive.

It has the added advantage that failure is not only tolerated but expected.

(Daniel Barenboim, 2009, p. 3)
Abstract

Placing the perceptions of ten contemporary professional pianists at its centre, this study explores how ‘intangibles’ in contemporary piano performance can be approached, understood, communicated and operationalised. Through a methodological approach of in-depth interviews recorded on video, coded and placed in the context of relevant literature and the experiences of other musicians, this study aims to locate the spaces in which intangibles play a role in classical piano performance, and determine the factors that influence how performers access and engage with intangible aspects of their music-making. In this way, it seeks to complement a vast body of literature on more tangible aspects of the instrument and its music, and contribute to a broader, more inclusive and balanced understanding of the constructs underlying piano performance as a process rather than product. It brings to the fore the actual voices of those who perform, yet have been downplayed or forgotten in much academic literature to date.

Organised in three parts, Part One outlines the research questions and methodological approach, considers multiple perspectives on the intangible from a range of (sub) disciplines, and introduces the ten pianists interviewed for this study (Chapters One-Three). Part Two presents views on locating and understanding the intangibles, organised by emerging topics and themes, and prominently presenting the voices of the pianists themselves on each issue (Chapters Four-Six). This is also the key feature of Part Three, with the next two chapters on accessing and communicating intangibles respectively, gradually bringing each pianist to life through their values and attitudes (Chapters Seven-Eight). The final Chapter (Nine) brings together the main strands of the discourse, the overall perceptions to emerge, and discusses their implications for intangibles in music-making.

Rather than attempting to arrive at definitive conclusions, this thesis sketches the contours of a territory hitherto largely uncharted within academic discourse. Inevitably, reflecting the elusive nature of the intangible, the pictures emerging from the pianists’ perceptions are frequently indistinct, only partly formed, or vague, and at times, the concepts appear as paradoxical or even contradictory. No attempt has been made to draw convenient conclusions from this wealth of perspectives. But undeniably, the voices appearing in the following pages map a realm that exists prominently in the mind of those that mediate between composers and audiences, and has considerable relevance to understanding contemporary piano performance for students, teachers, performers, advocates and scholars.
Statement of Originality

The work contained in this dissertation has not previously been submitted for a degree or diploma in any university. To the best of my knowledge and belief, the thesis contains no material previously published or written by another person except where due reference is made in the thesis itself.

Kirsty Guster
June 2012
## Contents

Abstract iv  
Statement of Originality v  
Contents vi  
Acknowledgements x  

### Part One: Approaching and Appreciating Intangibles

#### Chapter One: Research Questions and Methodology
1.0  Introduction 1  
1.1  Research Questions 2  
1.2  Defining Intangibles 3  
1.3  Approach and Scope 5  
1.4  Methodology 9  
1.5  Locating and Contextualising Intangibles 13  
1.6  The Interviews 16  
1.7  Challenges in Talking about the Intangible 25  
1.8  Analysis 27  
1.9  Presentation of Outcomes 28  

#### Chapter Two: Setting the Scene – Multiple Perspectives on the Intangible
2.0  Introduction 32  
2.1  Pathway to the Intangible 33  
2.2  Questioning Extrinsic Value 35  
2.3  Approaching Intrinsic Value 38  
2.4  Intangible and Ineffable 41  
2.5  Sacred and Symbolic 48  
2.6  Two Cultures: Measuring and Making Music 51  
2.7  Musicology: The Gap between Research and Practice 59  
2.8  Pedagogy: Acknowledging and Accounting for Intangibles 64  
2.9  Missing Voices: Placing Performers Centre Stage 66  

#### Chapter Three: The Pianists
3.0  Introduction 69  
3.1  Michael Kieran Harvey 70  
3.2  Freddy Kempf 72  
3.3  Mark Kruger 73  
3.4  Gao Ping 74  
3.5  Liam Viney 75  
3.6  Roy Howat 77  
3.7  Matteo Napoli 78  
3.8  William Westney 79  
3.9  Jean-Paul Sevilla 81  
3.10  Stephen Savage 82  

vi
## Chapter Four: The Intangible In

4.0  Introduction 84  
4.1  The Intangible in the Music 85  
  Culture and Language 86  
  Expressivity and Emotion 88  
  Expressivity and Structure 89  
  Implications for the Intangible 93  
4.2  The Intangible in the Musician 94  
  Musicality and Talent 95  
  Virtuosity and Artistry 97  
  Personality 100  
  Stage Presence and Charisma 102  
  Sensitivity and Speaking 104  
  Implications for the Intangible 106

## Chapter Five: The Intangible Between

5.0  Introduction 109  
5.1  Interpretative Spaces 111  
  Between the Composer and the Pianist 111  
  Striving for Perfection 113  
  Being Authentic 116  
  Being Creative 119  
  Implications for the Intangible 122  
5.2  Expressive Spaces 123  
  Between the Score and Sound 123  
  Space and Silence between Sounds 126  
  Implications for the Intangible 130  
5.3  Communicative Spaces 131  
  Between the Performer and Audience 131  
  Communicating and Connecting 133  
  Sound, Silence, and Sensing 136  
  Implications for the Intangible 140

## Chapter Six: The Intangible As

6.0  Introduction 143  
6.1  The Intangible as Emotion 144  
  Simple and Profound 145  
  Experiencing and Expressing 147  
  Embodied Emotions 148  
  Implications for the Intangible 150  
6.2  The Intangible as the Aesthetic 151  
  The Trio of Ultimate Values 151  
  Beauty 154  
  Truth 158  
  Goodness 162  
  Implications for the Intangible 167  
6.3  The Intangible as the Spiritual 170  
  Religious Belief 172  
  Exploring Spirituality 175  
  Implications for the Intangible 179  
6.4  The Intangible as Peak Experience 181  
  Peak Experience and Flow in Performance 181  
  Pianists on Peak Experience 186  
  Implications for the Intangible 192
Part Three: Accessing and Operationalising Intangibles

Chapter Seven: Accessing Intangibles
7.0 Introduction 196
7.1 Feeling and Emoting 197
  Implications for the Intangible 203
7.2 Thinking and Knowing 204
  Implications for the Intangible 211
7.3 Negotiating the ‘Self’ 213
    Self-esteem 216
    Ego 217
    Embodied Awareness 219
  Implications for the Intangible 223

Chapter Eight: Communicating Intangibles
8.0 Introduction 225
8.1 Talking the Intangible 225
  Talking about the Intangible 228
  Attitudes towards the Unknown 233
  Implications for the Intangible 236
8.2 Teaching the Intangible 238
  Teaching, Listening, and Talking 240
  Institutionalising the Intangible 244
  Implications for the Intangible 247
8.3 Valuing and Positioning Intangibles in Society 249
  Identifying and Communicating Value 250
  Implications for the Intangible 255

Chapter Nine: Discussion and Conclusions
9.0 Introduction 257
9.1 Locating the Intangible 258
  The Intangible In… 258
  The Intangible Between… 260
  The Intangible As… 263
9.2 Accessing the Intangible 267
  Training and Culture of Professional Pianists 267
  Experience of Performance 269
  Communicating and Valuing the Intangible 271
9.3 Finding the Balance 276
  The Self 277
  The Silent 278
  The Sacred 280
  A Delicate Balance 282

Bibliography 286
**List of Tables**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Table 1.1 Pianists Interviewed</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 9.1 Locating Intangibles in Piano Performance</td>
<td>266</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 9.2 Less Conducive and More Conducive Factors in Accessing the Intangible</td>
<td>275</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 9.3 Finding the Balance within the Musician</td>
<td>284</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Appendices**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No.</th>
<th>Artist Biography</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Michael Kieran Harvey</td>
<td>315</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Freddy Kempf</td>
<td>316</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Mark Kruger</td>
<td>318</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Gao Ping</td>
<td>319</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Liam Viney</td>
<td>321</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Roy Howat</td>
<td>323</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Matteo Napoli</td>
<td>324</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>William Westney</td>
<td>325</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Jean-Paul Sevilla</td>
<td>327</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Stephen Savage</td>
<td>328</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Acknowledgements

This thesis has been an academic and personal journey shared and supported by many people along the way. I am indebted to all who have travelled with me, and helped bring this document into being, and in particular, I would like to express my gratitude to the following individuals. Firstly, to the pianists that so generously shared their time and insights, providing the core voices in this research, thank you for your courage to speak on camera about this challenging and often sensitive topic. In re-living our conversations I have continued to learn from, and be inspired by each of you. Also, to Ananda Sukarlan, Carl Vine, Ross Bolleter, Judy Bailey, John Hoffman, Nehama Patkin, and QCGU staff, whose reflections have informed my thinking.

To Dr Stephen Emmerson, my sincerest gratitude for your wise, sensitive and patient guidance throughout this research. I have been very fortunate to have you as a supervisor, and enriched as a person to know you. To Dr Gerardo Dirie, thank you for your discerning and often poetic insights, and for pointing out valuable new perspectives. To Professor Huib Schippers, for opening up the possibility of exploring the intangible, and continued help in negotiating this territory. To Dr Bill Metcalf for his methodological support, and Dr Brydie-Leigh Bartleet for introducing me to the world of autoethnography. To Jocelyn Wolfe for the care with which you corrected grammatical errors, provided constructive critique, and bolstered me in the final stages, and to Armin Terzer, for bringing your incredible attention to detail to the finer points of my bibliography. To David Bennett, Angela Turner, Justin Bullock, Josh Chaffey and Niven Stines for your technical support with video and audio recording, and editing.

To Griffith University for generously supporting me to undertake this study with a scholarship for the first three years of my candidacy, and to my managers and close colleagues at the ANU School of Music for being flexible over the past three years while I completed this thesis. To Cathy Grant, Paul Lin, Premanjali Kirchner, Glenn Clarke, Colin Webber, Daniel Bangert, Therese Milanovic, Licia Papert-Lecari, Nicole Becker, Anthony Viscusi, Rebecca Breach, Dougal Torrance, Hugh Patton, Warwick Williams, John Garner, Ann Doyle and Rubens Peculis for your intellectual and musical insights, encouragement and support.

To John Luxton, my musical mentor for over a decade, and Ben Macklin for supporting and sharing my journey as a musician and person for many years, through its many twists and turns, joys and sacrifices. And finally, to my family, Chris, Paull, and Deborah Guster, my heart-felt gratitude for your love, and ongoing support in every conceivable way. To all those who talked about intangible matters with me, formally and informally, over the past seven years, and more than I can fit in the above, thank you for helping me to explore this realm, and for your patience when I talked too much.
Chapter One: Research Questions and Methodology

1.0 Introduction

At first glance, few performance practices in the world of music appear as tangible as classical piano playing. The iconic Steinway Concert Grand D weighs in at a solid 990 pounds of finely crafted wood and steel. The manner of producing tones is highly mechanical; the intonation is fixed and predetermined. The core repertoire is largely static, barring a relatively small number of minor variations, and has been carefully analysed in great detail. These hundreds of thousands of prescribed notes are taught through a training process that is highly formalised, progressing through clearly defined stages of advancing technique and increasingly demanding pieces. Next, these are performed within a concert-hall environment, where both setting and the ritual around performance follow clear conventions. The majority of the audience behaves according to a well-established etiquette, knowing when to be silent and how to show their appreciation of this highly intricate and demanding art form.

However, in spite of this apparent clarity, performers and music aficionados alike will argue that the core of excellence in classical piano playing – the difference between an adequate and an outstanding performance – lies in aspects that are intangible or excruciatingly difficult to define, yet essential to the art. These are the focus of this research. While I have no illusions of ‘defining’ the intangible in this thesis, I hope that the multiple perspectives presented here will begin to sketch the contours and elucidate the nature of an aspect of music that is considered by many musicians as crucial to music-making at a professional level. As discussed further in Chapter Two, in much of the research into music and music-making to date, the voices and perceptions of the performers have been surprisingly marginalised, and there is increasing acknowledgement that these need to be embraced. By adding these insights to a wealth of existing writings on more tangible aspects of piano music and performance from the past 300 years, my aim is to contribute to a broader, more inclusive and balanced body of studies on constructs underlying piano performance, with a focus on process rather than product.

While this topic is of relevance to all musicians, this thesis specifically focuses on the views of ten professional contemporary classical pianists, as expressed in words across a series of in-depth interviews. As the intangible aspects of piano performance – or indeed of any form of making music in the Western Classical tradition – from the performers’ perspective are a largely unexplored field of research, I unapologetically focus on the perceptions of the musicians themselves as the primary source of data. These views are juxtaposed, contrasted, and combined across this thesis with references to a broad range of other sources in order to assist in positioning and contextualising the variety of themes, topics, and attitudes that emerged.
In this first chapter, I explore and define the scope of this thesis, the questions it addresses (as well as the many fascinating ones not addressed), and the methodological approach adopted. The following sections present a set of targeted research questions; outline and contextualise the intangible subject matter of this thesis; propose and frame an appropriate methodology for investigating perceptions on intangible aspects in music-making; discuss the various data sources; explain the interview process, analysis and presentation; and consider the challenges involved in addressing a topic that, by its very nature, is resistant to being captured in words.

1.1 Research Questions

This thesis addresses the following central research question: **What are contemporary classical pianists’ perceptions of intangible aspects of their music-making?** This broad core question yields five more specific sub-questions, which in turn relate to the subsequent parts of this thesis dealing with locating, understanding, accessing, and communicating intangibles:

- In what domains of their art do classical pianists perceive intangible aspects to reside?
- How do classical pianists recognise, value and attach importance to various intangible aspects of their music-making?
- How do classical pianists access and engage with intangible aspects of performance?
- To what extent do classical pianists perceive that the intangible aspects of music-making can be taught?
- To what extent is it possible and desirable to communicate the intangible aspects of music and music-making in words?

In approaching these questions, I have deliberately chosen *not* to work from pre-existing or pre-conceived theoretical frameworks, but rather, to explore perceptions of the intangible on the basis of the voices of a select group of contemporary professional pianists. This firmly places the focus on the intangible as it might be represented or communicated qualitatively in conversation and words, by active practitioners, rather than employing the specialised language of theorists, in either music or other musically-interested disciplines. Furthermore, with a focus on the perceptions of performers, I emphatically exclude a number of possible strands of musical enquiry, including score analysis, sonological or critical analysis of performances or recordings, and audience reception.

Furthermore, these questions, and the pianists’ perceptions are not considered from a scientific perspective, through in-depth philosophical considerations of aesthetics, using linguistic, semiotic or hermeneutic approaches to text or meaning, or through the lens of cultural studies.
While all of these are of potential interest, they are beyond the already considerable scope of this thesis, and only touched upon when needed to contextualise the words and thoughts of the pianists. Before elaborating further on the approach and scope (1.3) and methodological approach chosen for this research (1.4), it is essential to first provide a working definition of the elusive and central topic, the intangible, and the closely related concept of the ineffable.

1.2 Defining Intangibles

Defining intangibles in any field of endeavour represents a paradox not unlike the famous Zen koan ‘What is the sound of one hand clapping?’ This is exacerbated by the discipline under scrutiny in this thesis. As Drabkin and Bent observe, music “presents a problem, inherent in the nature of its material. Music is not tangible and measurable as is a liquid or a solid for chemical analysis” (1987, p. 5). Or as Sullivan suggests, “music is by nature ephemeral, not subject to scientific observation and measurement” (2005, p. 1539). My ambition, therefore, is not to propose an artificially smooth definition, but rather focus on indicating the position and sketching the contours of those aspects of music-making that could be labelled ‘intangible’ in the minds of those who perform it.

In the Oxford English Dictionary Online, the intangible is defined as “not tangible; incapable of being touched” as that which cannot “easily or precisely be measured,” or “cannot be grasped mentally” (OED Online, 2011a). While this first aspect may be obvious, and the second highlights the challenges for scientific study of this realm, it is the last that presents the greatest challenge for this thesis. As the Macquarie Dictionary Online confirms, the intangible is “not definite or clear to the mind,” and furthermore, points to “the spiritual world” (Butler, 2009). In addition to “unanalysable,” The New Oxford Thesaurus of English more broadly defines the intangible as “indescribable, inexpressible, nameless” (Hanks, 2000, p. 516), concepts that appear more aligned with the ‘ineffable.’ Indeed, both terms are often used to refer broadly to elusive aspects of music. However, the link to language, speech, and the spiritual appears to be more directly associated with the latter.

The ineffable is defined as that which “cannot be expressed or described in language,” is “too great for words; transcending expression; unspeakable, unutterable, inexpressible” and that either “cannot be uttered or pronounced” or “must not be uttered […] disclosed or made known” (OED Online, 2011b). The latter two also appear as the key definitions in the Macquarie Dictionary Online. Significantly, a majority of the examples provided make reference to religious or mystical concepts. This is specified more clearly in the entry on ‘ineffability’ where James (1902) uses “ineffability” to refer to “any state to be called mystical,” and Laski (1961)
notes the term is “particularly common among religious writers” (OED Online, 2011c). The spiritual inference of ‘ineffable’ is similarly noted in the *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* entry on ‘Mysticism,’ though the ineffable here is also aligned with that which is incomprehensible, lies beyond rational knowledge, or what can be conceptualised or cognised – concepts more related to the intangible definitions above (cf. Gellman, 2011). Further highlighting the links between the two, ‘ineffability’ is defined in mathematical terms as that which “cannot be expressed in terms of rational quantities; irrational” (OED Online, 2011c).

It is evident in the above that the terms intangible and ineffable are closely related, share common characteristics, and are frequently used interchangeably. For practical purposes in this thesis, and to avoid sidetracks into the spiritual – implied strongly in the definition of ‘ineffable’ – the term intangibility has been chosen as the key term of reference, incorporating within it characteristics of ineffability. The ‘ineffable’ is used on occasion as necessitated by external sources, or when specifically referring only to that which – some suggest – cannot (or should not) be spoken about. Additionally, I have employed the terms ‘knowable’ and ‘unknowable’ when emphasising those aspects of intangibility or ineffability that refer to what can or cannot be reasoned, rationalised, cognised, or placed into a mental construct – or measured or proven through empirical or objective means.

Taking on board the potentially unknowable and unspeakable aspects of this topic, the challenges involved in attempting to study – or indeed discuss – the ‘intangible’ in terms that are academically rigorous and defensible are immediately evident. Indeed, embedded in the title of this thesis, is an underlying question of whether it is possible to talk revealingly or meaningfully about intangible aspects of music, or the viability of achieving a more concrete definition or understanding of the ‘intangible’ through conversation. If beginning with the hypothesis that music and our experience of it contains intangible aspects, ‘intangible’ may be interpreted as ‘cannot be apprehended,’ or ‘cannot be made tangible,’ whether in facts, figures, or words. However, ‘intangible’ may also refer to something that can be apprehended but is ‘hard to describe,’ or ‘ascribe’ a meaning that can be easily pinned down in language. While acknowledging both of these interpretations (including the equally challenging and closely linked concept of ‘meaning’ – discussed further in section 1.3 below), I embarked on this research with the view that the latter interpretation at least opens the door of possibility for exploration into this field.

Multiple perspectives and approaches to this terminology in relation to music are explored further in Chapter Two (see particularly 2.4 ‘Intangible and Ineffable’), and in more detail in various thematic contexts throughout the thesis. But as a working definition, I refer to ‘intangibles’ in this thesis as *those aspects of music making that cannot be measured or*
objectively described, and may be difficult (or even impossible) to put into words, yet constitute essential ingredients of performance in the minds of professional pianists. I am fully aware that this is neither a neat nor a pretty definition, and I am not convinced that there can or should be a more adequate one at the beginning or conclusion of this thesis. The joy of this research lies in beginning to define contours and scope, not in pinning down a concept that in some way is as elusive as love: we all know it exists, there is a vast body of expressions of it, yet we can neither grasp nor define it.

It is evident, however, that the nature of this topic invites a number of avenues of enquiry, many angles through which intangibles could be approached, a wealth of literature that could be incorporated, and a variety of potential theoretical and methodological frameworks that might be adopted. Considering this plethora of possibilities, it is imperative to outline some limits to the scope of this research.

1.3 Approach and Scope

In Everything is Connected, Daniel Barenboim (2009) prefaces his discussion on the connectedness of music and life by noting, “in music, as in life, it is really only possible to speak about our own reactions and perceptions” (p. 3). In a study focused on perceptions about music, the challenge, if not impossibility, of making any conclusive statements from ten, or indeed ten thousand individual – and inevitably subjective – accounts is obvious. Whether as artists, audiences or educators, music undoubtedly engages us in highly personal ways, as DeNora observes, it is “the cultural material par excellence of emotion and the personal” (2000, p. 46). However, exploring such views can lead to revealing insights into the nature of making music, and inform our understanding of the art form as a practice.

Various scholars have pointed to the relationship between our perceptions of music, the ways in which we engage with music, and the music we make. Cook argues that, “the way we think about music also affects the way we make music” (1998, p. 14), while Schippers observes “what we hear, learn and teach is the product of what we believe about music” (2010, p. xvi). Others have similarly highlighted the challenge of separating out music from our lives and indeed our humanity. Budd suggests that in order to “render intelligible, unmysteries, the fact that we value so highly music as an abstract art” we need to take into account “the manifold connections between these values and our extramusical life” (1995, p. 159). Johnson (2002) similarly argues that music cannot be “divorced from the world in which it is made” (p. 81), for ultimately, music is “concerned with essential aspects of humanity” (p. 89). Or, as Barenboim proposed, music “has to do with the condition of being human, since the music is written and
performed by human beings who express their innermost thoughts, feelings, impressions and observations” (2009, p. 12).

Given the personal and human aspects embedded in perceptions about music, there are many ways in which these might be examined. When considering perceptions from a broader social perspective, inevitably, cultural (and sub-cultural) constructs, values and attitudes that we bring to any experience will play an important role in how we perceive music (cf. Geertz, 1983; Kramer, 1990; Shore, 1996; Clayton, Herbert, & Middleton, 2003). Indeed, the same can be said for perceptions of intangibility in general, and how the two might relate. In Western classical music, these are arguably strongly influenced by nineteenth-century ideas on art and the artist, as will be evident in the answers of some of the pianists below. However, this thesis does not attempt to interpret or analyse their views from a cultural studies perspective, and neither does it present an in-depth exploration of historical manifestations of – or cultural influences on – the broader concept of ‘the intangible.’ While both of these aspects are acknowledged and incorporated into some of the contextual discussions, my methodological approach focuses primarily on the current perceptions of contemporary high-level performers and the role intangible aspects play in their music-making, rather than their historical roots.

At the broadest level, this thesis does not tackle the ontological questions of ‘what is music?’ or ‘what is art?’ As Lamarque (1999) suggests, given the problematic nature of the latter, few publications or courses on aesthetics do either, making passing reference to “the standard theories – imitation, expression, ‘significant form’, functionalism, institutionalism – if only to show the weaknesses of each before moving to another topic” (p. 92). Similar contention and ongoing debate surrounds the question in regard to music (cf. Scruton, 1994, pp. 508-511). However, in speaking of music throughout this thesis, a key distinction is made between music as ‘the score’ and music as a practice. In contrast to the more traditional musicological view of music as a fixed and text-based object of investigation, this thesis embraces a far more inclusive interpretation of music as music-making, focusing on the ‘process’ and ‘practice’ of making music. This is very much in the spirit of Elliot’s (1995) influential idea of placing the “praxis” of music-making itself at the centre of thinking about learning and making music, and Small’s inclusive definition of ‘musicking’ as “to take part, in any capacity, in a musical performance, whether by performing, by listening, by rehearsing or practising, by providing material for performance (what is called composing), or by dancing.” (1998, p. 9). However, it is worth noting that the score-based notion of “the music-itself apparently remains a treasured concept even when it is being vigorously attacked” (Agawu, 2009, p. 5).

While ‘the music itself’ was discussed with the pianists in these interviews, (see in particular Chapter 4.1), the conversations most often revolved around what cannot be found in the score.
Very few of the pianists I interviewed referred to specific musical examples, and indeed many specifically highlighted the inadequacy of analysis in relation to this topic. Consequently, analysis or excerpts from scores are absent from this thesis. At times during these discussions, the pianists also made reference to their perceptions of both composers and audiences. However, this thesis does not focus on either music composition or audience reception, or claim to represent the voices of those at either end of the music-making continuum. It has not attempted to – or presumed to be able to find – ‘hard evidence’ of the presence of intangibles in music in particular compositions or performances, or to construct conclusions on how, when, where, or why performers or audiences may perceive these. Thus, this research does not attempt to map intangibles through an ‘objective’ analysis of recordings, or, to analyse or investigate more broadly the (subjective) perceptions or responses of audiences.

Similarly, while this study included a consideration of what contemporary classical pianists value about their art form, it does not seek or intend to provide empirical proof of this value, or the benefits music might bring to those engaged with it. It aims instead to provide a crucial insider’s perspective, which is valuable – if not essential – when trying to elucidate or understand a matter as complex as musical performance. Furthermore, while several examples of pedagogical approaches to the intangible are provided in Chapter Two, and the question of whether we can ‘teach the intangible’ was posed to the pianists in the interviews, this research does not pose or tackle the question of how to play the piano, whether through historical techniques or modern methods of piano playing. Neither does it delve into the extensive literature on pedagogy and education at large.

As noted in ‘defining intangibles,’ in the process of researching the topic of intangible aspects of music-making, the concept of ‘meaning’ in music appeared in many guises. This is not surprising, as Agawu (2009) highlights, the question of whether music has meaning “has been debated ever since music became a subject of discourse. Aestheticians, philosophers, historians, semioticians, and sociologists of music have had their say; in our own day, musicologists of a certain persuasion have been exercised by it” (p. 3). The question of ‘where’ intangible aspects might be located in the process of music-making inevitably prompted discussion of ‘meaning’ as potentially inherent in the musical score. In these parts of the conversations, some spoke of what they considered the relevance of musical form and structure. However, it was not my aim to explore with the pianists their perceptions of the ‘meaning’ of particular melodic and harmonic musical features, or, if and how structure contributes to meaning construction. I did not provide semiotic theories for their consideration, and neither did the pianists raise such forms of analysis in discussion. Similarly, in line with my aims and methodology, I did not later analyse the pianists’ comments for explicit or implicit references to such questions through a linguistic or semiotic perspective.
The question of what music means also leads to a host of sub-questions, including: Is music a language? Does it communicate specific ideas and emotions? Is musical meaning intrinsic or extrinsic – autonomous, or culturally, socially and historically constructed? While references to such questions are made throughout this thesis, both in the contextual introductions and the presentation of the pianists’ perceptions, there has been no attempt to seek answers in the context of ‘musical meaning’ as it is otherwise dealt with directly by such disciplines noted above, and neither was the literature emerging from these fields a focus for review. Thus, this thesis makes no attempt to examine intangibles in music-making from a philosophical, historical, sociological, semiotic, or linguistic perspective, or from the many different ways in which the creation, communication and interpretation of ‘meaning’ might be analysed within hermeneutics (Bent, 2012).

Yet, it is not only in such disciplines that questions of musical meaning arise, even if more implicitly than explicitly. While seeking examples of intangibles in the discourses of practicing musicians, it was clear that the general concept of meaning, even if only referenced through use of the term itself, often prefaced or generated intangibly-rich discussion points. In the same way that Agawu suggests that the “metaphor of music as language” – while highly problematic – serves as a “useful foil for music analysis” (2009, p. 9), the word and general concept of ‘meaning’ was employed in the interviews as a useful avenue to elicit discussions on intangibles in music-making.

On many occasions the word was employed in a general or even colloquial way to explore the idea that “music is about something but its aboutness – its intentionality – can vary from context to context, within a context, and from individual to individual” (Cross, 2003, p. 23). Words such as ‘something,’ ‘aboutness,’ ‘intentionality’ – and indeed ‘essence’ or ‘significance’ – all suggest that music is considered to either have some kind of meaning, or be meaningful to those who engage in it. While the pianists highlighted the challenge of quantifying and articulating what music means, it was also evident that they felt they were engaging with, and aspiring to express, something meaningful in their music-making. It is in this latter – broad and inclusive – context – that I have approached this concept, with the aim of identifying whether there are specifically intangible aspects that contribute to this.

In the same way that various discipline-specific investigations into music will address and “speak within the narrower discourses” of their field (Agawu, 2009, p. 9), in avoiding a reliance on pre-conceived academic or theoretical concepts, my aim in this study was to feature and speak to the everyday discourse of music practitioners – and more specifically – that of performers. Thus, throughout this research, I have not attempted to incorporate the technical processes or language of musical or cultural theorists. Concepts and questions were posed using
terms with which they were likely to be familiar and comfortable with, as opposed to overly theoretical or academic concepts that might restrict their responses, or lead to perceptions clouded by perceived expectations.

In this sense, my approach towards both concepts and terminology throughout this thesis has parallels with the interpretive anthropology of Geertz, who rejects “a methodology that aims to reify the world of lived experience in a specialized language of science” (Schwandt, 1994, p. 122). My approach then – as a researcher and interpreter – might be considered ‘local’ as opposed to ‘scientific,’ as Denzin (1994, p. 506) explains, rephrasing Geertz (1983, p. 57):

Local interpreters use experience-near concepts – words and meanings that actually operate in the worlds studied. These individuals seek emic, or contextual, situated understandings. Scientific interpreters frequently use experience-distant terms – words whose meanings lie in the observers’ theory.

Indeed, Denzin further highlights, these two different types will “often give different meanings to the same set of thickly described/inscribed experiences.”

As will be discussed further in Chapter Two, cognitive science and its various subdisciplines are increasingly investigating how the brain perceives and responds to music. While acknowledging and occasionally referring to such literature in the contextual discussions throughout this document, this thesis does not attempt to enter into debate over scientific data, nor has it been the aim to map or analyse the pianists’ perceptions within such contexts. Similarly, while psychological analysis (from a multitude of perspectives) might be employed to gain greater clinical insight into the pianists’ personalities when interpreting their perceptions, as with the realm of cognition studies, this would necessitate expertise beyond the scope of this thesis. Each of these potential frameworks would, however, potentially be taken up in the future by qualified experts in their respective fields, leading to be valuable cross-disciplinary studies.

1.4 Methodology

While the subject of this thesis is undeniably complex to grasp by definition, the methodological approach I have chosen incorporates well-established elements of qualitative research, including ethnography and grounded theory, as will be discussed in this section below. This is supported by a literature review, the scope and limits of which are outlined in 1.5, with the subsequent section 1.6 dedicated to describing my approach to the in-depth interviews that constituted my key method of gathering data.

Given that the ‘intangible’ subject matter of this thesis is in essence immeasurable, and the key data are based on perceptions rather than hard data, it was clear from the onset that a qualitative
rather than quantitative approach would be most appropriate. Broadly speaking, in such an
approach, “the researcher seeks to establish the meaning of a phenomenon from the views of the
participants” (Creswell, 2009, p. 16). Importantly, this is done through “inductive analysis,
which means that categories, themes, and patterns come from the data. The categories that
emerge from field notes, documents, and interviews are not imposed prior to data collection”
(Janesick, 1994, p. 215). As Denzin (1994, p. 511) points out, there are “multiple interpretive
communities that now circulate within the many terrains of qualitative research” (cf. Atkinson
& Hammersley, pp. 257-258). Amongst the wealth of qualitative methodologies, including
ethnographic, autoethnographic, narrative, phenomenological, hermeneutic, heuristic, and
grounded theory approaches, there are, as Creswell points out, a “baffling number of choices”
and classification systems to choose from (2007, pp. 6-7). I have chosen to tackle this elusive
subject matter through an ethnographic approach, in which the pianists’ voices take centre stage,
and have adopted a framework that incorporates both the underlying philosophy and
methodological processes of grounded theory.

While ethnography is historically associated with the study of ‘another’ culture or cultural
group (Erickson, 2011, p. 44), given my long association with the Western classical piano
culture, my approach can comfortably be regarded as ethnographic in nature: in that I have
‘immersed’ myself in this “field setting” over a long period of time. As Creswell summarises:

Ethnography is a strategy of inquiry in which the researcher studies an intact cultural
group in a natural setting over a prolonged period of time by collecting, primarily,
observational and interview data. The research process is flexible and typically evolves
contextually in response to the lived realities encountered in the field setting. (2009, p.
13; see also Creswell, 2007, and LeCompte & Schensul, 1999)

This definition of ‘ethnography’ however is broad (Atkinson & Hammersley, 1994, p. 248). Its
historical applications are also not without controversy (Vidich & Lyman, 1994; Erickson,
2011), markedly so following Geertz’s proposition, across two publications (1973/1983), that
“all anthropological writings were interpretations of interpretations” and the “observer had no
privileged voice in the interpretations that were written” (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994, pp. 9-10).

Geertz’s influence on the field of ethnography has been significant, particularly in advocating a
“thick description” or context-rich consideration of phenomena and cultures (cf. Geertz, 1972,
p. 14; Denzin, 1994, p. 505). As Robson’s clarifying definition highlights: the ethnographer
“through involvement” seeks to uncover “the implicit rules and traditions of a group” and “to
provide a rich, or ‘thick’ description which interprets the experiences of people in the group
from their own perspective” (1993, p. 148). Following Geertz, a number of subsequent
publications challenging the authority of the ethnographer brought about a “crisis of
representation” (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994, p. 10), or as Vidich and Lyman phrase it, an “epistemological cul-de-sac” for the qualitative researcher (1994, p. 42).

The qualitative approach is evidently not without challenges. As Denzin (1994) highlights, there have been ongoing attempts throughout the history of qualitative research “to wrestle with this process and its methods.” It is, he points out, “a complex, reflexive process” and “not formulaic or mechanical.” Researchers in the social sciences effectively deal in “the art of interpretation,” and, in “moving from the field to the text to the reader,” take on the role of interpreters or “storytellers” (pp. 500-502). Effective interpretation, he argues, “creates the conditions for authentic, or deep, emotional understanding” (p. 106), while, as he qualifies, such interpretations will inevitably produce “understandings that are shaped by genre, narrative, stylistic, personal, cultural, and paradigmatic conventions” (p. 507).

Janesick (1994, pp. 215-216) confirms, however, that when adopting a qualitative approach, it is still possible to “hold the phenomenon up to serious inspection,” and that “sociologists and anthropologists have shown us that finding categories and the relationships and patterns between and among categories leads to a completeness in the narrative.” Amongst the numerous documented and validated parts of this process, she highlights in particular “constant comparative analysis” and “continual reassessment and refining of concepts as the fieldwork proceeds,” leading to a “creative synthesis” in order to “describe and explain the essence of experience and meaning in participants’ lives.” As Creswell (2001, p. 4) also points out, in “building from particulars to general themes” a qualitative researcher must be mindful of “the importance of rendering the complexity of a situation” when “making interpretations of the meaning of the data.” These comparative, critical and creative aspects have been employed throughout the course of this research, and as discussed further below, I have attempted to embrace both the complexity and the contradictions inherent when interpreting and presenting the data collected.

Within the qualitative/ethnographic realm, my approach resonates most closely with grounded theory, arguably the “most widely used qualitative interpretive framework in the social sciences today” (Denzin, 1994, p. 508; see also Janesick, 1994, p. 219). Indeed, as a research philosophy, in many respects it might be considered synonymous with ‘qualitative.’ As Strauss and Corbin (1990, p. 23) explain:

A grounded theory is one that is inductively derived from the study of the phenomenon it represents. That is, it is discovered, developed, and provisionally verified through systematic data collection and analysis of data pertaining to that phenomenon. Therefore, data collection, analysis, and theory stand in reciprocal relationship with each other. One
does not being with a theory, then prove it. Rather, one begins with an area of study and what is relevant to that area is allowed to emerge. As Strauss and Corbin later highlight, the theory “evolves” during the research “through continuous interplay between analysis and data collection.” Furthermore, “theory may be generated initially from the data, or, if existing (grounded) theories seem appropriate to the area of investigation, then these may be elaborated and modified as incoming data are meticulously played against them” (1994, p. 273).

Grounded theory employs similar data sources to other modes of qualitative enquiry: interviews, field observations, and a variety of documents, including autobiographies, biographies, historical accounts, newspapers and media, and videos. As a “general methodology,” its broad scope also allows for it to be employed in a variety of ways depending on the area, focus and purpose of the research, as well as the “contingencies faced during the project” (Strauss & Corbin, 1994, pp. 274-276). Similarly echoing a number of qualitative recommendations above, Strauss and Corbin advise that “a certain amount of openness and flexibility are necessary in order to be able to adapt the procedures to different phenomenon and research situations,” as with the “creativity” and “sensitivity” to “recognize potential categories, and identify relevant conditions and consequences when they appear in the data” (1990, pp. 26-28). Indeed, in comparison with this original “systematic approach,” the later “constructivist approach” of Charmaz (2005, 2006) allows for even greater flexibility, with “more emphasis on the views, values, beliefs, feelings, assumptions, and ideologies of individuals than on the methods of research,” and also presumes that theories developed will necessarily be “suggestive, incomplete, and inconclusive” (Creswell, 2007, pp. 65-66).

Informed by the flexibility embraced in such methodologies above, as well as the challenges, in this thesis the opinions and insights of professional classical pianists constitute the core data, sourced through in-depth, semi-structured interviews, with ten selected performers and pedagogues (see 1.6, 1.7 and Chapter 3). These interviews informed, and were informed by, a cross-disciplinary literature review of sources that provided conceptualisations of intangible aspects of music and performance, and a modest selection of representations of intangible aspects within other disciplines that added or elucidated perspectives. In order to further map the terrain, I also explored a range of additional sources, conducting several focus groups, informal interviews with other musicians, a survey with piano pedagogues, and a public panel on Intangibles (see 1.5). Adding to my own personal and professional experiences as a pianist – which as Strauss and Corbin (1990, pp. 35-36) highlight is an equally valid source – these assisted in identifying and validating ideas, expressions, terminologies and challenges, as well as informing the interview preparations, process and analysis.
Once the interviews were conducted, the subsequent analysis and presentation of the wealth of data collected was realised through a process of coding and comparing these sources for common themes, categories and concerns (see 1.8-1.9). In each of the thematic sections presented in Parts Two and Three of this thesis, an overview of selected voices from the literature has been provided to contextualise the pianists’ perceptions that follow, and as Janesick (1994, p. 214) recommends in qualitative research, to provide “some interpretive commentary framing the key findings.”

As presented in Chapter Two, there are various research cultures examining and contributing to discussions on music-making. With the end goal of contributing to a constructive dialogue that acknowledges both the tangible and intangible in music-making, I have sought to achieve a balanced approach in engaging with and presenting these voices in this research. In doing so, I have attempted to resist the “gravitational inertia of traditional historical musicology” (Juslin & Sloboda, 2001, p. 458), or force “the arts through the eye of the needle of conventional science” (Coessens et al., 2010, p. 22), and, at the other end of the cultural spectrum, avoid spinning too many “postmodern prayer wheels” (Doran, 2010, p. 41) or promote “New Age” or “airy-fairy” ideas (Greenfield, 2002, p. 57).

Conscious of the challenges inherent in achieving this balance, I have endeavoured to sketch the contours of the intangible in music-making, while presenting a perspective that “leaves spaces for the ongoing negotiations and renegotiation of the meanings of people, things and situations” (DeNora, 2000, p. 38). As Behar points out, this may very well be an effort to “map an intermediate space we can’t quite define yet, a borderland between passion and intellect, analysis and subjectivity, ethnography and autobiography, art and life” (1997, p. 174). Ultimately however, this thesis hopes to contribute to future research into developing approaches or tools through which the nature, role, and place of intangibles may be better understood, appreciated, and operationalised in piano performance and pedagogy, and acknowledged in how we communicate about music.

1.5 Locating and Contextualising Intangibles

Literature Review
Due to the broad nature of the topic, the many angles from which it can be approached, and the need to most efficiently and clearly present the complexity of data collected, my overview of the literature is spread out across the thesis. Chapter Two – which serves also as an extended rationale for this thesis – presents various perspectives on intangibility in music and music-making, including disciplines and subdisciplines engaging in discourse on music (specifically
Western classical music), and concept-specific discussion on a number of related perspectives on the intangible. More detailed exploration (including significant and relevant published literature) of specific aspects of intangibles that emerged during the research appears in the introductions and summary discussions that are thematically organised in Parts 2 and 3 of this thesis. Additionally, the ongoing literature review informed my approach to intangibles in the interviews and the subsequent analysis and coding of themes and categories, and assisted in the discussions on how these might be operationalised.

There is a large body of historical, social, musicological and pedagogical literature dealing with the contemporary practices and culture of Western classical piano music. However, literature addressing the concerns of the performer is limited. While a number of autobiographical writings of musicians were sourced, the most relevant publications for this research included those by prominent pianists, for example: Schonberg (1963), Sandor (1981), Schnabel (1988), Berman (2000), Brendel (2000, 2002), Horowitz (1992), Rosen (2002a, 2002b), Westney (2003), Dubal (2005) and Hough (2007, 2011a, 2011b). Of particular interest were those based on discussion or interview formats, including: Brower (1915), Mach (1991), Cooke (1999), Dubal (1984), Noyle (2000), Cotter (2004), Grindea (2007), and documentaries by Sturrock (1999), Nupen (1999) and Kidel (2000, 2003).

While a number of these include pianists’ philosophical reflections on their engagement with the piano, in most cases any references to issues relating to intangibility are scattered amongst discussion predominantly based on a mixture of technical and pedagogical issues, particular repertoire and musical examples, or dealing with nerves or more practical demands of a performing career. Few publications specifically address issues of intangible aspects of performance. Of these, Dunsby (1996) and the authors contributing to Rink (2002a) have proven most relevant. The opinions of a number of other classical musicians have also been included where directly relevant for intangibles. These have been sourced through the major writings of respected musicians (performers, teachers and composers), and in documentaries. While the voices of jazz and popular musicians have not been targeted, some research conducted in this field has been cited when relevant (e.g. Boyd & George-Warren, 1992).

Though there is limited research and literature directly addressing this research topic from the perspective of the performing musician, and even less when narrowing the field to the professional classical pianist, there are a host of other sources and disciplines that potentially have some relevance when attempting to interpret and map intangibles in music-making. As Jourdain (1998, p. xvii) asserts, attempting to understand music and how we relate to it requires “a willingness to stretch your mind to every dimension that music occupies, to think like a paleontologist, a neuropsychologist, an acoustician, a psychophysicist, a musicologist, a
composer, a performer, a sociologist, a linguist, and a philosopher.” Additionally, as Alberici suggests, when considering the phenomenon of ‘transcendence’ in music performance, one might also employ the perspectives of biological systems theory, deep ecology, quantum physics, and chaos theories (2004, pp. 51-52).

This research makes no claim to presenting a comprehensive overview of a topic obviously too wide to cover in a study of this scope. Rather, selected sources from other disciplines have been approached with the aim of identifying and contextualising main strands of thinking on issues at the heart of this study – including possible parallels and contradictions. These have very broadly included philosophy, sociology, the sciences (from psychology to neuroscience), education, the visual and literary arts, performing arts, and some spiritually oriented writings. In approaching this diverse range of literature, I have primarily sought explicit references to the music-related concepts and key words identified in the course of the research. Additionally, where possible – and while acknowledging the disciplinary expertise required when interpreting extensive variations in concepts and terminologies – these sources have also been considered for attitudes and approaches to the concept of intangibility in general.

**Exploratory Research**

To supplement the ongoing literature review, and my own experiences as a performer, I conducted a range of exploratory research at the outset of this project to test the ideas and concepts beyond the realm of published sources, and determine how the intangibles might be dealt with in conversation. This served to locate and validate my enquiry and, along with the literature review, formulate a basic construction of themes and potential angles through which to approach and later structure and interpret the interviews. Where relevant, quotes and findings have been included in the contextual introductions and discussions in each of the chapters to follow.

Part of this exploration consisted of informal conversations over the years of my PhD candidature with musicians from a range of backgrounds. These musicians did not participate in recorded interviews, but their ideas inevitably fed into my understanding of the issues. More formally, I organised several small focus groups during 2006 and 2007 at the Queensland Conservatorium Griffith University (QCGU), consisting of students, and separately, performers and tertiary-based pedagogues representing a range of instruments. The aim of these focus groups was to stimulate group discussions to raise additional concepts and terminologies, and possible sensitivities to consider when embracing the topic with peers (whether students or staff). In 2007, I also attended the Australasian Piano Pedagogy Conference in Canberra, where in addition to talking about my research with a broad range of attendees, a small exploratory survey was conducted of pedagogues working in private settings. This included questions about
the terminologies and concepts they considered to best align with the essence of and rationale behind their pedagogical practices, as well as their views on the value of music, and the extent to which this might be tangible and/or intangible.

In a more public arena, as part of the conference Islands: Music research in Australia and New Zealand, held at QCGU in 2007, I organised a public panel to gauge how those working within the conservatoire culture as pianists, educators, or musicologists might approach these issues when discussing them in a more formal and larger setting. Chaired by Professor Nicholas Cook, this panel included Dr Rosalind Halton, Professor John Drummond, and pianists Dr Stephen Emmerson and Ananda Sukarlan. After a presentation of my research, the discussion focused on the challenges in expressing the intangibles in music performance, research and discourse. While these formal and informal sessions do not feature in this thesis verbatim, I would like to acknowledge that they helped shape my thinking. Indeed, along with the review of musicians’ voices in the literature, it was during these exploratory discussions that a number of potential expressions, descriptions, and locations of intangible realms were initially identified.

1.6 The Interviews

The main data collected for this research consisted of ten semi-structured, in-depth interviews, conducted in 2007 with a selected group of professional pianists, and pedagogues involved in training pianists to a high level. The following sections outline the process of selecting the pianists, the approach taken to the interviews, the challenges in talking about the intangibles, the process of analysis, and the considerations in presenting the data.

Selecting the Pianists

The choice to focus on professional performers was made on the basis that high-level professional pianists were more likely to offer deeper insights into the particularly intangible aspects of their art form in performance. As widely recognised within the Western classical culture, artistry and the more elusive aspects of music-making lie beyond the acquisition of technical skills, which may take many years to master. As Green highlights, “the musicians we think of as true masters of their art are the ones whose artistry we admire, and that goes way beyond technique” (2005, p. 7). In one of the most direct references to the subject matter, in a discussion focused on conducting techniques for bands and ensembles, Lisk labels the final stages of a musician’s development as The Intangibles of Musical Performance. Here, he suggests, we “free ourselves from the more explicit analytical state of specifics and notation,” releasing “the intrinsic values of perception, conceptual images, and expressive qualities surrounding an artistic performance.” As he argues, “this is the peak or summit of musical
expression and the reason for study, practice, knowledge, and skill” (2000, p. 2). Research conducted by others into the perspectives of musicians adds further support for a focus on professional pianists. Frederickson and Rooney cite a number of studies highlighting that musicians “at the pinnacle of musical development” will demonstrate “both mastery and the capacity for self-reflection” and “universal understandings about music” (1988, p. 2). Examining the “Concepts of Ideal Musicians,” Creech, Papageorgi and Welch found that professional musicians “elaborated in greater detail” on their perceptions than students (2010, p. 14). In her “phenomenological study of transcendent music performance,” Alberici similarly reported that, “most students in higher education were not experienced enough in the realm of music performance to be able to talk about it” and furthermore, “subjects who had experienced transcendent performance (and were willing to talk about it)” were a “hard-to-identify population” (2004, p. 64).

While views on the intangibility of music are no doubt to be found amongst amateur pianists, and the sample of potential interviewees would have been far greater, it has also been taken into consideration, as Rosen writes in Piano Notes: The World of the Pianist, that “the amateur ideal today is largely derived from the professional standard” (2002b, prelude). Moreover, as Belgian notes, while successful professional soloists are few, they “can and do alter our views and perceptions of music” by “setting the tone and character of the public’s understanding of what the art of music is” (in Larsen, 2005, p. 14). Informed by the above, I sought to access prominent and successful concert pianists who would be available, and willing to share their perspectives.

An initial broad survey of major national concert series, and a more targeted search of those within Brisbane during 2007 produced around fifty elite classical pianists appearing in performance, thirty of whom were performing as soloists. These appeared with three key national organisations (Musica Viva, the Australian Chamber Orchestra, and the 2007 Australasian Piano Pedagogy Conference), and in three major classical concert series in Brisbane: The Queensland Orchestra, the Medici Concert Series, and the Kawai Keyboard Series. In determining which of these pianists to approach, it was necessary to consider several practical factors: the professional status of the performer; their formal qualifications; institutional education; age; diversity of experience; and their availability and willingness to make time for an in-depth interview. Additionally, while a study containing a much larger number of these pianists was an exciting prospect, given the in-depth nature of the interviews, and the time allocated for completing the transcription and analysis, it was not practically possible to include such large numbers.
With these considerations, an effort was made to contain the selection of pianists to those performing in Brisbane, with supplementary interviews conducted as opportunities arose. Approaches were made to a large number of pianists across these series, and while many expressed a keen interest in the topic, a number had to decline an interview. The reasons given were most often due to time constraints and the heavy performing and teaching schedule of international touring artists, though in several cases the feedback revealed a resistance to the topic of the research. This reticence to talk about the topic of intangibles is discussed in more detail below. Ten formal interviews eventuated, and constitute the core data in this research. Five of these interviews were conducted with pianists from the 2007 Kawai Keyboard series, hosted by Queensland Conservatorium Griffith University (QCGU). The remaining five pianists were sourced from other concert series or conferences. The difference between these two groupings is worth briefly highlighting, as they affected the length and structure of interview, and the amount of prior interaction.

The 2007 Kawai Keyboard Series provided a timely opportunity to access a number of high-profile visiting Australian and international artists. Additionally, in my capacity as a research assistant at QCGU I was engaged to design, research and write a new online educational resource for each of the concerts, which included extended information about the works and the pianists (Guster, 2007a). The opportunity to align this work with my PhD research provided valuable background to the interviews I conducted with the performers. In most cases, I had a significant amount of email contact with each pianist during the preparation, research and publication stages, helping to build a level of trust and familiarity between us prior to the interviews. In a few cases where the performers were based locally, we also met in person during this process.

Five other in-depth interviews with pianists resulted from external contacts over the course of 2007. The first two of these interviews were of similar length and format to the Kawai Keyboard core sample, though contact prior to the interview was restricted to a letter of invitation outlining the research and a copy of the background article on my topic (Guster, 2007b). In addition, three international pianists presenting and performing at the 2007 Australasian Piano Pedagogy Conference in Canberra were interviewed. These interviews ranged from 1 to 1½ hours long, and due to the setting, the structure was somewhat less formalised. Pre-interview interaction was also limited to a background letter and the article referred to above. During the course of the research, less formal interviews with five other pianists were conducted, of various length, format and recorded mediums. While these informed the research, due to methodological differences (i.e. the interviewee was a jazz musician, a composer, a primary-school level pedagogue, or there were language barriers), these have not been included as primary sources of data.
While most pianists who declined an interview cited scheduling issues or the demands of performance and travel, in several cases, the reasons given were directly related to the subject matter, and are thus worthy of discussion. Two of these were female pianists, and given the small number of potential female performers to choose from, their absence in this study was regrettable, leading to an unfortunate gender imbalance in the final selection. The first declined on the basis that she did not feel able to talk about ‘the intangible.’ While she believed the topic was highly relevant, and we had several phone conversations about it, she doubted her own ability to put it into words, and additionally that doing so might do ‘it’ an injustice. While I tried to assure her that I understood the difficulty, and was hoping only to point to what and where it might be, aware of the limitation of the words themselves, she was not convinced to participate.

In the case of the second female pianist to decline an interview, her response to my request for an interview was a very short reply that she was not an academic. While I attempted to persuade her of my background as a musician and interest in musicians’ perspectives, she did not return any further email correspondence. This was a very clear reminder to me of a tension I have also personally encountered, between performing musicians and musicologists in the institutions in which I have studied. In the case of another female pianist invited for the Kawai series, I was asked specifically by the QCGU piano department not to approach her. Though citing a busy schedule, I also sensed some general reluctance from them towards the research, perhaps stemming from the tensions noted above. Given this, I resisted further requests to the department, which included another possible female addition to the interviewees. These missed opportunities with internationally renowned pianists were unfortunate, as I feel that in each case they would have had significant knowledge to share.

Beyond the Kawai Keyboard Series, there were a number of other pianists appearing in Brisbane who expressed their interest, but for various reasons, ranging from travel and performance demands to language barriers, an interview did not eventuate. It is worth noting that the attitudes of those managing the concert series in which the pianists were performing were also influential. While in some cases they were found to be very willing and happy to pass on my request to the performers, in other cases they were not. This may have been due to a desire not to place any more demands on already busy schedules, yet there was a sense, particularly in one case, that the resistance was more a lack of interest and perhaps even scepticism towards the research topic of ‘the intangible.’ However, despite these challenges, the final sample of ten classical pianists constituted professional soloists from a broad cross-section of nationalities and ages, as outlined in Table 1.1 below. These pianists brought a wealth of experience in both performance and pedagogy, and proved to be a rich source of data for this research.
### Table 1.1 Pianists Interviewed

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Kawai Keyboard Series</strong></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Michael Kieran Harvey | Australian pianist residing in Tasmania  
Interview Date and Length: March 3, 2007; 1 hr. 30 mins.  
Location: Queensland Conservatorium Griffith University (QCGU) |
| Mark Kruger | Australian pianist residing in Berlin  
Interview Date and Length: March 16, 2007; 1 hr. 45 mins.  
Location: QCGU |
| Gao Ping | Chinese pianist residing in New Zealand  
Interview Date and Length: March 23, 2007; 1 hr. 50 mins.  
Location: QCGU |
| Roy Howat | Scottish pianist residing in the UK  
Interview Date and Length: May 29, 2007; 1 hr. 33 mins.  
Location: QCGU |
| Stephen Savage | British pianist who has resided in Australia for many years, currently living in the UK  
Interview Date(s) and Length: August 21/30, 2007; 2 hrs. 20 mins.  
Location: QCGU |

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Other Pianists</strong></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Freddy Kempf | British pianist performing with the Queensland Orchestra  
Interview Date and Length: March 8, 2007; 1 hr. 40 mins.  
Location: Queensland Orchestra Studios, Brisbane |
| Liam Viney | Australian pianist performing in the QCGU Alumni Series  
Interview Date and Length: April 3, 2007; 1 hr. 34 mins.  
Location: Saville Hotel, Brisbane |
| Matteo Napoli | Italian pianist / pedagogue presenting at the Australasian Piano Pedagogy Conference  
Interview Date and Length: July 3, 2007; 1 hr.  
Location: ANU School of Music, Canberra |
| William Westney | American pianist / pedagogue presenting at the Australasian Piano Pedagogy Conference  
Interview Date and Length: July 4, 2007; 1 hr. 20 mins.  
Location: ANU School of Music, Canberra |
| Jean-Paul Sevilla | French pianist / pedagogue performing at the Australasian Piano Pedagogy Conference  
Interview Date and Length: July 6, 2007; 55 mins.  
Location: Rydges Restaurant, Canberra |
Approach to Interviews

The approach taken in this research has been informed by the issues raised by a number of authors on contemporary trends in interviewing (e.g., Gubrium & Holstein, 2002; Ellis, 2004; Creswell, 2007). Reflecting the debates over ethnographer authority discussed above, several of these question the separation of and distinction between the interviewer and interviewee. As MacDonald, Hargreaves, and Miell point out, this has been largely influenced by social constructionist theories on what constitutes “meaningful discourse” (2002, pp. 9-11), such as the following perspective of Gergen (1994, p. viii):

Meaningful language is the product of social interdependence. It requires the co-ordinate actions of at least two persons […]. We may rightfully replace Descartes’ dictum (‘Cogito ergo sum’) with ‘communicamus ergo sum.’ We communicate, therefore I am. This perspective has been transferred into qualitative interview methodologies in varying degrees.

Thus, as Dingwall argues, any interview is an “artefact, a joint accomplishment of interviewer and respondent. As such, its relationship to any ‘real’ experience is not merely unknown but in some senses unknowable” (1997, p. 56). Wengraf reminds the potential interviewer that:

[Interviews] are not asocial, ahistorical, events. You do not leave behind your anxieties, your hopes, your blindspots, your prejudices, your class, race or gender, your location in global social structure, your age and historical positions, your emotions, your past and your sense of possible futures […] nor does your interviewee […] nor do you do so when you sit down to analyse the material you have produced. (2001, p. 4-5)

However, as Rapley more practically suggests, interviews can source “‘accounts’, or ‘versions’, which offer up a window through which to view the various possible ways that the topic of the interview can be talked about” (2001, p. 304). It is this perspective that has been adopted in this research.

The extent to which the interviewer should, or does contribute to these ‘accounts’ is similarly a much-discussed topic, with relevance for decisions made throughout the interview process, subsequent analysis, and presentation of data. The question, for instance, of how removed or personally involved to be as a researcher presents an ongoing challenge for ethnographers, as one exchange in Ellis (2004) highlights. In responding to a student’s query on whether she is “obligated not to feel” or embrace her emotions in her research, Ellis suggests that, “as an ethnographer, you are obligated to feel them, since they might provide a frame for understanding [the subject’s] experience and your own on a deeper level.” As noted by the student, “that’s the dilemma […] I am concerned about being too involved; then I think it’s wrong not to be involved enough” (p. 96).
Some have suggested that separating the “interviewers’ experiences from those of respondents (...) is highly artificial and produces sanitized portrayals of the ‘data’ in question” (Gubrium & Holstein, 2002, p. 28). The rise of narrative and autoethnographic methods of inquiry has been one suggested approach to tackling this dilemma (Creswell, 2007, pp. 53-57; and Ellis, 2004). While I explored various approaches to presenting my own voice along with the pianists, I decided to present the data from the interviews in a more traditional manner, making my presence in the interviews more implicit. Though I have underplayed my own voice in the ensuing chapters, I have taken into account, as Rapley (2001, p. 304) recommends, that “an awareness and analysis of interviewer’s talk in producing both the form and content of the interview” is important (see 1.8 below). So, while my words may be absent in the quotes used, my presence is not.

In order to ‘talk the intangible’, and investigate the challenges in doing so, my personal involvement in these interviews was crucial, and an awareness of this was prominent throughout the research. This was confirmed in two trial interviews conducted some weeks prior to the ones documented in this research. Through those, it was evident that to draw out the pianists’ perceptions of these difficult questions in any depth necessitated significant interaction. As a result, the data was very much co-created through the to-and-fro of the conversations. Furthermore, these trials led to the realisation that physical gestures, facial expressions and body language constituted a key part of the discussion, adding meaning to the words, and at times, even as powerful substitutes when words could not be found. With these factors in mind, the decision was made to conduct all the interviews on video, despite the risk that this might be an inhibiting factor for some, and – acknowledging the views above – to include myself in the video frame, which proved both confronting and helpful in the analysis stage.

**Interview Structure and Questions**

For the ten interviews, a semi-structured approach was taken, with content tailored to the length of the interview and the interviewee. From the beginning, I was aware that pinning down the content of discussion too early ran the risk of restricting the breadth or depth of the discussions. A pre-planned set of standardised and direct questions might not engage and inspire all pianists, be effective in revealing the complexities of the topic, or draw out their subjective, personal and at times more private responses. Additionally, given the nature of the topic, it was anticipated that simple and direct answers were not likely to be forthcoming. For these reasons, the interview questions were kept as open as possible, and a flexible approach to the structure adopted.

Such an approach is supported in contemporary interview methodologies. Diaz (2010) highlights that such approaches are preferred in research where “operational definitions” of the
concept “continue to be elusive,” as they allow “respondents to provide loosely structured answers to broad questions, thus providing the researcher with data that could be used to build models, notice trends, delineate dynamics, and build conceptual categories” (pp. 32-33). Wengraf (2001) observes that in many ways the flexibility of approach in semi-structured interviews makes them more difficult to successfully negotiate than fully structured interviews. Given the amount of improvisation involved, they necessitate a high degree of preparation, risk, and analysis. However, as he, notes, they are also potentially “high-gain” and “may yield much more than fully structure ones can, under the right conditions” (p. 5).

After an introduction on the background to the research (depending on what had been covered before in correspondence or conversation), I suggested the following broad topics and questions to be covered during the interview: “How did you come to value playing the piano and what inspires you now?”; “What qualities do you value in great music-making that could be perceived as intangible?” and “How do musicians attain these qualities and can they be cultivated, nourished or taught?” A fourth area of questions under the banner of ‘Music Advocacy’, which served as a trigger for – rather than a focus of – this research, was also included to help initiate discussion on whether intangible aspects of music might play a role in its broader value(s) to society, and the pianists’ views on whether and how these values might be communicated and promoted in words.

In planning this basic structure, a key consideration was the importance of creating an environment in which the pianist felt at ease, particularly given the extra pressure that the video camera added. The opening question on early memories and experiences of music, which often led to much data not appearing in the thematic discussions to follow, was specifically included on the basis that it might be easier to discuss, and to help establish greater ease of communication for both parties.

For my own reference as interviewer, I used a cue sheet for each interview (below), which included more detailed questions to potentially pose within these main topics. Additionally, I took along to each interview a selection of quotations to assist as prompts for the discussion if needed, and a list of potential terms and themes identified from the prior exploratory research and literature review. At the stage of embarking on the interviews, these had been tentatively categorised as: expression/expressivity; emotion; talent; artistry; creativity; sensitivity; intuition; beauty; truth; heart/love; inspiration/passion; space /silence; peak experience; mystery; and spirituality. Over the course of the six months in which the interviews were conducted, new terms and concepts arose from the discussions, informing and occasionally feeding into the interviews that followed.
## Interview Cue Sheet

### 1. Early musical history and perceptions of value
- Can you remember how and why you started playing?
- Were your parents musical? What was their understanding of the value of music?
- What influenced your decision to study music for a career? Have there been any significant changes to your motivation over time?
- Who has most influenced your ideas about music (e.g. parents, teachers, peers)?
- What inspires you now as a pianist? Could you say ‘why you do what you do’?

### 2. Qualities we value in great musicians or great music-making
- I have a selection of terms and concepts that seem to often come up in association with great musicians or music making, and wanted to see if any of these resonate with you and your understanding of what is valuable in music. Could we start by talking a little about the terms artistry and musicality, and what distinguishes a great musician from a good one? ...

### 3. How musicians attain these qualities
- Is great artistry or musicality teachable?
- Is there a role for the tertiary level teacher beyond instruction on technique and repertoire?
- Was your musicality developed explicitly or implicitly – consciously or unconsciously?
- Was there a balance between tangible and intangible elements in your music education?
- Are there things that you do to maintain or cultivate your love of and inspiration for music that you think students could learn from?
- Do you feel that current approaches to teaching and learning within music institutions are in line with how you value music-making? What would you change?

### 4. Music Advocacy
- Do you agree with music advocacy campaigns that promote the idea that ‘music makes you smarter’, or other such arguments promoting non-musical or extrinsic benefits?
- Would you say the value of classical music to society is quantifiable or measurable?
- If you were asked to explain the value of music to government or other funding bodies what would you say? Do you have any ideas on how to promote the intangible value of music?

While the overall approach to the interviews remained constant, this cue sheet served as a base point of reference rather than definitive order of proceedings. Each interview inevitably took its own course, and the flow of the conversation was given priority over the planned structure. Although this meant that not all of the prepared questions were necessarily addressed directly...
with each interviewee, very often this flexibility resulted in more topics, unique angles, and themes than I had planned to discuss, constituting a valuable addition to the research.

Ethical clearance for the interviews as well as the focus groups and survey conducted was granted prior to beginning these aspects of the research under Griffith University protocol no. QCM/02/06/HREC. In addition, care has been taken to accurately and respectfully represent the content – both professionally and personally – generously provided by the interviewees. The pianists were given the opportunity to edit the transcribed interviews, and the final quotes used in this document. Several took up this opportunity, but in the end the editing was confined to the removal of some names, expletives, and colloquialisms, as well as minor grammatical changes or clarification of comments, and did not affect the core content.

1.7 Challenges in Talking about the Intangible

Johnson (2003, p. 2) suggests that the arts are often used as a means of expressing the inner realm of the emotions, imagination, intuition, ideals, values, and sense of spirituality. As was evident from the early research for this thesis, and as was to be expected, such topics featured heavily in these interviews. There were several issues – as with sensitivities – considered when approaching these intangible ‘inner’ realms. In order to encourage open and rich conversations, it was clear from the two trial interviews that my participation as interviewer (or co-author) was essential in building rapport and a level of trust with the interviewees. I embraced the notion that ‘mutual disclosure’ plays an important part in encouraging the interviewees to reveal their own experiences and personal beliefs.

On numerous occasions, this involved a significant emotional ‘risk’ for me personally, and the courage to be prepared to venture into emotional aspects of my own life as a pianist. Coessens, Crispin and Douglas (2010) highlight that “a high level of personal exposure with its attendant emotional toll” is a key challenge for the artist researcher (p. 10). This became abundantly clear in the very first interview (Harvey), when the planned structure quickly changed with the interviewee challenging and questioning my past experiences and decisions with music. In a later interview (Westney), in a completely different way, the pianist’s opening statements had a significant and surprising emotional impact on me, from which I had to quickly recover.

Discussions involving spiritual or religious beliefs – whether explicitly or implicitly – can be particularly challenging. While Johnson defines spirituality as “apart from any religious context” and “simply honoring the inner” (2003, p. 2), as Ellis (2004) points out “sense making and identity [are] often entangled with religious and spiritual beliefs,” which brings with it the
potential for “many conflicts – personal, emotional, intellectual” both for the researcher and those participating in the research (pp. 97-98). This was noted from several angles during the exploratory phase of my research. Just as people hold a wide range of spiritual beliefs, there are considerable differences in people’s abilities or willingness to define what those beliefs are. While singer Katie Noonan stated in a public lecture on *Intangibles in Music* that “the key to music is spirituality; making connections,” she described spiritual as simply a “translation of whatever *that* is” (K. Noonan, personal communication, August 2, 2005). The challenges in identifying what that is are compounded by the fact that these ideas may be disguised in different terminologies, or silenced by a range of personal, cultural, or indeed, academic factors. As one senior academic (a Deputy Vice-Chancellor) warned me in an informal setting, by using such words in academia, researchers run the risk of being ostracised. This comment serves to highlight the potential for conflict between artistic and scientific cultures, discussed further in Chapter Two.

It was also evident that dealing with the spiritual – particularly on camera – can lead to a variety of unexpected responses and reactions. In one Australian documentary, an exchange between pedagogue and student about the divine leads to tears (Connolly & Anderson, 2001). In another, when asked by an interviewer to talk about ‘soul’, a high-profile Australian composer exclaims “No! Too much! I’m too tired!” and after some incoherent words, jumps out of shot. While he insists that a woman (off camera) talks about it instead, she refuses, and the screen remains blank (Parham, 2001). Given the many references to the soul and the spiritual in music, these topics nevertheless presented as a crucial intangible concepts to explore.

In seeking discussions that explored such topics in depth, where appropriate, I attempted to actively encourage these areas through the questions I asked, and the conversational turns I instigated. During several interviews this included remaining alert to answers I sensed were more academic or formalised in nature. While I encouraged the interviewees to venture into non-academic realms, there is no doubt that the pressure of being ‘on record’ and ‘on camera’ restricted what might otherwise have been more adventurous and perhaps candid discussions. As one pianist noted in email correspondence prior to the interview, “I would definitely be less self-conscious with only audio” (Viney).

While I felt that all of the pianists relaxed into this recorded environment, my presumption that a less formal chat over a drink or a meal, and without a camera, would likely lead to different results was shown to be true with several of the pianists who continued to talk socially after the interview. It was notable that conversation of this sort enabled us to address the issues from another level, and led to insights that had not surfaced in the formal interview. In three cases, these post-interview conservations were recorded on a portable recorder and several comments
have been incorporated, with permission, into the discussions below (identified accordingly). While this would have caused unequal data in a comparative study, in the methodology and analysis I used, this merely added depth to some discussions.

1.8 Analysis

The primary data collected in the interviews is exclusively qualitative, and analysis of these has been conducted from both a content and process perspective. Following transcription, the interview content was coded according to the nature of the questions being asked, the subject matter of the answers provided, terminology and rhetoric used, and overall themes present. Topics that were specifically raised by the interviewee as significant – especially when not first introduced by the researcher – were also noted. The data obtained from all interviews was then compared for common words, phrases, concepts and themes, and the results used to construct overarching categories through which the intangible could be presented for discussion. Both the early stage of data collection and the final stages of analysis and presentation of the data were informed by a broad, yet non-exhaustive cross-disciplinary literature review of references to the intangible and related concepts.

From a process perspective, the broader context surrounding the interviews has also been taken into consideration. This includes the degree of pre-interview interaction, the setting, situation and length of the interview, and any extraneous events that impacted on the interview. Researcher observations and reflections were written following each interview, and reviewed in combination with the transcribed and video data in the final analysis. These have been included in the interview summaries in Chapter Three, and incorporated more implicitly in the presentation of the pianists’ voices throughout this document.

According to Strauss and Corbin (1990), a key aspect of conducting grounded theory research is “theoretical sensitivity.” Referring to a personal quality of the researcher, this “indicates an awareness of the subtleties of meaning of data […] the capacity to understand, and capability to separate the pertinent from that which isn’t” (p. 43). Theoretical sensitivity arises from being “well grounded in the technical literature as well as from professional and personal experience.” It is “also acquired during the research process through continual interactions with the data,” including self-reflection on the “reality of the data”, an “attitude of skepticism toward any categories or hypotheses brought to or arising early in the research” and “validating them repeatedly with the data themselves” (pp. 46-47). I have attempted to balance this type of critical and theoretical approach with a more personal and professional sensitivity to the pianists, during the both interviews and in the subsequent presentation of their voices.
When coding the interviews and choosing key quotes, I made a conscious effort to be aware, as much as possible, when a particular viewpoint I cited was that of the pianist, or more reflective of how I had set up a question. Or, when a pianist agreed with a view I offered, that they did so on the basis of their opinion and not, as I sensed in several situations, out of politeness or to avoid being ‘disagreeable.’ When this, or the content of the pianists’ responses, has been overly ambiguous, they have been left out, or otherwise noted in the discussion. However, ambiguity was not avoided, and indeed was an integral part of the data and analysis. Furthermore, when sketching the intangibles in this thesis, it was necessary to consider more implicitly the degree to which the pianists highlighted intangibility in music-making; whether they elucidated either the location or nature of this intangibility; and whether they provided further insight into the reason for this intangibility (for example, noting a general elusiveness; focusing on a particular ambiguity, contradiction or paradox; or highlighting the challenge of finding suitable words).

Given the challenges many have experienced in finding words to represent this subject matter, the video footage was also considered for less explicit visual and aural aspects of the discourse, including the way in which the interviewee spoke (e.g., slow or fast, soft or loud); when they expressed emotion (and what kind); whether they tended to used simple, elaborate, emotive or academic language; and if significant physical gestures were made to express a point. Less obvious – though equally important – content was also considered, much of which was gauged through nonverbal signals such as facial expressions and body language. This included significant pauses; moments when something obviously or deliberately went ‘unsaid’; where tension or sensitivity (either in the interviewer or interviewee) towards the topic being discussed was perceived; when the pianists sounded doubtful, hesitant, or appeared too eager to agree, or by contrast, were inclined to disagree with quotes provided or suggestions offered.

Often the nature of the interaction shifted during the interview. At times, this could be accounted for by the nature of the topic of discussion at the time. However, while I was able to reflect on my own feelings at the time, in those cases where I noticed a change in the demeanour, or reticence on the part of the pianist being interviewed, my suggestions on the reasons that may have influenced this are, inevitably, just that – and far from conclusive. The interviews were very much dialogues, which like any form of communication, might be interpreted in many ways, and quite differently even by those engaged in them.

1.9 Presentation of Outcomes

The outcomes of this research project are presented in three parts, comprising three chapters each. This first chapter of Part One, *Approaching and Appreciating Intangibles*, has outlined
how intangibles have been defined, located and approached in this study. The second chapter identifies the importance of intangibles and the context in which they appear in music and related disciplines, providing a variety of potential perspectives, angles and terminologies through which the intangible in music-making might be interpreted and approached. It also serves as an extended rationale for the research questions and methodology. In Chapter Three, the ten pianists who were interviewed are introduced, with a brief personal contextualisation. Parts Two and Three of this thesis then present the diverse range of pianists’ perceptions and expressions of intangible aspects, organised into the key themes and topics that emerged throughout the coding process and comparative analysis. Each section begins with a contextual introduction highlighting perspectives sourced from the literature review, and is followed by a discussion of either similarities in opinions, words and concepts, or significant points of ambiguity or contention. At the end of each section, I outline the implications of the findings for each aspect of the intangible.

Part Two, titled Locating and Understanding Intangibles, presents several key areas for examining intangibility that emerged through these conversations: The Intangible In, The Intangible Between, and The Intangible As. Chapter Four considers the pianists’ perceptions of intangibles that reside in the music and the musician, specifically the intangible features that constitute great music, and personal attributes that contribute to great musicianship. Through metaphorical reference to the ‘Space between the Notes,’ Chapter Five explores the intangible spaces of music-making that a performer must negotiate when approaching and dealing with ‘the music,’ organised and discussed thematically as interpretative, expressive, and communicative spaces. From these, a wealth of perceptions emerge which help to locate, sketch, and understand intangibles in music-making. Under the heading ‘The Intangible As,’ Chapter Six addresses what the pianists felt they are expressing, communicating, engaging and/or connecting with in the act of performance, discussed according to the themes of the emotional, aesthetic, and spiritual, and additionally, the peak performances that brought them closest to their ideals.

Under the heading of Accessing and Operationalising Intangibles, Part Three considers how intangibles are accessed, communicated and valued, in performance, pedagogy and society. Chapter Seven examines the pianists’ reflections on the roles of feeling and thinking, and more broadly, the complexity of negotiating the ‘self’ in performance. The following chapter considers how the pianists talk about and teach intangibles, and, returning to the initial impetus for this study, their views on whether – and how – what they value most about music might be communicated beyond their instrument. Finally, Chapter Nine brings together the overall perceptions to emerge throughout this thesis and their implications for intangibles in music-making.
The interviews conducted were rich in content, with many of the pianists’ comments touching on several concepts in one sentence. Given the manner in which the data was organised, some excerpts often related to more than one theme, though an attempt has been made to highlight the predominant subject and restrict more than one entry. On each of the themes identified in this thesis, many pianists expressed very similar views. In these cases, I have selected quotes from those that I believe represent the views of the majority with the greatest depth, or otherwise, a strikingly different or conflicting view.

Throughout these interviews, I have not presumed or expected that the pianists would be experts in current musicological, philosophical or other theoretical discourses on the many topics covered. As discussed above, the aim has been to specifically feature the voices of those who, as performers, would not necessarily be focused on these aspects, and could provide perspectives that have been absent in this literature. While academic perspectives have been included as contextual material, and any striking correlations or contradictions between these and the pianists has been noted, my aim has not been to judge or critique the pianists’ perceptions for any form of accuracy or theoretical ‘correctness’ in relation to this literature.

Given that this thesis explores how pianists talk about the intangible, I have deliberately maintained the conversational tone in their words, with only minor grammatical edits where appropriate. At those times when the communication involved unspoken signals or physical gestures I considered of particular relevance, these have been noted descriptively in italics in [closed brackets]. Significant pauses in conversation have been transcribed as ellipses without brackets, and ellipses in closed brackets […] used when text has been omitted. By presenting the pianists’ reflections in this manner, and frequently throughout this document, I hope that the text paints not only a colourful picture of their perceptions, but also brings their personalities to life, like characters in a novel, adding a valuable dimension to the project at large.

As presented here, the final organisation of the data reflects my own evolving perceptions and appreciation of the subject matter over the course of the research, as triggered by the words of the pianists. Additionally, as several pianists highlighted in post-interview communication, their comments were made at a certain time and place in their lives and are likely to have been reframed or rephrased quite differently with the passing of time, depending on their own subsequent experiences and thoughts on these matters. As Barenboim eloquently points out:

No idea can be implemented in all of its aspects at one time, just as a performer can present only certain aspects of the music in one performance, but cannot express everything contained within the score. The distilled essence of an idea, which is infinite, must not be confused with its implementation, which is finite. The essence of an idea is
not subject to change over time, whereas its implementation is variable, depending on time, perception and understanding (2009, p. 48)

If the intangible could be pinned down and quantified, even for one instant in time, it would inevitably need to be re-examined in the next. Consequently, rather than attempting to arrive at definitive or grand conclusions, this thesis aims to sketch the contours of the intangibles in music-making, as perceived and portrayed by the classical pianists who have generously shared their time and thoughts with me.
Chapter Two: Setting the Scene
Multiple Perspectives on Intangible

2.0 Introduction

While the nature of the topic of this thesis is neither simple nor uncontroversial, and given its elusive nature, challenging to investigate within an academic setting, I have chosen to embark on this endeavour with an inquisitive and open mind, embracing multiple perspectives on the intangible, including inspirations and sources from personal experience, and from various worlds of music professionals, music scholarship and other interdisciplinary explorations. This chapter presents a variety of such potential perspectives, providing angles and terminologies through which the intangible in music-making might be approached and interpreted, while also serving as an extended rationale for the research questions and methodology discussed in Chapter One.

These are presented firstly from an auto-ethnographic perspective (2.1), acknowledging my background and experience as a classical pianist, and my pathway into researching this topic, and then a brief account of the discrepancy between various voices on music’s value and how it is communicated in contemporary music advocacy, taking as an example the notion of extrinsic value (2.2). Sections 2.3-2.5 present some of the key concepts underlying these debates, beginning with an exploration of the issues embedded in claims that music has ‘intrinsic’ value and the tensions and ambiguities that arise when attempting to qualify, or quantify, what this is. This then leads to a discussion of the inherent challenges in attempting to approach and talk about the ‘intangible’ and the ‘ineffable,’ and the closely related concepts of the ‘sacred’ and the ‘symbolic.’

This is followed by a consideration of the perspectives and attitudes towards – and tensions between – various approaches to these elusive concepts in relation to music, from science-oriented disciplines to musicology and music education (2.6-2.8). The final section (2.9) identifies and discusses the striking absence of the voices of professional performing musicians themselves on this topic, and indeed from the perspective of performance practice in general. These various perspectives strongly support the need for more research into a variety of elusive aspects associated with music both in research and practice, and crucially, in the context of this particular study, the need to focus on and represent the voices of those professional performers whose practice lies at the heart of music-making.
2.1. Pathway to the Intangible

The impetus for embarking on this PhD came from personal experience. In 2005, I found myself at a crossroads in my musical career. Having studied piano from the age of four and winning numerous competitions and awards, I went on to train under scholarship at the Elder Conservatorium in Adelaide and the Canberra School of Music, where I completed a Bachelor of Music Degree, First Class Honours, with a University Medal for academic excellence, and the School of Music’s annual award for its most outstanding student. With the additional assistance of a prestigious Fulbright scholarship, a Queen’s Trust Award, and school scholarship in 2000, I continued my studies in the United States.

Despite such support and success, following the final recital of my Masters’ Degree at the Manhattan School of Music, New York, I lost inspiration for playing. On a search for the relevance of my vocation, I steered away from my career as a performing musician and spent two years working with a New York-based program titled ‘Music and the Brain.’ During this time, I was made aware of the plight of music education in the U.S. curriculum, the work and arguments of music advocates, and the research being conducted to support their cause. In addition to gaining first-hand experience of the benefits of teaching music through keyboard programs to young children across a range of educational environments, I participated in research looking into the correlation of this program and related cognitive benefits, and was active in promoting such benefits.

I then moved to Paris to take up a position as director of this program across several bilingual Montessori Schools, where I took great pride in presenting the results of research in the field of music and the brain in presentations to hundreds of parents and school administrators. These reports included data showing that music education could improve a child’s spatial-temporal reasoning, increase the size of their corpus callosum and cerebellum, lead to higher academic marks and a greater likelihood of success in more ‘academic’ subjects such as mathematics, science, engineering, law or medicine. With these selling points to advocate the inclusion of music (and particularly music through keyboard programs) in the curriculum, I had found what I thought was a solid justification for learning to play the piano.

On moving back to Australia, I faced the decision of whether to return to piano performance or continue directing my interests on the cognitive realm of music education, and music advocacy. En route back home in 2004, I explored my options by attending two major international music events in Europe, *The XXVI World Conference of the International Society for Music Education* in Tenerife, Spain, and the *International Workshop on Piano* in Graz, Austria. It was here, as I explained to other musicians my interests and recent experience, that I encountered – for the
first time – the sensitive nature of music advocacy arguments that focus on the instrumental and particularly cognitive effects of music education. The very mention of ‘spatial-temporal reasoning’ in the same sentence as music provoked scepticism and disdain amongst some attendees, and in at least one instance, the warning that this was a “dangerous field” to explore from the perspective of ‘music for music’s sake.’

This experience constituted a major turning point in my perspectives on music and future career plans. I too began to question an approach to advocacy which promoted the value of training to be a pianist primarily for its flow-on effect into tangible cognitive benefits, transferable generic academic skills or other – more ‘relevant’ – pursuits. I found it increasingly difficult to accept the – implied – idea that I, as with other trained or professional pianists had embarked on their vocation with such aims in mind. Unable to ignore what seemed to be a discrepancy between voices, both external and internal, in having to justify what we do as musicians in a tangible way and to external criteria, and what might be a less tangible or intrinsic value of music, I returned to Australia to embrace these questions within an academic context.

Following an initial exploration, it became clear that my efforts to reconcile this discrepancy were reflected in dichotomies between different fields of expertise and perspectives on music and its value. While musicians, educators, and philosophers tend to refer to the value of music as difficult to quantify or measure, their comments appeared almost diametrically opposed to the very tangible and measurable benefits of music as presented in recent music advocacy forums. Following research conducted in 2005-2006, I explored some of these discrepant views, and why musicians might be resistant to instrumental or tangible evaluations of their art, in an article titled ‘Of music and oranges: Advocating the intangible’ published in Music Forum (Guster, 2007b).

Comparing the arguments put forward in music advocacy with a selection of musicians’ voices, it became evident that there were several areas of underlying tension: a distrust of the validity and reliability of scientific findings; a concern with a focus on the extrinsic or instrumental benefits of music at the expense of music’s perceived ‘intrinsic’ value; and an underlying resistance to making tangible inroads into the less tangible aspects of music-making. The most compelling challenge, which was to become the focus of this research, was how we might comprehend and communicate that which was perceived as highly valuable, yet was described in various ways, as ‘intangible.’ In the following section, an overview of the issues that arose in this quest serves to highlight the evolution of this research topic.
2.2 Questioning Extrinsic Value

In *Grove Music Online*, Davies (2012) asserts: “Music plays so central a role in the lives of many people that there can be no doubting how highly it is valued.” While such a statement seems to be supported by the ubiquitous presence of music in society, it appears that music advocacy has become increasingly necessary for the survival of formal music education in school curricula within many western societies. It is in this area that the debate has been most pronounced. As McPherson (2005), past President of the International Society of Music Education noted, “almost universally now, music educators seem to be taking on the task of advocating for their programs.” Or as Stevens (2002) observes from an Australian perspective, there are “increasingly apparent threats to [music’s] traditional role and place in education” (p. 203). Competing with other subjects for limited resources and time, music advocates have found themselves in a position of needing to argue for the value of music within the context of broader educational goals, seeking evidence for its role in enhancing other more academically useful skills, and with tangible arguments perceived as the most convincing (Hallam, 2001, p. 20).

With advances in science, computer technology and cross-disciplinary fields, new ‘evidence’ for such benefits of music has proved very useful for music advocacy groups, and has been increasingly relied upon to help ‘prove’ the value of music education. The *National Association of Music Merchants* outlines the increased interest in this new resource for music advocacy, and its influence:

> The pace of scientific research into music making has never been greater. New data about music’s relationship to brainpower, wellness and other phenomena is changing the way we perceive mankind’s oldest art form, and it’s having a real-world effect on decisions about educational priorities. (NAMM, 2010)

With much of the discussion revolving around the place of, and funding for music in education, one of the more popular strands of research is that which points to cognitive or intellectual improvement, or in other words, supports the claim that “music makes you smarter” (Haroutounian, 2001; Demorest & Morrison, 2000; Gallup Organization, 2000, 2003; Rosevear, 2002; Vitale, 2011). Indeed, similar research has been the focus of many engaged in arts advocacy more broadly, as highlighted by Winner and Hetland (2000), who found that between 1950 and 1999, there were over 11,000 published and unpublished reports claiming a link between studying the arts and academic improvement.

In musical terms, this claim received new ‘scientific’ support in the mid-1990s, widely popularised under the banner of the ‘Mozart Effect’ (Campbell, 1997). Researchers reported that college students listening to Mozart’s sonata for two pianos in D major K.448 exhibited
improved spatial-temporal reasoning (Rauscher et al., 1993, 1995). More significantly, this was followed by similar studies citing improved spatial-temporal reasoning in pre-school children taking piano keyboard lessons (Rauscher et al., 1994, 1997). Adding further support, a wealth of neuroscientific research using magnetic resonance imaging is reporting that numerous parts of the brain are larger in musicians (Schlaug, Jäncke, Huang, Staiger, & Steinmetz 1995; Hutchinson, Lee, Gaab, & Schlaug, 2003; Schlaug, Norton, Overy, & Winner, 2005; Hyde et al., 2009).

However, arguments that advocate and value music for its ability to enhance cognitive skills are “extremely controversial” (Hallam, 2001, p. 20), or as McPherson (2005) noted, in the case of the ‘Mozart effect,’ “just plain embarrassing” (see also Pietschnig, Voracek, & Formann, 2010, p. 314). Indeed, many have found fault with research promoting direct links between music or the arts and cognitive or academic achievement. From the 11,467 reports that Winner and Hetland (2000) sourced citing evidence for the transfer of arts learning to non-arts cognitive achievement (above), they found only 188 containing any empirical data, and through a meta-analysis of the ten common themes, only three that demonstrated clear, reliable causal links. As they concluded, there is “a danger in such reasoning […] these claims do not hold up unequivocally. Those who live by instrumental claims risk dying by such claims.” They insist instead, that even when the arts contribute secondary benefits, “arts educators must build justifications based on what is inherently valuable about the arts themselves.” Hallam (2001) echoes these findings and recommendations in her review of over two hundred articles reporting transferable benefits of predominantly Western classical music to other subjects (p. 20).

McCarthy, Ondaatje, Zakaras, and Brooks (2004, p. 68) add the warning that “an argument based entirely on the instrumental effects of the arts runs the risk of being discredited if other activities are more effective at generating the same effects or if policy priorities shift.” Not surprisingly, they note, “many arts advocates are uncomfortable with an exclusive reliance on instrumental arguments.” Expressing the underlying concern of many of his music colleagues, Reimer (1999) observes that while music educators have generally supported the idea that music education serves other “associated” or academic purposes, “there has been a state of anxiety about the possibility […] that at some time, purposes other than musical ones might start to dominate.” Indeed, he suggests, “the spatial/temporal rationale for the value of music” has brought “music educators perilously close to, if not over the edge of, the precipice they have long feared,” and while a tempting argument to help justify music in school curricula, it comes with “potentially destructive” consequences, and threatens to “overwhelm musical values” (pp. 39-42). Reimer argues that in order to “protect the integrity of its musical responsibilities,” music educators must “conscientiously promote the benefits of involvements that are particular to music” (p. 43).
As these statements highlight, criticisms of recent scientific data are not just focused on the validity of the results – debate that could be expected in the process of discovering any new knowledge. They reflect a concern with a focus on an extrinsic rather than an ‘inherent’ or ‘intrinsic’ value of music. As Budd (1995) explicitly states, “artistic value is intrinsic” (p. 43), or Johnson (2002) argues, music should claim “a special status in our culture precisely because it invites us to participate in this sense of being valued in and for itself” (p. 8). Indeed, McCarthy et al. (2004) suggest, “what draws people to the arts is not the hope that the experience will make them smarter” (p. 37), but “the intrinsic benefits the arts provide” (p. 70).

This argument and the tensions underpinning the above are certainly not new. Temmerman (1991) observed more than twenty years ago that distinctions between “philosophical arguments that explain the merit of music for its own intrinsic sake and arguments that explain the extrinsic value of music […] constitute the basis of a major ongoing debate by music educators” (p. 149). As defined by Temmerman, an intrinsic philosophy is “based on the promotion of music for its own sake. In other words, music’s intrinsic value requires no external justification,” whereas an extrinsic approach – also referred to variously as utilitarian, functional, referential or instrumental – is “the promotion of music in education as a means towards non-musical ends” (pp. 151-152). Reflecting the concerns noted above, she points out that, “according to exponents of the intrinsic music education philosophy, to advocate music on non-musical grounds is to deny the unique qualities and value of music and face the possibility of music losing its integrity as a subject” (p. 153). Emerging under the banner of “aesthetic education” in the mid-twentieth century (Henry, 1958; Leonhard & House, 1959; Leonhard, 1965), key exponents of this approach have included Reimer (1970, 1989, 2009), Swanwick (1979), Swanger (1982), Hope (1985), and Miller (1988).

When viewed within this broader context of aesthetics, concerns over approaches in music advocacy are indicative of a larger debate about the value afforded more generally to the arts, both in education and society at large. As Scruton (1994) highlights, the question of whether music should be valued, or “listened to for its own sake” rather than “for the sake of its effects,” lies at the heart of larger debates “about the nature of the aesthetic experience” (p. 513). While these debates extend far beyond the scope of this thesis, the controversial “art for art’s sake” argument remains a popular one for those defending music’s place in education and value in society (e.g., “Education institutions must value art for art’s sake,” 2012, p. 10).

However, in contrast to the increasingly demonstrative scientific and ‘tangible’ benefits of music, arguments that rely on subjective perceptions such as “aesthetic awareness and sensitivity” (Temmerman, 1991, p. 152) are far more elusive, and vulnerable. Indeed, additional ambiguity is added when considering the arguments for intrinsic value put forward by music
advocates more closely. Embedded within these claims is an often unstated and confusing merging of concepts; the distinction between ‘music for its own sake’ and ‘music for humans’ sake.’ While some music advocates explicitly present intrinsic value as something inherently human (e.g., McCarthy et al., 2004), conversely, as Stevens (2002) suggests, “most music education philosophers draw a distinction between the intrinsic value of music – that is, ‘music for its own sake’ – and the extrinsic or utilitarian value of music – that is, ‘music for the sake of human needs’” (p. 202). This discrepancy between interpretations – already elusive notions in themselves – only serves to increase the murkiness and less-than-tangible nature of such claims.

As McCarthy et al. (2004) observe: “‘art for art’s sake’ in its various forms has been profoundly influential, and although the intent was to insulate art from demands that it be useful, the unintended consequence has been to make art seem remote, esoteric, and removed from life” (p. 38). Equally critical, Shusterman (2002) argues that it has led to the perception of “the practice and reception of art as something essentially purpose-less and gratuitous” (p. 52). Further highlighting this point, Rainbow (1968) observes that while music has, “at various times,” been considered as emotionally, morally, socially, culturally and spiritually beneficial, or “as a valuable educational discipline in itself,” at other times “its very uselessness has been acclaimed as its chief virtue” (p. 21). It is this ‘uselessness’ that appears to underlie much of the contention. In an effort to gain a better understanding of these elusive and intangible aspects of music, the following section briefly explores this perspective, framing the variety of considerations, ambiguities and indeed contradictions that exist in arguments that music is ‘intrinsic’ or ‘inherently’ valuable.

### 2.3 Approaching Intrinsic Value

When dealing with the concept or perception of ‘intrinsic’ value, a key question is: “What exactly is meant by those who say we are interested in a work of art for its own sake, on account of its intrinsic value, as an end in itself?” (Scruton, 2011, p. 15). The difficulty in finding answers is highlighted by the various angles through which the question has been approached, and vast numbers of contradictory opinions that emerge, particularly when considering this question as a philosophical one. Tracing these discussions back to “the dawn of western philosophy in ancient Greece,” Zimmerman (2010) points out that philosophers have long considered intrinsic value “to lie at the heart of ethics,” and “crucial to a variety of moral judgments,” in the same way that “judgments about moral virtue and vice also turn on questions of intrinsic value” (p. 1). As he highlights, however, over the last hundred years, the underlying concept of intrinsic value has come under “sustained scrutiny” (p. 2) and has been subjected to “doubts about its metaphysical implications, its moral significance and even its very coherence” (p. 10). Across a range of perspectives highlighted in his survey, including conceptual,
epistemological, ontological, phenomenological or metaphysical, the nature and existence of intrinsic value remain hotly contested.

This thesis has no aspirations to resolve this debate, or tackle the topic in relation to music in philosophical terms. It suffices to say that this same elusive and contentious ground underpins the debate and variety of opinions on intrinsic value as it relates to Western classical music. These range from a ‘purely aesthetic’ approach to music, where intrinsic value is placed in the work itself and removed from the concerns of the individual, to one that places music’s value as an integral and intrinsic part of the human experience. When considering the act of performance as a bridge between these two perspectives – the moment when the abstract is translated into communication with an audience – these various approaches to intrinsic value could then be broadly classified under the categories of aesthetic, social (or sociological) and experiential (or performative). These three categories are explored in brief below.

McCarthy et al. (2004) point out that, “the dominant tradition in Anglo-American aesthetics over the past century has emphasized that the experience of art is separate from ordinary experience and that the appreciation of art should be disinterested, insulated from life, and its own reward” (p. 38). As Cook (1998) confirms, “the artistic vision of classical aesthetics is in every way exclusive. It is based on the idea of the masterwork, whose value is intrinsic and eternal, regardless of whether anyone appreciates it or not” (p. 82). Johnson (2002) similarly observes, it “is based on an understanding of music as defined primarily by the musical work and its inward, intrinsic, and objective properties, and only secondarily in terms of listeners’ responses to it” (p. 27).

Scruton traces this idea – and the rise of modern western aesthetics – back to Shaftesbury’s *Characteristics* of 1711, in which he “explained the peculiar feature of the judgement of beauty in terms of the disinterested attitude of the judge. To be interested in beauty is to set all interests aside, so as to attend to the thing in itself” (2011, p. 22). Kant further explored this concept in detail in his *Critique of Judgement* of 1790, where the act of contemplating something beautiful with a “disinterested interest” was aligned with a purposelessness, or rather, “purposefulness without purpose” (1790/1987, §10). As Graham (1997) points out, “these two concepts – ‘contemplation’ and ‘distance’ are the principal elements in what has come to be known as ‘the aesthetic attitude’” (p. 20); one considered by Kant and others since as integral to an appreciation of beauty, whether in art, music or nature. As Scruton further explains of this attitude:

> Once our interests have been set aside, we sympathize in a way that we cannot normally afford in our daily transactions. It would be plausible to suggest that this defines one aim
of art: to present imaginary worlds, towards which we can adopt, as part of an integral aesthetic attitude, a posture of impartial concern. (2011, p. 90)

However, as Carritt (1910) observed over one hundred years ago, “crossing and confusing” this attitude is a distinction between “taking pleasure in things for what they are, or are imagined to be, for themselves” and “for their effect” upon us. The latter, he argues, affords the object with an extrinsic value (p. 25). Indeed as alluded to earlier, there is an inherent paradox in aesthetic claims that music is highly valuable to us, yet this intrinsic value lies in its ‘purposelessness,’ or our ‘disinterested’ contemplation of it. Reflecting the broader philosophical ambiguity of this topic, many have since countered the existence of an intrinsically aesthetic, inherently objective value of art, or the possibility of an impersonal, ‘disinterested’ attitude in order to appreciate it. Indeed, Dissanayake (1995) suggests:

Philosophers concerned with art have concluded that art no longer exists (if it ever did) in a vacuum or ideal realm for its own sake, with its sacred essence waiting to be discovered, but must be considered as it appears in and is dependent on a particular social context. (p. 41).

Arguing this sociological perspective in musical terms, DeNora (2000) points out that music’s meaning, or “affect” is “the product of ‘human-music interaction’ […] constituted reflexively, in and through the practice of articulating or connecting music with other things” (p. 33). Additionally, she observes, “the vocabulary of using music to achieve what you ‘need’ is a common discourse of the self” (p. 40). This essentially then is an “appropriation” of music “into something extra-musical, something social” (p. 70). Bowman (2005) highlights the underlying contention: “To say music’s value is intrinsic is to claim it is self-evident: that it somehow exists without any connections to anything else. But all value is human value, and human value is value-for something” (p. 127).

Budd (1995) similarly argues that artistic value is essentially “anthropocentric” and that “the idea of artistic value must be unpacked in terms of a person’s finding it intrinsically rewarding to undergoing the experience the work offers” (pp. 38-39). Echoing this perspective, Graham (2005) points out, “music is uniquely human […] music is something that human beings make” (p. 94). Further, he observes, music is “not an art object, the sonic equivalent of a painting; it is a performance. The music resides in the activity itself, not in its outcome […] the essence of activity is not contemplation, but participation” (p. 155). This approach is also strongly advocated by Small (1998), whose concept of ‘musicking’ has gained wide following.

When viewing intrinsic value from this experiential perspective, we encounter issues of more direct relevance for the performing musician. For example, McCarthy et al. (2004) argue: “The
intrinsic benefits derived from the experience are what motivate individuals to become involved in the arts. Indeed, only by focusing on individual experience can one understand how individuals become drawn to the arts in the first place” (p. 70). Parncutt (2007) similarly observes that “intrinsic motivation, such as the pleasure of reward of practicing for its own sake” is “an important prerequisite for any long-term practice program” (p. 8), a concept explored in detail by Csikszentmihályi, (1991) with the aim of achieving a state of ‘flow’. Or, as Gabrielsson (2003) suggests, above all factors, “the elusive intrinsic rewards offered by close contact with this phenomenon called music” account for musicians choosing to remain in what is a challenging profession (p. 254).

However, these more recent social and ‘anthropocentric’ perspectives continue to generate much debate (cf. Zangwill, 1992 on Dickie, 1964 The Myth of the Aesthetic Attitude; Johnson, 2002, p. 112 and Scruton, 2011, pp. 52-54 on the ideological arguments of Bourdieu, 1984 and Eagleton, 1990; or Kukla, 2006 and Ginsborg, 2008 for further discourse). Indeed, there are a number of prominent voices that continue to maintain the rhetoric if not the aesthetic ideas behind ‘intrinsic’ value in music (e.g., Dorter, 1990; Budd, 1995; Reimer, 2009; Johnson, 2002; and Scruton, 2011). For example, while Scruton (2011) acknowledges that speaking of ‘purposiveness without purpose’ serves only to “intensify the mystery” (p. 66), he still argues:

Even if it is not yet clear what is meant by intrinsic value, we have no difficulty in understanding someone who says, of a picture or a piece of music that appeals to him, that he could look at it or listen to it forever, and that it has, for him, no other purpose than itself. (p. 15)

Thus, views on the intrinsic value of music remain divided. There are those who see music as art, with an intrinsic value independent of a human’s contemplation of it or its social function; and those who see music and its ‘intrinsic’ benefits as inherently connected to the beings that generate it within social contexts. In both cases, however, this value is difficult to quantify, and intricately woven into the perceptions of the producers and recipients of the art. In this sense the concept of music having intrinsic value is not only ambiguous, but its elusive nature may indeed qualify it as being inherently intangible.

2.4 Intangible and Ineffable

An obvious problem in these discussions, and indeed at the core of this thesis, is that we are dealing with concepts that are challenging to quantify or even verbalise. As Budd explicitly states, “artistic value is not a measurable quantity” (1995, p. 42), or as McCarthy et al. (2004) observe, “intrinsic benefits of the arts are intangible and difficult to define. They lie beyond the traditional quantitative tools of the social sciences, and often beyond the language of common
experience” (p. 37). Highlighting this in musical terms, Temmerman (1991) points out: “The intrinsic philosophy is about the unique function of music, as a significant symbolic mode available to individuals, to express symbolically that which cannot be represented by language” (1991, p. 152).

In other words, some essential aspects of music can be said to be intangible and ineffable. As discussed in Chapter One, while much of the literature uses these terms interchangeably, in this thesis, I use the word ‘intangible’ primarily to refer to it being impossible to grasp or quantify, and ‘ineffable’ to refer to its resistance to being captured in words. Both of these can be seen as playing a role in the views outlined in the previous section. While the art for art’s sake argument inspired by Kant’s aesthetic legacy is considered dubious, the intangible and ineffable play a significant role here also, evident in Budd’s summary of Kant’s “aesthetic idea”:

An aesthetic idea is defined (apparently) as a representation of the imagination that induces much thought but to which no concepts can be adequate, so that is in ineffable, that is, cannot be rendered fully intelligible in language […]. Accordingly, an aesthetic idea cannot form the sensory core of a state of knowledge, which requires that a representation should be brought under a concept. (Budd, 1995, p. 33)

Thus, beyond – and bridging – the controversy surrounding ‘intrinsic’ value, there appears to be a perception that music’s value is inseparable from its inherently intangible and ineffable nature. As Selwood (2002) confirmed, when reporting on the first attempt to collect and analyse statistics about the arts in the UK twenty years ago, “this exercise inevitably attracted the scorn of those who believed that the concept of the arts, is, by definition, ‘elusive and indefinable and that any attempt to measure it cannot begin to represent its essential quality’.” Since then, she adds, “not much has changed” (pp. 1-2).

Indeed, the following sample of musicians’ opinions serves to highlight that this elusive quality has been, and continues to be considered by many as the unique value and potential of music. Additionally, reflecting the ambiguities discussed in the previous section, while celebrating music’s intangible or ineffable nature, these voices emphasise its value as either intrinsic to the human condition or as a means of accessing a realm beyond it. According to Nickson, music “is not only a sensual art, but captures the expression and feeling of the intangible, in a way not possible in other art forms.” (1967, p. 17). Barenboim similarly argues:

This intangible substance that is expressible only through sound […] cannot be defined as having merely a mathematical, a poetic, or a sensual content. It is all those things and much more. It has to do with the condition of being human. (2009, p. 12)

For composer MacDowell, music is as “a language of the intangible, a kind of soul-language” (in Pesce, 2012). Or, as the former Dean of the Sydney Conservatorium of Music observed, “if
we succeed as a performer we step into the intangible” (K. Walker, personal communication, September 13, 2005).

Others have suggested that music enables access to a realm otherwise intangible to humans. Goodall (2001) suggests “this sense in which music seems to come from beyond the frontiers of our knowledge and understanding is key to its place in our lives” (p. 225). Beethoven is quoted as claiming that “music is the one incorporeal entrance into the higher world of knowledge which comprehends mankind but which mankind cannot comprehend” (in Sullivan, 1960, p. 4). E.T.A. Hoffman similarly proposed, “music reveals to man an unknown realm, a world quite separate from the outer sensual world surrounding him, a world in which he leaves behind all feelings circumscribed by intellect in order to embrace the inexpressible” (in Charlton, 1989, p. 236). Or as Goldman argues:

The peculiar and most inclusive value of music lies precisely in its presenting to us an alternative world, in which we can be actively, but not practically, engaged. The way in which this world is truly alternative or different connects with the felt ineffability of musical experience, with the very difficulty we have been having in expressing in words its value. (1992, p. 39)

Many have spoken of the ineffable quality of music. Dunsby (2012) places the ineffable at the heart of music-making. In his entry on “Performance” in *Grove Music Online*, he outlines the basic elements of musical performance as “understanding, actuality and the ineffable,” explaining of the latter:

The ‘ineffable’ can be discussed under many different rubrics – artistry, charisma, inspiration, magic, star quality – none of which can ever quite capture a quality to which performers would nevertheless not aspire if they did not believe that audiences were acutely sensitive to it.

This appears to be supported by musicians and non-musicians alike. Johnson observes that, “few people would deny that music lends itself to a breadth of personal experience and understanding that often exceeds that of language” (2002, p. 79). More specifically, Scruton argues, “the listener to Bach’s Double Violin Concerto, to Beethoven’s last Quartets, or to Bruckner’s Ninth Symphony, will certainly be granted an experience of a meaning ‘too deep for words’” (1994, p. 516).

Aldous Huxley suggested that “after silence, that which comes nearest to expressing the inexpressible is music” (in Sheldon, 2004, p. 367), and orator Robert Ingersoll highlighted, music is “below and before speech, and it is above and beyond all words” (in Pradier, 2011, p. 46). The poet Alphonse de Lamartine considered music to be “the literature of the heart; it commences where speech ends” (in Meelberg, 2009, p. 324). Expressing an oft-cited opinion,
Mahler argued, “if a composer could say what he had to say in words he would not bother trying to say it in music” (in Jensen, 2011, p. 1). There are, no doubt, many more claims such as these to be found amongst musicians.

The idea that the essence or intrinsic value of music is ‘beyond words’ is crucial to address before asking musicians to talk about it. While the notion that music is a language is a deeply embedded one, debate about the relationship between the two has been long-standing. It lies at the heart of philosophical discourse from the second half of the eighteenth century onwards, when “the Enlightenment assumption that truth can be represented only in semantically determinate language” was questioned, along with the idea that the feelings aroused by music could “be articulated via the objective ways of naming them” (Bowie, 2012). As Goehr (2012) points out, the discourse continues, with philosophers increasingly embracing cognitive psychology and science in their efforts to tackle the question of whether, and how music can be described “as a ‘language’ or ‘code’, whose fundamental principles of organization [are] analogous to those of verbal language and other semiotic systems.”

In tracing the various approaches to this question over the twentieth century, from structural linguistics, semiotics, and theories of “generative grammar” or a “universal ‘deep structure’,” Goehr (2012) highlights the latter, and the work of Lerdahl and Jackendoff (1983) as the most promising. As she notes, according to their theory, mental representation in the act of listening “is governed by a musical grammar, by analytical and innate rules stored in the unconscious mind that allow us to represent what is given to us in hearing as a coherent or intelligible structure.” Yet, Goehr points out, while some have interpreted this model as highlighting “the strong cognitive and conceptual dimension of listening,” others have used it to “stress music’s non-conceptual or ineffable meaning.”

Susanne Langer (1942/1957; 1953) presents one example of the latter, in proposing that through symbols, meaning could be communicated in a way that was “incommunicable by ordinary, public discourse. Symbols, through non-discursive form, achieved cognitive weight and force equal to the original experience. As such, they transmitted knowledge of the ineffable” (Brand, 1998; see also Sparshott & Cumming, 2012). Langer described music as a symbolic “formulation and representation of emotions, moods, mental tensions and resolutions – a ‘logical picture’ of sentient, responsive life, a source of insight.” As she argued, not only can music “present emotions and moods we have not felt, passions we did not know before,” music “articulates subtle complexes of feeling that language cannot even name, let alone set forth” (1957, p. 222).
However, in challenging approaches that “privilege the linguistic over other modes of semiotic activity, and the propositional over other modes of mental life, including feeling” (Sparshott & Cumming, 2013), Langer’s ideas have been controversial. This is perhaps not surprising given she herself acknowledged that hers is “the field of ‘intuition,’ ‘deeper meaning,’ ‘artistic truth’, ‘insight,’ and so forth. A dangerous-looking sector, indeed, for the advance of a rational spirit!” (1957, p. 92). Representing a concise example of the numerous critical evaluations (Brand, 1998; Innis, 2012), in his survey of Aesthetics in Grove Music Online, Bowie (2012) concludes: “The strict division Langer requires between music and language therefore not only fails to theorize language adequately but also fails to do justice to key aspects of music.”

Thus, the question of whether music can be deemed a language ‘proper,’ or contains a meaning that can be made tangible, continues to be debated. Notably however, the emphasis of much of the philosophical discourse thus far appears to be on music reception, or “the perceptual features of listening” (Goehr, 2012), with little attention to how musicians or performers approach or deal with the ‘language’ of music (cf. Bowie, 2009, pp. 30-31). For example, in his cross-disciplinary consideration of the relationship between music and language Metaphor and Musical Thought, Spitzer (2004) provides a “synthesis of a wide range of fields: music history and theory, philosophy, aesthetics, semiotics, hermeneutics, art history, linguistics, literature, science, and theology” (Weiner, 2005, p. 775). As Weiner points out, “his work should appeal to music historians and theorists, and students of philosophy and aesthetics” (p. 775). Yet, noticeably absent here is any reference to practitioners or performers.

Acknowledging the challenge of ascribing words to the meaning of music, composer Aaron Copland suggests that musicians might simply not feel inclined to bother tackling it:

> How close should the intelligent music lover wish to come to pinning a definite meaning to any particular work? No closer than a general concept, I should say. Music expresses, at different moments, serenity or exuberance, regret or triumph, fury or delight. It expresses each of these moods, and many others, in a numberless variety of subtle shadings and differences. It may even express a state of meaning for which there exists no adequate word in any language. In that case, musicians often like to say that it has only a purely musical meaning. They sometimes go farther and say that all music has only a purely musical meaning. What they really mean is that no appropriate word can be found to express the music’s meaning and that, even if it could, they do not feel the need of finding it. (Copland, 2002, p. 14)

Yet, as is demonstrated by the large body of literature on music, there is an ongoing need for words to augment music in classical performance culture. As Cook (1998) observes:

> Maybe Elvis Costello (if it was Elvis Costello) had a point when he said that writing about music was like dancing about architecture. But the point is that we do it all the
same. We use words to say what music cannot say, to say what we mean by music, what music means to us. And in the end, it is largely words that determine what music does mean to us. (Foreword)

Indeed, Rink observes, writing about music is “an act which for some has been as compelling as the need to perform is for many performers” (2002b, p. xiii).

However, expressing a widely held opinion, Johnson (2004) argues that even when we do write about music, the real meaning of it still eludes us:

That music is a thing of mystery and wonder that eludes the grasp of words is a truism to which we all pay lip-service […]. We all know that music is radically other to the words with which we approach it, and yet, in our busy professional lives, where music becomes the object of our scholarly enquiry, we work ‘as if’ that were not so. To be sure, we may produce valuable and fascinating work – as history, criticism, theory, philosophy, or analysis. But somewhere, like a ghost in the machine, the music haunts such systems to which it remains perpetually elusive. (p. 643)

Highlighting the challenge, Dunsby observes, “writing about pieces of music, about such ineffable and mercurial phenomena, becomes at least doubly elusive when anyone is writing about the performance of pieces of music” (2002, p. 226).

The French philosopher Jankélévitch explores this tension in his 1961 publication *Music and the Ineffable*, which (surprisingly or significantly) was only translated into English in 2003. As Jankélévitch argues, “music does not exist in itself but only in the dangerous half-hour where we bring it into being by playing it,” and in an opinion that is not uncommon among musicians, “music is not made to be spoken of, but for one to do; it is not made to said, but to be ‘played.’” No. Music was not invented to be talked about” (2003, pp. 78-79). Yet he does write about it, and according to Davidson, “more passionately and more persuasively” than any other philosopher of this century (in Jankélévitch 2003, p. vii).

Abbate suggests that Jankélévitch’s success, and perhaps one of the reasons an English version was so long coming, may lie in the “force and strangeness” of his writing, which is “a reproach to academic prose in every language” (in Jankélévitch 2003, p. xvi). Crucially, she observes:

So much of what he says disturbs the comfortable state of musicology (old and new alike) […] by insisting that music is a material phenomenon in time. Seeing musical works as temporal, as a form of Becoming, means that they are not structures. Jankélévitch dismantles the claims of musical semantics and exposes the suspect metaphysical urge that underlies musical hermeneutics. (p.xvii)

Indeed, Jankélévitch’s most tangible explanation of the ineffable occurs in his concept of ‘Charm,’ which he adapts from the mystic philosopher Henri Bremond. Described poetically in
various ways by Jankélévitch, “charm is graceful, without complacency, knowing no changes of heart or mind, no backtrackings upon reflections; it is the efferent force [...] that converts us every time” (p. 89). The charm he suggests “has something nostalgic and precarious about it, some unknowable something having to do with insufficiency and incompleteness, which heightens itself through the effect of time” (p. 96). Significantly, he argues, “technical analysis is a means of refusing to abandon oneself spontaneously to grace, which is the request the musical charm is making” (p. 102). As Abbate notes, while difficult to translate, this is an “aesthetic phenomenon to which we react not passively but actively, by being changed, changing ourselves [...] one is transformed in response to it” (p. xviii).

Serving as an example of what Abbate suggests might disturb musicologists about such approaches, in his preface to Beethoven’s Piano Sonatas: A Short Companion, Rosen (2002a, p. xi) describes his distaste for the types of writing that can result when others try to translate what may very well be a transcendent musical experience into words:

I have always despised the writing about music that tries to substitute for the music a kind of pseudo-poetry or, even worse, the sort of facile philosophical speculation that leads readers to believe that they will be engaged in an exalted activity when listening to Beethoven [...]. There is no question, of course, that the music of Beethoven often made a claim to reach the sublime, and that he believed that the experience of great music transcended the day-to day experience of our ordinary lives. Translating this experience into words does not, however, make it more accessible, only more commonplace. Posing a pertinent question in this regard, Barten (1998) asks: “Is all talk about music that does not use standard technical vocabulary nothing more than ‘impressionistic twaddle’ [...] The purists insist that music itself, absolute music, resists efforts at description; its interest lies in the ‘notes themselves.’” She argues however, “on the contrary, language is sometimes valuable, if not essential, in conveying certain aspects of music experience and performance” and particularly, “figurative language” (p. 89).

The necessity of embracing metaphor when dealing with music has been well documented across a variety of music-related disciplines (Barten, 1998; Lindström, Juslin, Bresin, & Williamon, 2003; Sheldon, 2004; Woody, 2006; Schippers, 2006). As Johnson (2004, p. 645) observes:

All the terms with which we attempt to grasp hold of music are always and only metaphors and analogies redrawing the lines between the ungraspable nature of music – resistant to logical schemes at every turn – and the structures in which we seek to ‘make sense’ of it.

Reimer (2009) argues that this is true also of the musical experience:

We must keep in mind, when examining verbal reports of musical experiences, that we
are thrown, by necessity, into the realm of metaphor, imagery, euphemism, figurative language of various sorts, because those are the only modes of language in which inner experience can be expressed. (p. 44)

Echoing Reimer, Campbell (2001) suggests that metaphor is essential in order to approach the “really ineffable mystery that is just the existence, the being of ourselves and of our world.” Further, he argues, “if we give that mystery an exact meaning we diminish the experience of its real depth” (p. 9).

Metaphor then, can be considered a signpost for what is intangible, a means by which to approach and deal with the intangible, and quite possibly, the only way to represent in words what is otherwise intangible in music. As Johnson (2004) suggests, “speaking about music is an attempt to mediate the worlds of the ineffable and the rational, not to reduce one to the other” (p. 647). Reiterating the important role that words play in our experience of music, Cook argues, “the languages we use of music, the stories that we tell about it, help to determine what music is – what we mean by it, and what it means to us” (1998, p. 14).

However, as it evident from the above, the way in which words are used, and indeed the question of whether they should be when approaching the intangible or ineffable aspects of music appears to be a sensitive topic, and informs the way musicians speak about it. This is particularly true when dealing with concepts such as the metaphysical, mystical, or transcendent.

2.5 Sacred and Symbolic

Goldman suggests that music’s “peculiar value lies in the purity of its revelation of the human spirit” (1992, p. 43). Reimer observes that the underlying inference here is a sacred one, and would be “interpreted quite naturally by people as being connected to the divine, the spiritual” (2009, p. 53). Indeed, returning to the moral and metaphysical elements of philosophical discourse on intrinsic value noted by Zimmerman (p. 38 above), while not always initially explicit, arguments that position intrinsic value as removed from ‘human’ concerns very often imply, or conclude, by directly implicating the spiritual.

As Scruton suggests when further considering the ‘mystery’ associated with aesthetic and intrinsic value, “the beautiful and the sacred are adjacent in our experience” and “our feelings for the one are constantly spilling over into the territory claimed by the other” (2011, p. 66). Presenting a similar argument from a neuropsychological perspective, D'Aquili and Newberg (2000) have suggested that similarities in brain functions between aesthetic experiences and
those reported in spiritual and mystic states “allows for the development of an Aesthetic-
Religious Continuum” (p. 39). Anecdotal evidence suggests that musicians themselves perceive
such connections. For example, when asked why music is valuable, prominent Australian
pianist Geoffrey Lancaster suggested such questions are just a “hop, skip and a jump to
metaphysics: You ask why until you can’t ask why anymore and you inevitably get to God”
(personal communication, 2007).

Music and art have long been associated with the divine, as symbolic of the sacred, or, in more
recent times, as substitutions for their absence in society. Indeed, Cook (1998) observes, during
the nineteenth century “as conventional religion succumbed to the onslaught of science,” many
considered music as providing “an alternative route to spiritual consolation” (pp. 36-37).
Scruton (2011) argues that while “not all works of art are sacred things […] they are, or have
been, part of the continuing human attempt to idealize and sanctify the objects of experience”
(p. 152). Further, he suggests, “in an age of declining faith art bears enduring witness to the
spiritual hunger and immortal longings of our species. […] Even for the unbeliever, therefore
the ‘real presence’ of the sacred is now one of the highest gifts of art” (p. 156). Johnson echoes
and clarifies this point: “[Art] does not necessarily deliver an experience most people would call
religious, but art, even when it is most obviously concerned with the secular, implies something
beyond itself, and in this sense it is metaphysical” (2002, p. 87).

As highlighted by Temmerman (p. 42 above), many consider music’s intrinsic value to lie in its
ability to act as a symbolic reference to what may be unspeakable or – as others emphasise –
unknowable by other means (also reflecting Langer’s approach, p. 44 above). Presenting a
parallel to claims that intrinsic value can be compromised by focusing on the extrinsic,
utilitarian or instrumental, there are those who suggest that the sacred – and the symbolic to
which it is strongly linked – is threatened if conceptualised, cognised, or commercialised. In
discussing the powerful and ubiquitous role of symbol in our lives, Jung (1990) observed:
To be effective, a symbol must be by its very nature unassailable […]. It must also be
sufficiently remote from comprehension to resist all attempts of the critical intellect to
break it down; and finally, its aesthetic form must appeal so convincingly to our feelings
that no argument can be raised against it on that score. (p. 237)
As he further argued, “a symbol loses its magical or, if you prefer, its redeeming power as soon
as its liability to dissolve is recognized” (p. 237).

Others will present even stronger reasons for not approaching the symbolic in either word or
thought. While Astrachann (2005) suggests that “naming the unnameable” is “the place and
space of sublime artistic and analytical reflection and endeavor” and “the quintessential human
activity par excellence,” he also warns:
Attempting to trace a path from speech and language, image and symbol, and action and behavior, to the unrepresentable core of our being […] necessarily lies along the border between madness and ecstasy, with all of its attendant risks of Dionysiac dissolution, disintegration, and destruction. (abstract)

Many writing in the domain of spirituality will similarly warn against talking or even thinking too much about what is sacred. Krishnamurti provides one example: “God is something that cannot be talked about, that cannot be described, that cannot be put into words, because it must ever remain the unknown.” Thinking about it he argues “only brings more confusion, more sorrow to man” (in Vardey, 1995, pp. 7-8).

Speaking on artistic symbols in 1831, Carlyle noted they can “have both an extrinsic and intrinsic value.” The former, he suggests, have no “divineness, or even worth,” while the latter are the “Highest of all Symbols” and “true Works of Art.” Yet, he argued, if these “have acquired an extrinsic” worth over time, the “sacredness” is “evaporated out of them” (chapter III). Over 150 years later, Scruton (2011) similarly argues that art cannot survive in a “world of commodities to be consumed, rather than icons to be revered. True art is an appeal to our higher nature, an attempt to affirm that other kingdom in which moral and spiritual order prevails” (pp. 159-160). Johnson (2002, p. 86) also observes that when art becomes a “commodity and artifact” it loses its extraordinary and magical aura, and indeed function:

One subscribed to this illusory auratic quality of art because it served as a symbol for our belief that objects, including ourselves and the world, might also be sacred, that they might be more than the sum of their parts. The loss of art’s aura is thus more than a demystification, a deconstruction of art’s magical properties; it is also coterminous with the triumph of a materialism that reduces the world and ourselves to the status of things. Further, he suggests, “this is why the power of an art form like classical music is neutralized in today’s culture: it ceases to work when it is treated as simply a thing among others, a thing to be used by and for the subject” (p. 86).

There are many who have suggested that ‘the sacred,’ whether from a religious, philosophical, aesthetic or personal perspective has largely, if not completely, disappeared in the dominant discourses of modern western society. Stone (2005) points out that while philosophy has historically been “closely connected to religion and speculative theology,” in most Western societies it “has become a secular discipline” (p. 1798). Hammerstein observes this trend more broadly, noting its impact on music: “In the post-baroque period the preconditions of the old metaphysical ideas disappear everywhere […]. Music is henceforth based solely on this-worldly principles, its origin lies in the human heart or within itself. It is the expression of human feelings or cherished for its own sake, a purely aesthetic phenomenon” (1973a, p. 267).
Others suggest that this human, emotional and aesthetic perspective is also at risk of disappearing. Dissanayake (2000) observes that while historically “the arts have been a way of treating the inner life and its concerns seriously” this was only “until quite recently” (p. 223). DeNora (2000) points out that even “sociological discourse itself is biased against the perception of the aesthetic dimension in modern life;” and reports a widespread feeling that “the aesthetic and sensuous bases of human subjectivity and human activity have been eroded by the tide of rational administration and rational, calculative modes of consciousness” (p. 155). Thus, when delving more deeply into the discrepancy of voices on music’s nature and value we encounter a far more complex and contentious layering of concerns about potential threats to a perceived intrinsic value of music; from a focus on measurable outcomes at the expense of what is immeasurable about music, to the commercial, cognitive, rational and secular at the expense of the aesthetic, the human, the symbolic, and the sacred.

The scientific revolution has been implicated by many as influential in this regard, as Lehrer (2007) argues, “in our own time, art is a necessary counterbalance to the glories and excesses of scientific reductionism, especially as they are applied to human experience” (p. 197). Broks similarly highlights the limits of an approach based on scientific paradigms when dealing with the ambiguities of personal experience (in Ritchie, Broks, & Mitchell, 2007). Expressing what appears to be an underlying concern for many such voices, Bertrand Russell argued: “Science tells us what we can know, but what we can know is very little, and if we forget how much we cannot know we become insensitive to many things of very great importance” (1945, p. 14).

2.6 The Two Cultures: Measuring and Making Music

The various perspectives outlined above point to a broader perceived dichotomy between the arts and the sciences, most prominently notable in diverging methodologies, aims and agendas. In coining the now famous phrase ‘the two cultures’ in 1959, Snow suggested that “the intellectual life of the whole of Western society is increasingly being split into two polar groups,” consisting of scientists on the one hand and literary scholars, humanists and artists on the other. Between the two, he observed, is “a gulf of mutual incomprehension […] hostility and dislike, but most of all lack of understanding” (1998, p. 4).

Pointing to the underlying tension that still remains a half-century later, Lehrer (2007) argues that the view that “the humanities should be ‘rationalized,’ their ‘lack of empiricism’ corrected by reductionist science” fails to account for “the many different ways of describing reality, each of which is capable of generating truth.” Art, he counters, “is not reducible to physics” (pp. 191-
This dichotomy of views reflects an even longer running and underlying epistemological debate, as Dorter observes:

The tradition that there is a non-rational kind of knowing that rivals or even surpasses rational knowledge is as old as philosophy itself, and even Plato speaks of the ancient conflict between poetry and philosophy [...]. In the modern period the dispute over whether the disclosure of truth is best attained by conceptual or aesthetic means has not figured prominently in the English tradition, where empirical science and therefore the rational, conceptual model of knowledge has always been the dominant criterion. (1990, p. 37)

While some have observed that a third culture has since emerged, in which scientists are translating their findings to the general public (Brockman, 1996), this has done little to bridge the divide, as Lehrer (2007) highlights, “there is still no dialogue of equals. Scientists and artists continue to describe the world in in-commensurate languages” (p. 191). This perceived divide may have been enhanced by the increased communication of a particularly scientific viewpoint, as the following example from several (similar) audience responses to a 2007 BBC radio program “The New Two Cultures” highlights: “Scientists go out of their way to make their ideas accessible. Artists often seek to obscure their message as much as possible in the belief that the more obscure and inaccessible it is, the better” (Bryden, in BBC Radio 4, 2007). This opinion is widespread, notes Johnson (2002), and closely tied in with accusations of “elitism” that have been “frequently employed with reference to classical music and to art and high culture more generally.” As he observes, the “usual criticism” is that, “not only do those involved in high culture have pretensions about themselves; they also seek to defend that space by discourses designed to alienate others and deny them access” (pp. 83-84).

Conversely, however, Rink suggests, “performers often understand music along the same lines as those carrying out ‘rigorous analysis,’ but in different terms – a parallelism that we ignore at our peril” (2002c, p. 39). This raises the question of whether musicians deliberately obscure the process of their music-making, or “celebrate their bafflement” as Dennett suggests, (in Dennett & Mitchell, 2006). Or, do they, as Lehrer and Rink argue, simply talk a different language? It is by considering the relationship between these ‘two’ cultures in the context of musical expression – a topic of increasing interest to scientists, and central to music performance and pedagogy – that the underlying tensions and challenges in realising a more balanced and inclusive perspective to the intangible in music-making can be further clarified.

In 1860, Berlioz referred to music as “the science of the impalpable, the imponderable, the ungraspable” (in Haskell, 1996, p. 133). Recognition of such elusiveness led Charles Darwin to note in 1871: “As neither the enjoyment nor the capacity of producing musical notes are
faculties of the least use to man in reference to his daily habits of life, they must be ranked amongst the most mysterious with which he is endowed” (1981, p. 333). However, with advances in technology during the twentieth century, researchers from a variety of fields are coming to a “greater scientific and theoretical understanding of the mental processes underlying such activities as the perception and cognition of music” (ICMPC, 2001). As neuroscientist Zatorre confirmed in 2005, “investigators are convinced that music can yield valuable information about how the brain works: they believe that the study of the brain and the study of music can be mutually revealing” (pp. 312-313).

In addition to measuring how our mind behaves in response to music, science and its many subdisciplines (including psychology) are increasingly investigating the more expressive, yet elusive factors of music performance. As Palmer observed as early as 1997, “scientific study of music performance has witnessed tremendous growth in the past ten years, due to both technological advances and theoretical interest from the related fields of psychoacoustics, biomechanics, artificial intelligence, computer music, music theory, and music education” (1997, p. 134). Of particular interest to scientists has been the challenging question of why particular performances are so “extraordinarily emotionally and aesthetically appealing” (Sloboda & Ball, 2008), one that leads to the larger question of how music is expressive, which Davies (2012) notes “has been the major preoccupation of Anglo-American philosophers of music in recent decades.”

Acknowledging the complexity of the topic, psychologists Juslin and Sloboda (2001) pointed out in Music and Emotion – “the first scientific anthology” devoted to the subject – that “after a long time of regarding music and emotion as an ‘off-limits’ topic scientists are returning to the field to address what may be the most exciting aspect of musical behaviour: its affective consequences” (p. 6). However, as they also observed, “the psychology of emotion in general is far more advanced than the psychology of emotion as applied to music” (p. 457). Zatorre similarly noted in 2005 that neuroscience is still a long way from “having anything like a model of the processes going on” in how the brain perceives emotion in music (p. 315). Indeed, while technology had enabled much progress, challenges remain when attempting to quantify and account for the emotional and expressive aspects of music in performance.

From a survey conducted in 2003 on the growing number of papers presenting empirical research on music performance, Gabrielson reported that the majority focused on measuring such factors as timing and dynamics, and most were based on piano or keyboard performance (pp. 226-228). Repp presents as one of the most prolific researchers in this field (see Repp, 1996, 1997, 1998, 1999). As Repp reported however in 1999, from a study of over one-hundred recordings of a Chopin Etude, while “timing and dynamics are often considered the two most
important parameters of expression in piano performance” (p. 475), objective measurements of these alone failed to account for the expressive and aesthetic appeal when they were assessed by musically-qualified judges. He suggested in his conclusion at the time:

The author suspects that the aesthetically most important aspect of the performances was the elusive quality often referred to as ‘‘tone’’ or ‘‘touch’’. This remains the most poorly understood aspect of pianistic skill, but quite possibly the most crucial one [...] there is still a large gap between objective performance analysis and our understanding of the aesthetic impact of a performance. (1999, p. 476)

Gabrielsson (2003) also highlights that many within the scientific community are employing computer technology in an attempt to establish rules to account for the expression of emotion (pp. 230-235). These include models based on cognitive feedback (Juslin, Friberg, & Bresin, 2002; Juslin, 2003a/b), artificial neural networks (Bresin, 2000), Artificial Intelligence research (Widmer, 2001), “Oscillating Systems” (Langner, 2000), and those seeking answers in mathematical models (Mazzola & Beran, 1998). Yet, Gabrielsson argues, these models are currently limited in scope:

An all-inclusive model would have to take a lot of other aspects into consideration, such as acoustical conditions, stylistic conventions, performance practices, performers’ skills and personalities, social processes in connection with performance, and so on. This is a goal that is a long way off and that can be reached only through the accumulated efforts of many researchers. (pp. 235-236)

While technologically enhanced research into music-making is evidently still evolving, an increasing number of researchers in these fields are suggesting that performers and pedagogues will benefit from their findings. For example, while Repp highlighted the limitations of his measurements in 1999, three years later, Friberg and Battel (2002) report that “musical expression has been studied scientifically by analyzing variations in timing and dynamics in expert performances” and the principles of expression “can be taught analytically by explaining the underlying principles and techniques with computer-generated demonstrations” (p. 199).

Gabrielsson (2003) reports a range of other recommendations from researchers, including those arguing that “cognitive engagement during practice” is beneficial, “explicit instructions” and “knowledge of results” are necessary “to achieve high-level music performance,” and “explanations of high achievement in terms of innate musical talent” should be rejected (pp. 240-243).

Several years later, Parncutt (2007, pp. 1-2) similarly highlights the increase of scientific research that “can be applied to the everyday teaching and practice of music performance,” ranging from the physics, physiology, and psychology of performance; efficient practice and
motivation; musical expression; memory, sight-reading, improvisation, intonation, and performance anxiety (see Parncutt & McPherson, 2002; Rink, 2002a; Williamon, 2004; McPherson, 2006). He further cites arguments that “modern brain research is becoming increasingly relevant for musicians” (Altenmüller, Wiesendanger, & Kesselring, 2006) and that musicians should learn how to “interpret and apply the results of psychological research” in their practice (Lehmann, Sloboda, & Woody, 2007). As Parncutt suggests – somewhat ironically in the context of this discussion – “scientific research on music performance is not only interesting for its own sake; it also has important implications for post-secondary music education” (2007, p. 1).

Yet, Parncutt (2007) asks, to what extent should pedagogues “apply, or be able to apply, such research in their teaching?” (p. 2), a crucial question similarly posed by Rauscher at the 2004 international conference on perception and cognition: “Can (and should) current music cognition research influence music pedagogy?” (Rauscher, 2004). Parncutt observes a number of issues that need to be taken into account when attempting to achieve “a fruitful interaction between performance teaching and performance research” (p. 1). Referring to the recommendations of Friberg and Battel (2002) above, he suggests that the application of computer programs in music education will only be successful “if the complex relationship between specific structures and associated expressive devices can be concisely explained and illustrated by a human performer at a real instrument.” Additionally, rather than receiving “explicit instruction on specific means of musical expression,” many music students develop their expressive style “intuitively, without students or teachers analysing the detailed, note-for-note relationship between expressive parameters such as timing and dynamics” (p. 10).

Parncutt (2007) also raises concerns about analytical approaches to teaching expression based on cognitive feedback, (e.g., Juslin & Persson, 2002; Juslin, 2003a/b), noting:

> It is unclear to what extent such training can transfer from the confines of a controlled experimental situation to the concert platform and to a range of different musical styles. Besides, an overtly analytical approach may be more suitable for some personalities and cognitive styles than others. (p. 12)

Further, he observes, “performance teachers may feel that the analytical approach of this kind of teaching inhibits musical spontaneity” (p.16) and “the process of acquiring analytical knowledge about the mechanics of performance may affect student musicians’ instinct for aural exploration or their sensitivity for those mystical qualities of music that cannot be reduced to physics or rationality” (pp. 7-8).

However, Sloboda (2008) warns that we must “avoid the trap of asserting that music is so complex and ineffable that a detailed scientific understanding of it is impossible, and that it
must remain shrouded in mystery.” As he points out, “on this issue, musicians and scientists often line up on opposite sides, with musicians seeing scientists as naive over-simplifiers, and scientists regarding musicians as defensive ‘obscurantists’” (p. 33). Clearly, the degree to which performers, music pedagogues or students feel this research enlightens or encroaches on their practice is a crucial factor to consider in how the two cultures might jointly approach the intangible aspects of music-making.

In his article *Five myths about expressivity in music performance and what to do about them* Juslin (2003a) provides a striking, though far from isolated, example of opinions that can lead to tensions between scientists and musicians:

Research has indicated that expressive skills are often neglected in music education (Juslin & Persson, 2002). Why is this so? First, music teachers lack a theory that can guide their teaching of expressive skills. Second, there are certain myths about musical expressivity that are shared by many teachers and students. (p. 2)

Juslin presents the following five myths, which he argues have negatively impacted on music education: expressivity cannot be studied objectively; you must feel the emotion in order to convey it to your listeners; explicit understanding is not beneficial to learning expressivity; emotions expressed in music are very different from everyday emotions; and expressive skills cannot be learned. Several of these will be considered further in this document.

In addressing the first of these ‘myths,’ Juslin reports:

A lot has been written about expressivity by philosophers, musicologists, and musicians – often with the implication that there is something mystical about expressivity. […] This has led to the belief that expressivity is an entirely “subjective” quality which cannot (or at least should not) be described in scientific terms. Musicians are often unable, or unwilling, to define the concept of expressivity or to probe its underlying mechanisms. Does this mean that it is impossible to study expressivity objectively? Not so. Acoustic correlates of perceived expressivity can readily be obtained and manipulated in musical performances, and listeners’ judgments of expressivity can be systematically and reliably related to acoustic correlates. (2003a, p. 2)

While the challenge of talking about the emotions expressed in music is certainly acknowledged by musicians, the argument that pedagogues ‘neglect’ the crucial factor of expression is controversial. It is also difficult to ignore the implication that in being ‘unable’ to discuss it musicians are somehow lacking in intelligence, or that in being ‘unwilling’ they are just being deliberately unhelpful. Juslin is by no means the only psychologist, or scientist making such suggestions.
In their article, *Expressivity comes from within your soul* – provocative in its very title – Lindström, Juslin, Bresin, and Williamon (2003) similarly argue, “expressivity deserves more attention in music education that has hitherto been the case” (p. 23). They point to a number of reports indicating that music teaching has “traditionally” focused little on affective aspects of music performance, and “teachers spend more time on technical aspects of performance than on expressive, emotional, and aesthetic aspects” (p. 26). Particularly concerning, they note, is that “many students seemed to think of expressivity as something mysterious: ‘There is no technique to perform expressively, you have to use your soul!’” (citing Woody, 2000, p. 21). “Fortunately” they observe, “systematic investigation of emotional expression” over the last decade has enabled researchers to “make concrete suggestions concerning methods aimed at developing expressive skills.” Indeed, the goal of their research is the creation of “computer software that will allow music students to receive immediate feedback with respect to how they communicate specific emotions in their performance” (p. 24-26).

In outlining the need for such a tool, Lindström et al. (2003) acknowledge that, while “the real experts on expressivity are arguably the musicians themselves,” musicians either cannot, or will not talk about it: “Their comments on this topic are usually vague, which is additionally hampered by the fact that many musicians feel uncomfortable discussing their work” (p. 24). While they observe that a “scientific perspective on expressivity may be contrasted with the perspective of the musician,” they suggest, “it may be assumed that the views of most musicians are less clearly delineated than those of researchers” (p. 25). However, and highlighting the often ambiguous and dubious basis of their and Juslin’s rationales (notably cross-referencing a relatively small circle of similar and collaborative research), they acknowledge, “it is well-known that teachers use different strategies, such as metaphors, aural modeling, and felt emotion to teach expressive skills” but “there is little research on the effectiveness” of these (p. 27). Adding further discrepancy, they report from their own findings that “many teachers at music conservatories today spend considerable time on teaching expressive skills” though not necessarily “in a formal manner using theories based on empirical research” (pp. 38-39).

Indeed, the rationale for this, and a host of similar research suggesting that expressivity is neglected in music education – and that science and technology are needed to remedy this situation – appears to be based on the premise that what is not verbalised, quantifiable or measurable (by scientific means) is evidence of its absence. Additionally, despite resistance, there appears to be a determination to proceed with scientific solutions. For example, Lindström et al. (2003) report that of the students interviewed in their study, 68 percent felt that expressivity is dealt with by pedagogues in a way that is “just right,” and most were sceptical that “expressivity is amiable to teach through modern techniques” (pp. 36-37). Yet, even though “many musicians have a negative attitude toward using computers in music education,” often on
the basis that “computers are ‘cold’,” they support the notion that computer-based-instruction (CBI) is here to stay: “Music educators can’t afford to ignore it because it has too much to offer” (Taylor, 1981, pp. 27-28). In concluding, they maintain their argument that, teachers “must incorporate up-to-date theories and findings” and “new ways of teaching expressive skills” in order to combat “the current ‘commonsense teaching’ that relies largely on tradition and folk theory” (p. 39).

Noting the “critical resistance from performers” to such suggestions, Parncutt (2007) advises, “if researchers are to develop realistic, mutually acceptable strategies for curricular change, they must take the practitioners’ objections seriously and adjust their pedagogical strategies accordingly” (p. 16). However, Juslin and Sloboda (2001) suggest that barriers to the future progress of understanding expressivity and emotion in music involve differences between disciplinary approaches and attitudes: “Issues which seem of great importance to psychologists might seem irrelevant to musicians. Therefore what constitutes progress in this area may be a matter on which the representatives of the different disciplines will be unable to agree” (p. 461).

Juslin and Sloboda also suggest that the discipline of musicology itself must shoulder some of the responsibility:

Delayed progress in understanding musical emotions partly reflects the cultural assumptions about music that have been shared by those people most well equipped to move the field decisively forward. At the centre of these assumptions for the last 150 years or more has been the belief [in musicology] that music is epitomized by the canon of masterworks produced by a small circle of ‘great’ composers. Such works are expressions of things that the composer has grasped (which may include emotions), and the job of the listener is thus to ‘learn’. What the listener ‘feels’ is largely irrelevant to this serious task. This task is traditionally accomplished through a grasp of formal structural descriptions of the work; that is, analysis. (2001, p. 457)

Given this dominant focus on analysis, they argue, “it is inevitable that the belief should have developed that emotion is not core to music. Such a stance has contributed enormously to the disengagement of the general population from entire genres of music” (p. 458). Lindström et al. similarly point in the same direction, noting, “in certain domains, such as musicology, problems regarding expressivity have almost been regarded as ‘off-limits’ for research” (2003, pp. 23-24).

Advocating the need for a “fourth culture,” Lehrer (2007) suggests that the existing cultures will need to work together: “The humanities must sincerely engage with the sciences […]. At the same time, the sciences must recognize that their truths are not the only truths” (p. 197). While there appears to be a shared opinion that the ‘two cultures’ need to find some common ground, in investigations of expressivity and emotion in music-making, both the approaches and
findings to date seem to be too far apart to build effective bridges. Indeed, past attempts by musicologists have not necessarily proved to be successful, and as many argue, it is not only in the area of music expression that the traditions of musicology have failed to adequately account for the intangible aspects of music and music-making.

2.7 Musicology: The Gap between Research and Practice

Schippers suggests that since the late nineteenth century, in their efforts to be recognised and taken seriously as a discipline in academic environments, musicologists have felt obliged to adopt the ‘scientific’ methodologies and outlooks of the natural sciences:

Since its principles were outlined 120 years ago, traditional musicology has been predominantly modeled on approaches borrowed from science and history. Ideas emerged that structure can explain beauty, to the point of suggesting that the sound of a piece of music may be an inessential property. As a result, the analysis of written music has been a principal concern. This scored well in the field dominated by science, and dealt effectively with the inconvenience of having to explain beauty and creative processes in non-scientific terms. (2007 p. 37; cf. Adler, 1885)

While this resulted in a strong emphasis on ‘tangible’ aspects of music research such as music analysis, the inadequacies of this approach have been increasingly acknowledged in the discipline.

Duckles and Pasler (2012) report in Grove Music Online that a significant strand of musicology to emerge over the last two decades of the twentieth century is “based on the belief that the advanced study of music should be centred not just on music but also on musicians acting within a social and cultural environment.” As they note, “this shift from music as a product (which tends to imply fixity) to music as a process involving composer, performer and consumer” has led to the increasing cross-fertilisation of information and methodologies across disciplines, “some of them borrowed from the social sciences, particularly anthropology, ethnology, linguistics, sociology and more recently politics, gender studies and cultural theory.”

Goehr (2012) similarly observes amongst musicologists a “remarkable surge of recent interest” in “the connections between music and the world” and “the ordinary conditions and experiences of men’s and women’s lives – to counter the more positivistic, alienated and abstracted discourse of formalism they take to have long dominated academia.” Amongst the latter she includes “the division between composer and performer, the commodified work-concept,” the “fixed score (text),” the “ideal of correct (Werktreue) or authentic interpretation” and a focus on “the pure
Reflecting on the place of the performer in this tradition, Dunsby (2012) points out that historically the phenomenon of performance has been inadequately addressed:

The ‘work’ of music has typically taken precedence over any of its ‘realizations’. Technical commentary on music since the Middle Ages has largely been restricted to commentary on general musical practices and on notated pieces or repertories [...] music in performance was not essentially open to scientific or even philosophical inspection.

Cook (1998) similarly highlights that the performer’s voice has been largely absent, even in the very environment one would expect to find it:

It is in books on classical music that the distinction between authors and reproducers is to be found in its most literal form. For the most part, they refer to ‘music’ but are actually about composers and their works; if you look in the two capacious volumes of the New Oxford Companion to Music, for instance, or for that matter in the Rough Guide to classical music, you will find a mass of information of even the most obscure composers, but performers are conspicuous by their absence. It is like the role of servants in Victorian society: they have to be there, but you don’t have to talk about them. (pp. 13-14)

While the trend towards more inclusive musicological approaches has led to an increased interest in the performance of music, so far, the relevance to performers has been questionable. As Dunsby (1996) argues, “there is precious little” in print to assist the aspiring performer (p. 4). Noting the extremes of literature available, he observes the “persistence of structuralist approaches to ‘academic’ studies of musical performance” on the one hand, and “the impressionistic sphere” on the other, which “ripples with memoirs, guides, handbooks […] that belong on the coffee table, if they can be said to belong anywhere at all” (p. 45). Rink later concurs, noting that “recent” academic literature on performance “has offered little in the way of practical assistance” and “has tended to neglect the concerns of the performers themselves,” in particular, their interest in “the experience of music through performance” as opposed to perspectives that focus primarily on the score (2002b, pp. xi - xii).

While many conservatorium or university trained musicologists are also practicing musicians (or have been), the limited relevance of this literature to performers may be, as Cook provocatively suggests, that musicologists have “taken it upon themselves to speak for performers in a kind of ventriloquism” (2005, [23]). Yet, distinctions between musicologists and performers that were once very sharply delineated may be breaking down (Samson, 1999, p. 36). Signalling an important change of perspective in recent times, there is a growing awareness that the voices of performers themselves need to be represented. In a development somewhat
apart from traditional musicology, the last decade has seen an upsurge of performer-led, or ‘practice-based research’ in which artists or performers reflect on their own practice (e.g., Murray & Lawrence, 2000; Davidson, 2004; Schippers, 2004; Biggs, 2009; Coessens, Crispin, & Douglas, 2009; Borgdorff, 2010).

Performance teachers working within tertiary music institutions are increasingly being encouraged to engage in such reflective research regarding their studio practices. However, Parncutt (2007) points out, this may be less motivated by the performers’ concerns than “a desire to quantify how performance teachers spend their time working within higher education” (p. 2). As Parncutt observes, this interest has been influenced by broader pressures on tertiary music institutions “to improve or enlarge the academic content of their activities (teaching and research) so as to emulate the status of universities” (p. 3); “to make their goals transparent and develop strategies to achieve them as cost-efficiently as possible”; and provide “concrete success indicators” to increase their “chances of attracting funding” (p. 18).

Whether such motivations are proving successful or ideal in representing performers is questionable. Indeed, Samson’s identification in 1999 of an “institutional inertia” in resolving the “division of theory and praxis (discourse and disciplines) which is formalized by our major teaching institutions, university and conservatory” (p. 36) appears to have remained unresolved over the last decade. As Doran (2010) points out, artistic research is “still not fully accepted within the academic humanities” (p. 41), and Coessens, Crispin and Douglas (2010) highlight, it is under pressure to conform “to the dominant ideologies, criteria and methodologies of research culture” (p. 9). It is evident that this emerging subdiscipline faces a number of challenges, directly related to the longstanding epistemological divide noted by Dorter and Snow (pp. 51-52 above), and the more recent tensions from musicians to the influx of scientifically based research and recommendations. As Parncutt (2007) points out, while “the application of music performance research involves crossing a difficult boundary: that between research and practice,” there is an equally “difficult boundary within music research, namely that between the humanities and the sciences” which needs to be addressed in order to “bridge the gap between the terminologies and epistemologies of research and practice” (pp. 19-20).

In *The Artistic Turn: A Manifesto*, Coessens, Crispin, and Douglas (2010) present the case for “research in-and-through practice” or “artistic research,” arguing that all of the “more traditionally research-oriented disciplines” (including musicology) have “left out important aspects of artistic experience.” As they point out, “since the artist’s hidden creative processes seem inaccessible to scientific research and discourse, including as they do idiosyncrasy, temperament and the imagination” these aspects “have been deemed to defy analysis and therefore to escape scientific discourse” (pp. 44-45). Thus, they report, the “academic study of
art” has “neglected the artistic process for art theory, it neglected agency and creation for
description and analysis; it dealt not with the implicit, non-discursive, but with the explicit and
discursive, not with experiential, but with methodological claims” (p. 45).

In further discussing the tensions between art and science, Coessens et al. (2010) point out that
“for a hypothesis to be accepted as new scientific truth, the whole expert scientific community
must be convinced,” however “artists work in inductive and intuitive ways as individuals” (p. 55). Additionally, and presenting a significantly different epistemological perspective, they
argue that knowledge is more than what is visible or verbalisable (citing Polanyi, 1958) and
highlight the importance of personal and tacit knowledge, which is “submerged,” “embodied”
and “remains unarticulated” (p. 71). As they conclude: “Artistically situated research has a duty
to address the imbalance created by the dominance of science, and scientific methodology, in
relation to research discourse about art,” including, in particular, “the acknowledgement of the
ambiguity that lies within experience” (p. 72). Indeed, this is personal ‘data’ that can only be
gleaned from the performers themselves.

Co-author Crispin (2009) elsewhere suggests, “the study of live performance does not involve
just ‘music’, but also the imperfect being making that music” (p. 26). A “candid exploration” of
this realm, she reports, must allow “a space for an exchange of subjectivity and objectivity” and
requires the “courage” to reveal and embrace the “vulnerability” and contradictions inherent in
music-making (pp. 25-27). Referring to the ongoing divide between scholars and practitioners,
she argues: “Disciplines relating to performance need to continue to strive to work beyond their
customary ideological horizons, while understanding that factual knowledge is not the same as
the numinous ‘knowing’ of performance” (p. 27).

Chan (2005) highlights that understanding musical performance will necessitate far more than
“the conventional computer metaphor for understanding cognitive processes” (p. 34). As she
argues, “beyond pure cortical functions,” the act of performance involves “complex interactions
between the brain and the body – where emotion, intuition, multiple senses, and other
ambiguous feelings of knowing all play a significant role” (p. 39). Further echoing the voices
above, she observes that “the life of a concert performer is often confronted with contradictions
and paradoxes” which “if not clarified and dealt with in an appropriate manner that is consistent
with the personal sense and musical ideals of the performer” can “lead to internal conflicts and
uncertainties” and performance blocks (p. 52). It is crucial, she suggests, that more research is
conducted into “what a liberated, creative practice and performing experience ‘feels’ like; and
how that can be achieved and consistently maintained” (p. 55).

Thus, in following a widespread (sociological) shift towards an appreciation of the contextual
and experiential aspects of music-making, the traditional musicological perspectives and methodologies are increasingly being challenged from a number of angles. On one hand, the increase in various scientific and psychological disciplines exploring music promotes an even greater focus on empirical models, while on the other, the emerging voices of the artists themselves (encouraged by institutional demands) are increasingly insisting that music research addresses their crucial contribution and perspectives. As can be seen, this involves also taking seriously those aspects of music-making that lie – ‘inconveniently’ – beyond the traditional means or methodologies of science, in realms that are intangible and ineffable.

The absence of these realms within musicological discourse is also reflected in Grove Music Online, considered by many as the central and most authoritative resource for Western classical music. A 2012 search for ‘Intangible’ yields twenty-three results, yet within these there is relatively little useful content for discussion. Ten entries refer to non-western music, highlighting the practice – particularly in Japan and Korea – of awarding the title of ‘Intangible Cultural Treasure’ to significant artists or musical traditions. Half of the entries appear in ‘biographies,’ and significantly, focus on composers rather than performers. These entries range from irrelevant in regard to Western classical music (poetry, jazz, world music) to only mildly relevant and passing reference to intangible qualities of music performance. The only result of direct relevance to the topic of this thesis is MacDowell’s reference to music as “a language of the intangible” cited above (in Pesce, 2012). While the entry on “expression” (Baker, Paddison, & Scruton, 2012) highlights aspects of uncertainty, irrationality, and inscrutability, the discussion is notably focused on expression as built into the nature of the relationships prescribed by the score, rather than how these are interpreted or dealt with by the performer.

Similarly, aside from Dunsby’s explanation of the ‘ineffable’ in his Grove Music Online entry on performance (p. 43 above), there are only nine other listings. All but two of these are irrelevant for this research. Sparshott and Goehr (2012) note the Pythagorean interest in finding analogies between universal ratios and musical structures in order to explain “their felt but ineffable meaningfulness.” Conversely, Samson (2012) highlights the significant shift during the nineteenth century towards a new evaluation of music in which music came to be valued specifically for its “independence of reference, its imageless, ineffable, unknowable quality” and, as “the only non-representational art,” its ability to speak “directly of the noumenal (as opposed to the phenomenal) world.” However, excluding the two key references noted, no further direct acknowledgement of the intangible or ineffable aspects of music-making of relevance to the performer could be found. From this, it is possible to at least conclude that the terms ‘intangible’ and ‘ineffable’, as with the relevance of these concepts to performing musicians, have not penetrated the traditional western musicological discourse to any great extent.
2.8 Pedagogy: Acknowledging and Accounting for Intangibles

While this thesis does not have a primary focus on pedagogical practice, the question of whether the intangible aspects of music can be taught is frequently in the background. The issue becomes particularly pertinent when considering the close, and contentious, relationship between music performance research and pedagogy, especially in a context where conservatoires and music departments are increasingly expected to be accountable – in tangible terms – for their practices and pedagogical outcomes (Parncutt, 2007). There is a vast amount of literature dealing with theories and discussion of best practice in education, music education and more specifically piano pedagogy. However, the extent to which this literature adequately represents intangible elements of music-making or indeed acknowledges what actually occurs in the studios of piano pedagogues is questionable.

Though ‘aesthetic education’ emerged as a prominent theme in the 1950s (e.g., Reimer, 1970) and has long dominated music education philosophy, this shift in rhetoric towards an intrinsic philosophy of music based on aesthetic education did not necessarily translate widely into educational policy, or formalised practice in music education curricula (Temmerman, 1991, pp. 153, 156). This philosophy has also since been challenged by a view of music education as primarily praxial (Elliott, 1995): the concept of the musical praxis (‘musicing’ in Elliott’s words, or ‘musicking’ as more broadly embraced by Small, 1998). However, these too have been the subjects of ongoing debate (cf. Koopman, 1998; and Westerlund, 2003). As is evident from the voices above, while a focus on the practice of music-making is reflected in more recent trends in musicology, it is still to prove itself within academia or translate into relevance for performers.

Tracing back to the work of pioneers like Paynter in the 1960s and 1970s, and others in the 1980s and 1990s (Burke, 2005), creativity has become a prominent topic in music education literature (e.g., Cleall, 1981; Burns, 1988; Odam & Bannan, 2005; Webster, 2010; Sawyer, 2011; and most recently Burnard, 2012). Issues related to even more intangible concepts in education such as spirituality have also attracted increasing interest and debate (e.g., Carr, 1995, 2008; Palmer, 1995; Astin, 2004). However, as Schippers (2010) reports from a global overview of formalised approaches to music education and pedagogy, this has not necessarily made an impact. He distinguishes five domains: technical skills; repertoire; theory; creativity and expressions; and culture and values (pp. 65-75). Through organising these into five overlapping continua gravitating from tangible to intangible, he emphasises that the latter “has often been ignored in the organization of music learning and teaching across cultures” (p. 75).

In the case of piano pedagogy, published literature dealing specifically with the more intangible
areas of music-making is still strikingly absent. As Chan (2005) reports from a survey of piano pedagogy methodologies spanning the eighteenth to the twentieth century, “the approaches taken are highly reductive” (p. 47), and particularly in the early twentieth century, dominated by an emphasis on technique “detached from a musical, personal, expressive or aesthetic context” or “individual differences in the experience of the performer” (p. 49). While Chan observes “a gradual infusion of psychological and physiological concepts,” and a growing interest in performance related injuries since the middle of the twentieth century, she concludes that “approaches to technique have evolved very little with time,” and issues such as “creative and aesthetic variability,” or individuality in musical communication and expression have “seldom, if at all been addressed in an artistically meaningful manner” (pp. 49-51).

While Juslin (2003a, p. 3) argues that the view that music is ineffable “has not proved very helpful in music education” – adding – “How could teachers say anything about the ineffable?” his opinion is perhaps understandable if based on the amount of formal documentation or research published thus far on the more elusive aspects of music-making. Yet, when observing pedagogues in practice, it is clear that they do touch on intangible aspects, and in words, as highlighted in the following instructions, observed and recorded in a series of public piano masterclasses in Austria (personal communication, July 23-25, 2004): “Create an aura of sound and play within it” (N. True, on Dohnányi’s Rhapsody Op. 11 no. 3); “What does your heart tell you – what were your instincts?” (R. Harte, on a question about articulation in Chopin’s Fantasy in F minor); “You warm up with your imagination” (F. Laires on performance preparation). These ‘instructions’ are far from tangible in a practical or technical sense, and far from uncommon (cf. Goldsworthy, 2009). However, it is perhaps because of their elusive nature that such utterings by practitioners are overlooked, or indeed, as evident in the examples noted above, treated with disdain.

A growing culture of accountability and formalised assessment criteria poses a challenge for those musicians who work in matters of the heart, instinct, intuition, imagination, auras, or other spatial metaphors without some support in the system for the value of such methods or terminology. Additionally, while the cognitive and psychological sciences may be generating much knowledge of music reception, or “how the brain is sculpted by musical experience” (Zatorre, 2005, p. 314), training the brain to be musical, or musicians to express and communicate through music is far more complex. It demands both quantitative and qualitative enquiry in order to deal with both the tangible and intangible factors involved in how musicians learn and engage with music, both in the studio and during performance.

As Crispin (2009) highlights, there is a need for a greater understanding of “the mysterious and largely unregulated processes that occur within the private studios where one-to-one teaching
takes place” (p. 27). Creech, Papageorgi, and Welch (2010) additionally point out that further research is needed into “current discourse relating to concepts of ideal musicians,” as it “may be a powerful yet tacit influence in higher education music curricula, assessment strategies and funding policies for music organisations.” They recommend that, “alternative discourses are required and should be legitimized within the aims and objectives of those responsible for young developing professional musicians” (p. 16). This persisting tension between what is quantifiable and verbalisable, and what musicians experience, whether as pedagogues or performers, plays out in the lives and views of contemporary pianists.

2.9 Missing Voices: Placing Performers Centre Stage

The previous sections demonstrate some of the significant divisions between disciplines and subdisciplines currently exploring music, ranging broadly across the sciences, musicology, and education. While on the one hand there are many discrepancies amongst these voices, there appears to be increasing awareness that the ‘big’ questions currently posed about music are difficult to satisfactorily answer if considered in isolation. This is particularly the case when dealing with the intangible aspects of music-making, a realm that emerges as both essential and unavoidable from all perspectives. Of greatest significance is the fact that the performers’ voices, perceptions and experiences have relatively little representation in these key disciplines, and are at risk of being marginalised or left out. This imbalance represents the most compelling argument for embarking on this study, as the following overview further highlights.

While science and its many subdisciplines are increasingly addressing issues relating to music perception, reception, cognition and emotion, as Sloboda (2008) points out: “Scientists who study music are not, as a body, skilled in musical performance or composition […] if science is to demystify music and explain its power to affect us, it must investigate music as it is actually experienced” (p. 32). Additionally, he acknowledges:

I think in some way music challenges science: it shows science some of its limits […] I actually think science can’t take us the full way with music: we need sociology, we need cultural history, we need philosophy, we need a range of subjects to capture the full richness of what this thing is. (in Sloboda & Ball, 2008)

Noticeably however, he does not mention the value of the musician’s voice in his call for collaboration.

Gabrielsson (2003, p. 258) similarly points out that psychologists “are still far from understanding the aesthetic aspects of music performance and experience,” and “it is high time that music psychology came into closer contact with neighbouring and overlapping disciplines.”
Here too, in citing music analysis, anthropology, aesthetics, and philosophy as crucial to understanding how human beings relate to music, reference to the performers themselves is strikingly absent. Indeed in Rink (2002a), *Musical Performance: A Guide to Understanding* – a publication Gabrielsson recommends as more “directly related to music teaching and learning” (2003, p. 224) – only one of the sixteen chapters considers “performers on performance,” a contribution by Dunsby that is positioned at the end, seemingly as an afterthought.

Over ten years ago, Gabrielsson and Juslin acknowledged that “the performer’s intention” should be considered in order to “understand the meaning of performance data” and that “performance research has merely begun to fully appreciate the implications of this fact” (1996, p. 89). However, as Chan observes, the degree to which this awareness has manifested into practice, or relevance for the performer remains limited: “The majority of the psychological studies on musical performance deal with isolated aspects of musical performance which may not necessarily be relevant to the creative and artistic performing experience.” Additionally, she reports, “virtually no study […] focuses on or deals with difficulties facing the performing artist in a ‘live’, formal musical performance context” (2005, p. 54).

Davies (2012) makes a similar point from the perspective of philosophy, noting that “in the case of classical music, philosophers typically have focused more on works and the listener’s experience of them than on performances […] the performer's interpretative contribution is little discussed.” This “restricted or slanted” approach, he suggests, will need to be addressed in order to increase our “understanding of music and its relation to those who make and listen to it.” Parncott (2007) similarly argues, “music performance researchers must acquaint themselves thoroughly with the issues and values of the performers themselves – both teachers and students – if they are to succeed in making a positive contribution to their craft” (p. 22).

Dunsby (1996) emphasised over fifteen years ago that there is a real need for more research and discussion to help “performers better understand their activity, with its ideals and its fears as well as its practicalities” (p. 5). These include the “search for perfection, beauty, truth, and all the good that undoubtedly is what we aim for when making and experiencing music” along with “the difficulty of balancing instinct with intelligence” and “the challenge of understanding ‘artistry’ in music, and mystery” (p. 6). Chan (2005) more recently observes that while the factors involved in achieving “artistic excellence in a live performance” are “elusive and difficult to quantify,” the challenges of realising this ideal are “profoundly real and tangible to the performing artist” (p. 106).

The voices of practicing musicians and pedagogues (including the many musicologists who also fall into this category) have a significant role to play in the process of marrying a diversity of
approaches to understanding performance and the role of intangible aspects of music-making; they need to be incorporated as a starting point, not an afterthought. While the emerging field of practice-led research suggests positive steps in this regard, reports from practitioners highlight that the performer’s voice is still not fully valued, nor are their concerns legitimised within empirically-based methodologies and accepted research practices. In order to empower this missing voice, there is clearly a need for more open discourse between the ‘two cultures,’ and in the context of the scope of this study, a closer examination of musician’s willingness to participate in this process.

Benjamin Britten noted his strong belief “that it is dangerous for artists to talk” (in Lindstrom et al., 2003, p. 24). As Copland suggested musicians may simply not feel the need to do so (p. 45 above). Yet, as Dunsby suggests, musicians need to “recognize the inevitability of music and discourse, and not shy away from it into the retreats of fragmentary disciplines, with mute performers, and arid commentators” (1996, p. 46). Or as Crispin (2009) argues, if performers hope to encourage research that reflects their concerns and practices, “this means, in turn that performers must shoulder some responsibility for reflecting upon the domains of tacit and embodied knowledge in which they work” (p. 27). As is evident from the above, if musicians are unable to find ways to express what they perceive as valuable about the practice of making music, whether in the studio or the concert hall, there is the risk these crucial aspects will fail to be acknowledged and appreciated. When considering the intangible or ineffable in the performance of Western classical music, there is a compelling case for listening to and acknowledging the ideals and challenges of those at the heart of the profession – the performers.
Chapter Three: The Pianists

3.0 Introduction

This chapter presents an overview of each of the ten core in-depth interviews conducted for this research. This comprises contextual information on the setting and prior communication with each pianist, my overall experience of the interview, and the most prominent views expressed. For further information on the pianists’ careers to date, artist biographies have been included in the Appendices.

While a pre-planned and semi-structured approach was adopted with these interviews, each conversation inevitably took its own course, depending on the individual responses and subsequent collaborative exploration of the content. Each pianist had a particular musical and world-view, which arguably informed their responses to individual questions. A number of the pianists chose to focus on certain aspects over others, steered the conversation according to aspects they felt important, or offered their own content in addition to that suggested by me. Additionally, as interviewer, my experiences with each pianist inevitably fed into and informed my approach to those that followed, constituting a factor in both the generation and interpretation of the ‘data.’ In this regard, each interview in itself represents a key finding in regards to pianists’ perceptions on the intangible. To best reflect the journey taken, the pianists are presented here in chronological order according to the date of interview.

In order to write a thesis about how pianists talk about the intangibles, voices initially heard must be then be considered and presented in textual terms, and in doing so a number of considerations must be made. In this way, suggests Schalkwyk (2002), “the thesis is like a composition and the researcher the composer.” Borrowing this metaphor, the process of writing this thesis has been one of notating and creating a score from the complex counterpoint of voices heard. To give clarity to what may otherwise be noise, I have had to highlight certain voices over others and decide on which expository themes to develop. In addition, there were at least four voices potentially assigned to each person: The formal or academic, the personal, the gestural and the silent. In the same way that the silences between sounds are essential in music, the unspoken content of these conversations was often as important as what was said, though not as easy to transcribe.

While academic integrity, depth and even ‘artful’ presentation of interview data may be ideals to which researchers aspire (Gubrium & Holstein, 2002, p. 28), the extent to which a ‘true’ representation of the views of the participants or the interview experience can be achieved is
limited; there are inevitable and unavoidable gaps between how the voices are heard and interpreted, experienced and told, and reinterpreted when read. When dealing with the richness of human interaction, at each point in this process, there may be ‘data’ lost in the translation, and much that may remain unaccounted for. As Barthes (1967) suggests, not only do authors bring to their writing “several indiscernible voices,” it is in the (anonymous) reader that this “multiplicity is collected.”

To return to Schalkwyk’s musical metaphor, in any musical composition there will many factors influencing its creation, ranging from the choice of instruments, themes and form, to the particular expressive devices and style used to explore and develop the musical material. The following overviews then are offered – in musical terms – as an introduction to the ‘instruments’, their timbre, expressive qualities and range. In addition, these introductions provide a window into my experience with the ‘musical material’ – or how I interpreted the personality and perspectives of each of the pianists I interviewed, as well as our interaction. Just as all compositions will reflect their composer – and performances their performer – I am aware that the following ‘score’ is my own and that there are many possible interpretations. Given that this chapter discusses my interaction with the pianists in personal terms, I have taken the liberty of referring to them by first names. For the remainder of this thesis, to align with the more academic nature of the writing, surnames have been used.

3.1 Michael Kieran Harvey

Australian pianist residing in Tasmania
Performing in the Kawai Keyboard Series
Date: March 3, 2007
Length of interview: 1 hr. 30 mins.
Location: QCGU

This was the first interview conducted, and constituted a powerful and challenging start to my plans to investigate pianists’ perceptions on the intangible. Most striking about the communication from the very beginning was the extent to which Michael would probe into my own background and perceptions. Equally surprising was the sensitive and heated nature of the discussion, particularly in terms of belief systems, experience with institutions, and the perceived dangers of both. The impact of this experience for me was all the more significant given Michael’s renown as a performer in Australian piano circles, and my personal interest in,
and admiration of his playing. Michael has a keen desire to understand the world around him, a
passion for science, and real concern over the impact of religious belief on individuals and
society. As with me, he had given much thought to the influence of his parents’ perceptions and
spoke of his need to challenge his upbringing. In contrast to my strongly atheist and
scientifically focused upbringing, Michael has fought against his parents’ strong religious
beliefs, and now views science as providing the only truth. With my interest in exploring
aspects of music that may not be scientifically measurable, there was a tension from the
beginning, evident in both his words and body language.

While I had planned a short introduction explaining my path to this research in order to move
on to Michael’s childhood memories, this was disrupted quite early in the interview when
Michael began questioning me over why I had stopped playing, and raised the concept that I
(along with others) had been institutionalised. I found this possibility unsettling. The topic was
to come up in a number of the later interviews. Within the first five minutes of the interview,
Michael had noted his strong concern over the current state of music, his distrust of people in
power, and the lack of truth in today’s consumer society. Two early comments were to set the
scene for the interview: “I don’t agree – I disagree with everything” and “I just give up even
dealing with it because it’s too depressing.” Michael’s strong views and resignation over music
and society were both fascinating and challenging to navigate.

In a post-interview conversation, Michael later explained that a prompt sheet I had provided at
the beginning of the interview, with a range of possible concepts for discussion, had caused him
some concern, particularly the term ‘universal consciousness.’ He explained that when seeing
this, he had thought, “Oh God, she’s one of them.” Revisiting the video footage, it was possible
to see that upon reading this, his initial, quiet jovial attitude quickly changed, and his body
language noticeably displayed scepticism. Indeed, it was not until much later in the interview
that I felt Michael’s level of trust increase. We continued the conversation over lunch, and again
several months later at Michael’s home in Tasmania. While these conservations have not been
included in the discussions, they have helped to inform my understanding of Michael’s views.

This interview was a challenge. However, Michael’s insights into music and his views of its
place in the world have been of great importance and value to my research. I have an ever-
increasing appreciation and gratitude for his candour and willingness to discuss topics and
issues that affect us all, but are often considered too personal or risky to discuss with others.
The importance of science, truth, and accountability were themes that dominated this interview.
Given Michael’s interest in these, his comments on what may be intangible in music were
perhaps all the more powerful.
I first approached Freddy for an interview via email while he was visiting Brisbane for a solo and concerto performance in March 2007. Freddy was keen to explore the topic and kindly agreed to take time out in between rehearsals to speak with me. We met in a practice room at the Queensland Orchestra Studios while he was waiting for his orchestral rehearsal, and even though his manager interrupted a couple of times after the first hour to hurry him along, he insisted on continuing the interview for another forty-five minutes. At the beginning of the interview, I sensed some hesitancy and that he was perhaps uncomfortable in revealing too much of himself to a stranger and on camera. At the same time, Freddy noted at the beginning of the interview that he was suffering from lack of sleep. I also initially sensed that his responses were more suited for media interviews (and possibly used before), however during the course of the conversation this impression disappeared, and Freddy opened up quite quickly. As I noted afterwards in my reflections: “He was a wonderful person to talk to – so easy and giving.”

In addition to our formal interview, we continued to talk over lunch at a restaurant in Brisbane’s South Bank for another hour, recorded on audio. A notable transition occurred during this more informal conversation. Here we had more time to discuss his daily workings as a musician and this led to more in-depth insights and enabled more questions specific to his circumstances. Where comments from this lunch session have been included in the discussion the different setting has been noted. I also observed that almost immediately after the recorder had been turned off after lunch, Freddy instigated a deeper and more personal level of conversation. Over a social dinner later in the week, he noted his concern about the press not being trustworthy, and that he had previously ‘been burned’ by a journalist. Given this, I was very grateful that he afforded me the level of trust that he did in such a short period of time.

Freddy has a strong drive to achieve his goals, which by his own admission are materialistic ones. Perhaps the most intangible aspects encountered during our discussion were Freddy’s interest in inspiring and exciting his audience; the thrill of taking risks; the unpredictable
aspects of performance; the challenge of balancing (and understanding) his thoughts and feelings during a performance; and his growing focus on exploring the emotional realm of music. In an interesting comment just as we were parting after lunch, Freddy noted that his ex-wife – also a piano player – might be more interesting to talk to as she was more “spiritual and artistic.” Freddy noted that he had not previously thought about some of the topics raised in the interview. As one of the youngest of the pianists interviewed, it is perhaps not surprising that Freddy had not previously explored all of them, and he seemed to appreciate the conversation as a chance to explore them in more depth. Overall, in comparison with other interviews, Freddy showed the least signs of being influenced by, or concerned about intangible aspects in his music-making.

3.3 Mark Kruger

Australian pianist residing in Berlin
Performing in the Kawai Keyboard Series
Interview Date: March 16, 2007
Length of interview: 1 hr. 45 mins.
Location: QCGU

Mark Kruger appeared as an Alumnus of the Queensland Conservatorium of Music to perform as a solo pianist with the Kawai Keyboard Series on the March 14, 2007. During his visit, Mark also gave a piano masterclass, which I attended, prior to the interview. This conversation was a very easy and delightful one to have, and there was a good deal of shared laughter. Mark was entertaining in his descriptions (and impersonations) and used many accompanying hand gestures. Mark felt very much like a peer, given that we are both of similar age, have a strong interest in self-improvement and both seem to be currently asking questions about our relationship to music. Indeed, we discovered that we were reading similar literature, and on several occasions Mark was able to finish the quotes I introduced. At the time of the interview, Mark was preparing his final written submission for his DMA studies, and was, as he noted, “discovering all this kind of language and these thoughts about music” and questioning what it actually means to perform and give a concert.

Given his virtuosic performance the night before, it was surprising to hear that Mark did not start playing until the age of ten. Additionally, after achieving top marks in two AMEB grades he gave up and did not return until he was 15. As Mark admits, with this late start he had “major
technical deficiencies” to overcome. Also, competing with his piano interests as a teenager was a promising tennis career, and as with Freddy Kempf, the discussion often drifted towards a comparison with sport. This proved to be fruitful, as often through these comparisons I felt we actually got to the ‘heart of the matter.’ In a similar manner to me, Mark had also questioned his vocation after a long period of study on the instrument, almost signing a contract for a computer job at the age of 34. The reasons for this were discussed in detail and very much informed my view on a number of intangibles that arose for consideration.

Of note, in the early stages of the interview was Mark’s comment that while he was very interested in the intangible aspects, he wondered if he could contribute enough, given his late technical start: “Only in the last year have I felt comfortable with my own playing. So, now I feel I can move onto these other things that you're talking about […] I still can see myself just very much entering this whole area of possibility.” It was perhaps because of Mark’s concern, and also that I felt very comfortable in Mark’s company that I found myself speaking more than in other interviews and the result was very much a collaborative effort to discuss and consider ideas about intangibles. Mark and I continued our conversation the following day over lunch for a further 2½ hours, recorded on audio. This was an insightful addition to the discussion and proved to be an example of how factors such as setting and extra familiarity can lead to more personal and rich exchanges. When comments have been included in the discussion from this part of the conversation, the different setting has been noted.

3.4 Gao Ping

Chinese pianist residing in New Zealand
Performing in the Kawai Keyboard Series
Interview Date: March 23, 2007
Length of interview: 2 hours (10 min. break)
Location: QCGU

I met Gao Ping while he was visiting Brisbane from New Zealand to perform in the Kawai Keyboard Series in 2007. I had my first contact with him over email while I was preparing the Kawai Keyboard Education Series a couple of months prior to his visit. We also met several times in the week prior to the interview at social functions, and I turned pages for one of his concerts. During this interaction, we talked informally about some of the issues related to the research, and Gao Ping had read the article I had written on music advocacy. There is no doubt
that this previous interaction helped set the scene for the interview, and aided in both of us feeling relaxed and comfortable with each other. Indeed the experience was very enjoyable, with a number of humorous moments. Gao Ping is highly regarded as both a pianist and composer, and he spoke in this interview from both perspectives. Born in China, he spent his first twenty years there before continuing his piano training in the United States. Gao Ping provided a number of insights from his Chinese heritage that proved very interesting for the discussion. While he spoke about the influence of the Cultural Revolution on his early experience with music, I was hesitant to push for too much detail as I sensed it was potentially a sensitive topic (particularly as his family still reside there).

For Gao Ping there were many ‘irrational’ elements of music in both composition and performance that could not be explained or reproduced through analysis. We discussed a wide range of intangibles, and Gao Ping raised many of these without my prompting. He was not afraid of discussing contradictory or paradoxical elements, and mentioned a number of these in relation to performance: Being ‘in and out’ at the same time; being aware of the audience but forgetting about them; being very conscious about yourself yet not yourself; being a medium for the music to speak yet allowing your true personality to come through; and doing everything while at the same doing nothing in order to reach a transcendent peak experience in music performance.

Gao Ping was very open and generous with his thoughts and willingness to explore the territory of intangibles, and new concepts and possibilities. He very much presented to me as someone whose ideas – like mine – are in transition, and he was not afraid to examine ideas and change them if necessary. During the conversation, I sensed that at times Gao Ping seemed a little too quick to agree with suggestions I made, in an effort to be congenial. At some points, when I felt this, I questioned him on his comments and on a few occasions, he changed his mind. Gao Ping employed many physical gestures during this interview, and this stimulated perhaps the most in-depth discussion on how and where intangible aspects of music-making might be felt physically in ways that were not otherwise describable.

3.5 Liam Viney

Australian pianist
Performing in the QCGU Alumni Series
Interview Date: April 3, 2007
Length of Formal Interview: 1 hr. 34 mins.
Location: Saville Hotel, Brisbane
I met Liam while he was visiting Brisbane from the California Institute of the Arts. Liam made time for an interview in between several performances and masterclasses at the Queensland Conservatorium, the institution where he received his undergraduate education, and a number of high profile awards and competition prizes. Liam responded positively to the chance to talk, but did note his reluctance to do so in front of the camera, noting prior to the interview, “I would definitely be less self-conscious with only audio.” I was very grateful that he agreed to its use.

Liam received his Doctorate in music at Yale University's School of Music, and noted he had a natural intellectual bent. He displayed a broad knowledge, and during our conversation made many references to musical examples, literature or performers. He was also concerned about providing accurate responses to my questions, and noted several times during the interview when he was not sure of his answers and needed more time to reflect on a topic. It was obvious that he had previously reflected on a number of issues related to this topic. Liam’s inclination to reflect deeply was particularly evident in the thought he had given to his career in music, and his relationship to the piano. He very openly (and humbly) described where he placed himself in the rankings of great pianists, explaining that he was not a ‘natural’ and had worked very hard to feel at one with the instrument. While piano performance and teaching has been, and still is a full time profession, Liam noted that he had chosen not to sacrifice life for his art, and that his family were more important to him than his music-making.

I had invited Liam’s wife Anna Grinberg, also a highly acclaimed pianist, and his duo recital partner to join us, but she was unable to attend due to family commitments. Of relevance, and in a similar way to Freddy Kempf above, Liam noted that while Anna is not “a verbaliser” when it comes to music, “despite that lack of verbalising, or perhaps because of it, I feel she has one of the most deep and intense connections to the intangibles of music I've ever seen.” Liam referred to Anna on numerous occasions throughout the interview, noting their different characters (intellectual vs. intuitive), and the influence she has had on his views and pedagogy practice. While Liam displayed a very intellectual approach to answering questions in this interview, and always sought to find reasonable explanations for the more elusive aspects of music, he did, however, refer to a number of intangibles in what he aspires to and in the challenges in performance. This was particularly evident in his comments on the spiritual dimension of music. Liam’s final comment in the interview was a pleasant confirmation: “Thank you! It was interesting for me, and I’m glad to participate in this research. Because, now that I know more about it – I really do think it’s important what you’re doing.”
3.6 Roy Howat

Scottish pianist residing in the UK  
Performing in the Kawai Keyboard Series  
Interview Date: May 29, 2007  
Length of Interview: 1 hr. 33 mins.  
Location: QCGU

Roy Howat visited Brisbane to perform as a solo pianist with the Kawai Keyboard Series on June 1, 2007. I had previously been in email contact with Roy while preparing the Kawai Educational Kit for this performance. Roy kindly agreed to this interview, in between a heavy schedule of performing, private teaching and masterclasses. In addition, Roy was suffering from a rather severe and persistent cough picked up from his travels. For this reason I was concerned about taking up too much of his time and energy, and felt the need to move quickly through concepts that I would otherwise have taken more time to introduce and explore.

In addition to being an acclaimed and busy performer, Roy is a highly regarded international scholar on French composers, and has edited a number of prestigious editions of Fauré, Debussy and Chabrier. As the most accomplished and active academic of the pianists interviewed, Roy was able to provide detailed examples, both musical and academic, to many of the questions I posed, and discuss the difference between intangible concepts and phenomena in music-making and the more tangible structures evident in the score. He was also able to provide detailed examples of changing styles and perceptions related to the historical performance practice movement. Not surprisingly, a number of Roy’s responses to my questions reflected his knowledge of French music and aesthetics, including the importance placed on clarity of emotions, the expressive potential of structure and rhythm, and the opinions of composers such as Debussy and Ravel.

This interview covered a broad and interesting mix of both intangible and tangible elements involved in the art of piano performance, and from Roy’s responses it would appear that he values both. He was keen, however, to attempt to rationalise the more intangible elements where possible (e.g., in relation to feeling, emotion, expression and peak experiences), with the concern that overly focusing on these elements as a performer could negatively affect the content. This said, Roy felt there were a number of ‘unknowns’ in the act of performance, and that these were integral and exciting aspects of the art form.
Many of Roy’s comments referred to the paradoxical, or contradictory demands placed on both pianists and teachers, highlighting the subtleties and challenges involved in both discussing and engaging in the art form. The tension and balance between what is known and unknown was discussed under several guises, including subjectivity and objectivity; the conscious and unconscious mind; and control and ‘letting go.’ Something that I noted specifically in this interview was the change in Roy’s voice when speaking on particularly personal matters. In speaking of his political views, and feelings of spirituality, his voice and approach to communication became significantly softer and more ‘personalised.’ I felt that with more time, conversation, familiarity and trust, more of this layer could have been revealed.

3.7 Matteo Napoli

Italian pianist / pedagogue
Presenting at The Australasian Piano Pedagogy Conference
Interview Date: July 3, 2007
Length of interview: 1 hour
Location: ANU School of Music, Canberra

I made contact with Matteo while attending the 2007 Australasian Piano Pedagogy Conference. This interview was organised at short notice, and there was no prior contact. As Matteo had a busy schedule and was due on a flight out of Canberra immediately after the interview, we only had one hour to talk. In addition to being an esteemed Italian pedagogue, Matteo has a long and high-profiled career as a concert pianist, with a number of prestigious competition prizes and international appearances to his name. His contributions to this discussion included his insights as a performer, pedagogue and experienced jury member on international competitions. While English was a second language for Matteo, he was still able to communicate his thoughts very effectively. At times, I needed to clarify things, and in the quotes used, I have made minor grammatical edits where necessary. The structure of this interview was much freer than with the other key pianists. I did not use any quotes and did not refer to external notes. Due to the time limit, a number of topics were not specifically raised, but in most cases were commented on during the course of the discussion.

At the beginning of the interview, Matteo noted his interest in the brain and its responses to and engagement in the musical process, and his conference presentation had included discussion on his study methodology based on the neuro-physiological learning process. This focus on the
brain and its influence in the music-making process came through in the interview, with Matteo displaying a strong leaning towards rational and scientifically provable explanations. It was, however, interesting to note a number of areas of conversation that presented ambiguities, or spaces of intangibility. Thus, while Matteo stated that he was not spiritual or religious, in addition to cognition and emotion he spoke of “the soul” as a crucial aspect of music-making; he used the word “energy” a number of times to describe the more intangible elements of the musical experience, yet he did not believe this energy could be labelled as a physical phenomenon; and while he felt that science may be able to one day explain the phenomenon of inspiration, it was inspiration which he felt could lead to “magic” moments for composers and performers. Additionally, in the areas of expressivity and interpretative freedom, Matteo’s comments highlighted the challenges of clearly defining the pianist’s role.

3.8 William Westney

American pianist / pedagogue
Presenting at The Australasian Piano Pedagogy Conference
Date: July 4, 2007
Length of interview: 1 hr. 20 mins.
Location: ANU School of Music, Canberra

I made contact with William while attending the 2007 Australasian Piano Pedagogy Conference. William was a keynote speaker at this conference, presenting two lectures on his 2003 publication *The Perfect Wrong Note*. William is renowned both as a performer and educator, with distinguished accolades in both arenas. William has perhaps thought more about the intangibles in music than the other pianists interviewed, having made a career out of addressing the more elusive realms of music-making in music education and performance. He regularly gives presentations on his pedagogical methods, with a focus on empowerment, self-trust and encouraging artistic expression and creativity. His 2003 publication speaks to many issues related to this research. This was an extremely rich interview, and William was eloquent on all topics, instigating many of them without prompting.

The interview began with William’s first comment on camera taking me by surprise as we were briefly discussing a presentation just given at the conference we were attending. William spoke of the importance of being able to grieve over past injustices, or misplaced approaches to music in order to step through that “open door” into fulfilling music-making. His words affected me
quite deeply, directly addressing my own loss of inspiration for piano performance, though this had not been discussed at all. This set the tone for a very open discussion, from both sides. From quite early on in the interview, I felt we could ‘safely’ talk and explore concepts and terms that had been challenging or less ‘safe’ in other interviews.

William was one of the livelier and physically engaged pianists interviewed, using his body quite dramatically to illustrate his points and relay his past experiences. While acknowledging the challenge of finding words for this topic, William described his perceptions of music throughout the interview using a variety of terminology and concepts that pointed to his belief in music’s power lying beyond the cognitive or tangible realms. He spoke of “uncanny” energies, transcendence, powerful forces that “can’t be named,” and music as another way of knowing.

While we covered a lot of ‘serious’ topics, the interview was full of enthusiastic and often humorous exchanges. One example was William’s interest in, and willingness to use the word ‘energy.’ While other pianists had not been so keen to use this word – or I had not volunteered it, in this case it was William who suggested it and this opened up greater possibilities for communication. This was one of the few interviews where I did not use my list of questions at all. It was a fairly sudden interview opportunity, with only ten minutes lead-in time. Although I had a prepared list of questions and quotes, I did not feel it necessary to refer to them. While this interview was not as long as several others, in a very short space of time I felt we covered more territory regarding intangibles than in any other interview.

Highlighting concerns noted by a number of the pianists interviewed, in reviewing his comments prior to this thesis being submitted (several years after the interview), Westney pointed out that many of his ideas and ways of expressing them have evolved. Additionally, he noted that when transcribed, words and phrases that might have been employed to make a conversation as vivid, entertaining, down-to-earth, or communicative as possible, can appear to lack grammatical or intellectual rigour. Further, they can all too easily be taken out of context. As he noted, “the tension is between research accuracy of ‘this is exactly what he said’ and casual, spontaneous (sometimes ungrammatical) talk being preserved forever [and quoted].”

In a PhD on how pianists ‘talk about the intangible,’ this tension has been particularly unavoidable. I have attempted to embrace this with integrity and sensitivity with all of the pianists interviewed, and hope that future readers will also take it into consideration the significant differences between talking and writing, the latter of which allows time to refine one’s thoughts, and reflect on the best way to express these.
3.9 Jean-Paul Sevilla

French pianist / pedagogue
Performing at The Australasian Piano Pedagogy Conference
Date: July 6, 2007
Length of interview: 55 mins.
Location: Rydges Restaurant, Canberra

I made contact with Jean-Paul while attending the 2007 Australasian Piano Pedagogy Conference. Jean-Paul was a keynote speaker at this conference and presented a lecture and demonstration on the Fauré Nocturnes. Our interview took place on the day he was leaving Canberra, and was held at his hotel. After attempting to start in a public part of the restaurant, we were given the opportunity to move into a private and quiet room, where we resumed the interview with Jean-Paul summarising his first brief comments. As with the other pianists interviewed at this pedagogy conference, the structure was more relaxed, and no notes or quotes were used to steer or prompt discussions.

Jean-Paul has a long career as both performer and pedagogue, and has taught many successful pianists, perhaps the most renowned being Angela Hewitt, who he referred to on a number of occasions during the interview. Jean-Paul’s preferred means of responding to my questions about the intangible was through story-telling, and the interview was effectively made up of several detailed stories from his past, often following a question that he could not answer, or had difficulty explaining. The stories were enjoyable to listen to, with Jean-Paul injecting numerous ironic or humorous comments along the way. Given his willingness to explain details, the challenge of finding words about the intangible did not appear to be hampered by a language barrier. Jean-Paul did, however, make some minor clarifications to the transcribed text via email.

At those times when I attempted to ask Jean-Paul to describe his thoughts on the intangible in more detail, I rarely managed to reach the end of my sentences, with Jean-Paul quite keen to continue with another story as an example. Sensing this, I tried not to interrupt too frequently. There were several key moments where I changed my approach and tried to push a little harder for answers. These brief exchanges served as very good examples of the challenges of talking about the intangible directly, and with a strong reliance on hand and body gestures, the limitations of transcriptions due to the many gestures replacing words. While a number of the pianists spoke of their interest in the spiritual, of all the pianists interviewed, Jean-Paul was the
only one who identified himself as religious. He referred to his belief in God on numerous
occasions through the interview, often deferring to the notion of a God to explain the mysteries
of music, artistry or talent. In addition to this as the most obvious intangible, Jean-Paul also
spoke at length about the power of silence, and what he felt were the ‘dangers’ of the
subconscious.

3.10 Stephen Savage

British pianist who has resided in Australia for many
years. Currently living in the UK
Performing in the Kawai Keyboard Series
Interview Dates: August 21 and 30, 2007
Length of Interview(s): 2 hrs. 20 mins.
Location: QCGU

Born and raised in London, Stephen’s musical education and early to mid-career was primarily
based in London. From his beginnings as a student in the 1950s he was exposed to a plethora of
the leading pianists and musicians of the day, with London being a hub of cultural activity at the
time. Stephen explained how this gave him a “tremendous amount to feed on,” and significantly
influenced his ideas and appreciation of great artistry. In his later position as a teacher at the
Royal College of Music in London, Stephen continued his engagement with the elite realm of
music-making, and was influential in the training of many high calibre and successful pianists.
In 1982, Stephen moved to Australia to take up the position of Head of Keyboard at the
Queensland Conservatorium of Music, where he remained until 2005. Since then, he has
continued his association with the Conservatorium as a consultant and visiting artist/teacher,
and was both the curator of and a profiled performer in the Kawai Keyboard Series 2007.

I first met Stephen in December 2005 when we had an informal conversation about my research
topic and he agreed to participate formally at a later stage. When Stephen returned from his new
base in London, in 2007, for the Kawai Keyboard Series, I interviewed him for the Musical
Education Kit associated with his performance, and a week later we met again for the official
interview for this research. With his performance and teaching schedule placing demands on
Stephen’s time, we divided the interview into two sessions, eight days apart, in between which
Stephen gave his Kawai Keyboard recital. With this arrangement, we ended up talking for
longer than I did with the other pianists (an extra ½ - 1 hour). This additional time enabled us to
explore the topics at hand from a number of angles. This proved very rewarding.
Stephen explained that he has always had an equal love for teaching and performance, yet noted that from quite early in his career his heavy teaching commitments had influenced his ability to focus on performance. With this background, Stephen had much to impart from a pedagogical perspective. He noted that since retiring from full time teaching, he had been pursuing his performing career much more in recent years. Stephen was also taking this opportunity to reflect on his experiences with music and preparing these insights for a PhD submission (since completed). With a long career in music at the highest level, Stephen’s insights were far-reaching and he provided rich descriptions of his more intangible experiences with music, particularly the “deeper” and “profound” realms that inspired him. He highlighted at many points throughout the interview the importance of the musician’s input, and the influence of perception in relation to both the pianist’s engagement with the music, and the audience impressions of what is being expressed.
Chapter Four: The Intangible In

4.0 Introduction

Across the ten in-depth interviews conducted with professional pianists, the intangibles in music-making were approached from a number of different angles, including what motivates pianists towards engaging with music and their chosen instrument; their intentions as performers; the practical and aesthetic ideals they strive for; their experiences during performance and with their audiences; the challenges of the performing profession; and the considerations involved in piano pedagogy. Part Two of this thesis brings together the diverse range of pianists’ perceptions and expressions of intangible aspects across all of these discussion points, organised by the predominant themes that were identified.

These themes could have been presented in a variety of ways. Indeed, this was one of the greatest challenges in conducting and analysing this study, and may very well be one of the reasons intangibles are so difficult to pin down. Similarly, the discussions often straddled a number of topics, including both tangible and intangible concepts and aspects of music-making at any one time, highlighting the complex layer of factors that are involved in the experience of music-making. Seen from this perspective, it is possible to argue that the ‘ultimate intangibility’ can be found in the widely accepted adage that the whole is greater than the sum of its parts. However, in order to further understand the intangible phenomenon of music a consideration of the ‘parts’ is not only informative, but also necessary.

As the point of departure in this journey to understand intangibles in music-making, this chapter provides a basic foundation by considering two key components: the music and the musician. As the great wealth of literature on Western classical music attests, there is much to be found, studied and analysed about both. However, as highlighted in this chapter, there are also many aspects that are more challenging to quantify. This was most strikingly evident when the pianists were asked the question: What constitutes great music and musicianship? Section 4.1 of this chapter considers the pianists’ perceptions on how music might be expressive – or meaningful, what of this can be identified tangibly in the score, and the intangible features that constitute great music. This is followed in 4.2 by their opinions on the personal attributes of great musicians, as exhibited across the various stages of a pianist’s career, from the initial identification of talent to the qualities that are perceived as contributing to artistry.
4.1 The Intangible in the Music

When discussing ‘the music’ in the Western classical tradition, several angles can be considered: the composer’s musical idea or intentions; the notation, or symbolic representation of these in a score; the performer’s translation of these symbols into sound; and when sounded, the way in which this content affects or moves the listener. Implicit throughout this process is the assumption that the music will express or ‘mean’ something. However, when we ask of music, “what does it mean,” notes Leonard Bernstein, “then we’re asking a very hard question” (1993). As Aaron Copland highlights, “the semanticist who investigates the meaning of words, or even the meaning of meaning, has an easy time of it by comparison with the hardy soul who ventures forth in quest of music’s meaning” (1959, p. 21). Agawu highlights the challenge, speaking from his perspective in the field of semiotics:

For as long as music is made, as long as it retains its essence as a performed art, its significance is unlikely to ever crystallize into a stable set of meanings that can be frozen, packaged, and preserved for later generations. (2009, p. 4).

Copland goes further to suggest that, “the precise meaning of music is a question that should never have been asked” for “it is this very imprecision that intrigues and activates the imagination” (1959, p. 22). Echoing this point, Dunsby observes that “it will never be clear what a piece of music actually, finally, decisively ‘is.’ Even to ask this is probably not the most intelligent and useful possible question.” He suggests instead that, “what a piece of music can best ‘be’ is a noumenal, memorable, consciousness-altering experience for the listener” (2002, p. 234). Scruton similarly argues that our focus should not be on “things in the world” but rather on our “particular experience of them, and about the pursuit of meaning that springs from that experience” (2011, p. 163).

However, as Scruton also observes, while challenging to locate, the meaning of music is important to us: “We want to say that works of art are meaningful – they are not just interesting forms in which we take an unexplained delight. They are acts of communication, which present us with a meaning; and this meaning must be understood” (2011, p. 93). Indeed, Budd argues, it is this capacity to be “understood” that defines a work of art (1995, p. 4). The question of whether this meaning can be understood or made tangible, underlies and returns in many guises throughout this document, across many aspects of the pianists’ experience of music-making, or as Bowie notes, the “performative doing” (2009, p. 417). However, given the music itself represents a key part of the musicking process, the following sections consider respectively the pianists’ views on factors and contexts that can influence how meaning in music might be perceived; their initial thoughts on what music is expressive of, and how music expresses meaning; and the extent to which this meaning can be found in the score.
Culture and Language

Cultural contingencies pose the first stumbling block in claiming any universal meaning to music. As Cook points out, “music is a very small word to encompass something that takes as many forms as there are cultural or subcultural identities” (1998, p. 5). Extending the possible considerations, Cross explains, “music is about something but its aboutness – its intentionality – can vary from context to context, within a context, and from individual to individual” (2003, p. 23). Echoing these voices and the range of potential factors involved, even within the seemingly narrow constraints of notated Western art music, the pianists highlighted the influence that cultural understanding has on how we perceive meaning in music, displaying a variety of opinions as to the degree of knowledge and type of understanding required.

Stephen Savage made reference to what has become an “informal parlance of music-lovers everywhere” (Samson, 1999, p. 48) – that music is a kind of language: “It’s this old question, is music a language? You know – well it is and it isn’t. Obviously it’s not translatable from one country to another or one culture to another.” As he explained from his own experience:

I’ve heard Japanese court music and in Bali I’ve heard Gamelan music and I found them both absolutely fascinating […] I’m aware of something that’s totally coherent and totally organised but I wouldn’t have the faintest idea how, and it doesn’t affect me as music of my own culture does. If I was immersed in it, or if maybe I was a product of a generation or two before that, I would know much more about it, not know, but it would be in my blood, it would be in my bones.

Liam Viney noted a further refinement of this type of embodied knowledge within the culture of Western classical music. In discussing the challenges he has encountered in playing romantic repertoire, he spoke of his wife’s more direct cultural connection to the music:

My wife is Russian Jewish from an older culture – she’s basically a nineteenth-century musician […] she has this relationship to Brahms and Schumann – she didn’t have to work at it like I did. It’s part of her culture; it’s part of her bones and her blood.

However, in significant contrast to the pianists above, and indeed to most academic critique on the topic (cf. Samson 1999), Gao Ping suggested that the meaning of music transcended cultural divisions, explaining that despite his Chinese upbringing he connected “intensely” with Western classical music before being enculturated in the tradition:

Nobody has taught me how to feel about this music […] none of my teachers in China talked about this, at least when I was starting music, later on yes, but no – nobody talked about that. And somehow, suddenly, this music just is, like mine […] it’s impossible to explain that phenomenon. I almost want to believe that there is a community of information that is there before one is born, regardless of where you are from. There is kind of a wisdom that is kind of [gesturing with hands above head]… through time it’s
accumulating, and when you are born you might inherit a little bit of that, and if you come into contact with this thing you can connect with it.

Presenting another angle on the relationship between music, language and understanding, Stephen Savage observed that music could be considered a language “in the sense that language, as we know, doesn’t just describe things, it also governs our perceptions of things, so that our reality is geared by language.” This potential for the musical language itself to impact on how – and indeed whether – the music is perceived as expressing ‘something,’ was illustrated by a number of the pianists. This was most notable in their observations of differences between the standardised classical canon and more recently composed repertoire. 

Liam Viney spoke of the various social functions and forms music has taken within the Western classical canon, observing that, “the point of music is always tied in to the time and place that it’s written.” Yet, ideally he also felt “there must be something in common about them – which is what we’re getting at. I think you can call it different things, and people have approached it in different ways.” While Viney felt that ultimately this common understanding was “transcendent and therefore incomprehensible,” his further comments on different repertoire suggested that the musical language and compositional approach taken could significantly impact on what this was. As Viney explained, after being heavily focused on contemporary classical music in his teenage years, he came to realise he was “missing out on so much in music,” highlighting in particular the experience of beauty in music:

At the age of twenty, to learn how to phrase beautifully is actually very difficult, because I didn’t really have a sense of it […] and what’s interesting is that I found that the more that I became facile with older forms of music, the more it helped my playing of modern music. 

As he pointed out, “appreciating beauty” and “relating to the beautiful aspects of music” is what he now considers to be the most meaningful aspect of his vocation.

Mark Kruger also explained that while he has played a lot of contemporary repertoire, in his late twenties he came to feel “something completely missing from contemporary music,” as well as “the way people talk and write about music in the twentieth century.” Noting that both tend to be “very cerebral and dry,” he expressed his preference for the “kind of language or feeling” that could be found in nineteenth-century piano music. Significantly, as he observed, it has been through “discovering all this kind of [nineteenth-century] language and these thoughts about music” that he has come to a greater understanding about what music “actually means,” including why he is “doing it” and “the point of giving a concert.” While Michael Kieran Harvey is a prominent advocate for contemporary composers and plays a great deal of modern repertoire, he also noted that contemporary music could be problematic: “With any
contemporary music, if it’s just serial clichés, you know, I get very tired of it.” As he explained, while he can appreciate a range of musical repertoire, “there’s got to be something in it that does something unusual, compelling for me […] and it’s very simple a lot of it. It doesn’t have to be complicated; it’s just got to have something in it.”

**Expressivity and Emotion**

To ask what music means immediately invites the question of how music is – or can be – expressive of meaning. The latter has historically plagued many philosophers and musicologists, and continues to be tackled and debated afresh by linguists, psychologists, sociologists, and cognitive scientists. Much of the debate centres on the widespread view that music expresses emotion. While Hanslick put forward the argument in 1854 that “purely instrumental music could not express human emotions” (Davies, 2012), as Davies notes, this is a difficult position to maintain, as “we might reasonably doubt that listeners comprehend music if they are never moved emotionally by it.” As Johnson similarly suggests, the medium of classical instrumental music is commonly “understood more in the highly subjective realm of emotions than in the collectively disputable realm of rational intellect” (2002, p. 79).

Yet, as Scruton points out, since the influential and highly debated formalist approach proposed by Hanslick, “we have witnessed semantic, semiotic, cognitive and similar theories, and attempts – in the philosophy of music especially – to show how emotion is expressed in art,” and in his opinion none of these “has advanced the subject very far” (2011, pp. 98-99). As Bowie (2009) similarly observes, “the debate about music and emotions since Hanslick has been one of those philosophical debates which generates little but disagreement, where the positions advanced depend largely upon what philosophical assumptions the theorist has already adopted before looking at music” (p. 30). Reimer underlines the challenge, noting that explanations as to how and why we experience music as expressive, have “challenged musical aesthetics throughout history,” and will continue to “until the unlikely time arrives that human consciousness itself can be thoroughly explained” (2009, p. 51).

It is thus not surprising that many of the pianists highlighted the challenge in finding answers. **Jean-Paul Sevilla** felt that the way in which music touched people was “purely personal and cannot be explained.” **Mark Kruger** argued that with music, “what you put in is what you'll get out of it. […] I think so much is in your own thoughts, in your own perception of what you put into it.” **Stephen Savage** noted that the “music itself is not expressive. What is expressive is what the listener brings to it,” and dependent on “the sum total of their experience.” **Gao Ping** explained that as a listener “you can hear whatever you like in a piece of music,” and speaking from his experience as a composer, pointed out that this is very often unrelated to what the composer’s intentions were. **Roy Howat** agreed that everyone’s perceptions of a work of art
will be different, and will be influenced by “our imaginations” and what we are “projecting on to it.” As William Westney explained “I don’t know what the music means […] [it might be] meaning this to me, but that’s not the meaning.”

For Michael Kieran Harvey, the meaning behind the music was ultimately subjective: “There is music – I don’t understand why there is […] music is there if you think it’s music. And you can get into semantics about what is music and what’s not music, but it’s the perception of somebody listening to it.” As he further noted, “it’s got a lot to do with how much you understand,” comparing music to a drug: “The more you have of it, the more you understand about it, the stronger you’ve got to have it, the stronger drug it’s got to be.” Liam Viney also noted the challenge of findings answers: “You know there’s a whole debate in music history – the Hanslick versus the Wagner – music can’t really express anything but itself – oh but it can express all these other things – there’s no end to that argument.” While Viney agreed that music could be representational, he felt “there’s also something elemental about it that can’t really be reduced or compared to something else.”

Several pianists attempted to explain in more detail the way in which emotions could be transferred from composer to the audience. William Westney suggested, “music reflects how feelings go, not what they are,” describing this in terms of metaphor:

These are patterns of sound and they’re metaphors, they’re really not captured by emotional statements. So if I’m thinking a certain story in mind that informs my Chopin Ballade, if there are thirty people in the audience and if they’re listening well, they may be caught up in it thinking completely different types of stories; these are patterns that are metaphors for anything that it triggers in you. So, it’s not really specifically about grief, but that’s just the kind of an energy that might be in it.

Similarly, Stephen Savage suggested that music could be expressive of sadness “because of a personal situation – this piece was played at my father’s funeral – that makes me feel sad” or “there are gestures in it which relate to your experience of other music, which in turn trigger something.” Highlighting the challenges in accounting for the expressive power of music, and how pianists or audiences connect with it, Mark Kruger suggested that, “the composers themselves put whatever they put into the music then it’s there accessible at some sort of – I don’t know how to describe it – [perhaps] it acts on some sort of wave form, and you’ve got the matching kind of wave form.”

Expressivity and Structure

While the emotional significance of music has attracted much interest from many disciplines, in his discussion on ‘understanding’ music in Grove Music Online, Davies (2012) explains that a significant line of thinking in traditional musicology has been that “the appreciation of
instrumental music depends on recognition of its formal structure and is fundamentally opposed to emotional responses other than those that delight in the work’s formal unity and ingenuity.” The fact that this formal structure is most tangibly evident in the score may account for the significant focus placed on the musical text by many musicologists in their attempts to understand ‘the music.’

Indeed, as Samson (1999) suggests, the increasing interest during the nineteenth century on form and structure, leading to a “work-centered perspective” and the emergence of music analysis, reflected a “more general intellectual shift – and one of epochal significance – from doctrinal to rational knowledge” (p. 41). This shift, and focus on analysis, which Samson suggests is “essentially a discipline of our age” (p. 41), has greatly informed views that ‘the music’ of the Western classical culture can be defined primarily by the score (Sparshott & Goehr, 2012; Boorman, 1999).

There is no doubt that the score is an essential reference point for the classical pianist and a crucial component to the process and continuation of the classical canon. Sharing to some extent the focus of traditional musicologists, when discussing the extent to which meaning could be found in the score, most of the pianists focused on the expressive potential of structure. However, even the strongest advocates for the importance of analysis also observed that accounting for all the subtleties of the structure could be challenging, and additionally, that great works appeared to have something that went beyond what could be tangibly explained through structure alone.

Stephen Savage highlighted the expressive power of structure particularly in the “feeling of the narrative” that can arise “in the very broadest sense” from the “exposition, development, recapitulation and so on.” He also spoke of the less quantifiable though important relationships between inner and exterior layers of structure, noting that, “very often great art actually thrives on the tension that’s created through the chaotic element and that of order.” He discussed how this tension could manifest in various combinations with different composers, and demanded a high degree of psychological awareness from the performer:

I think of [Mozart] and Alban Berg as being totally ‘inside outs’ of each other, because with Berg, the exterior is so seething and seemingly – not chaotic exactly – but certainly so dramatic, but the inner ordering is I think, is very graceful. And Mozart is the other way around […] underneath the ever-gracious exterior there is this whole seething world.

Roy Howat highlighted on numerous occasions that pianists need to be aware and informed of ways in which different composers worked with structure. Citing a number of composers’ works and opinions, he argued that “the structure itself is expressive” and “the structure and the
emotional are indivisible.” As he explained: “If you haven’t grasped the architecture the expression’s going to go wrong; and indeed Debussy said exactly that.” Howat also felt that while “structure in sound” is “phenomenally sophisticated,” the score could be of significant value in this regard:

The theory’s worthwhile, because there really is an almost tangible structure in music. It’s tangible once you put it down on paper and draw maps of pieces and you can see how events in the music relate. […] So it’s not a material object that people see – but you know that structure is real and it is terrifically powerful.

However, Howat also pointed out that even with a good understanding of a work’s structure, “a great piece of music – it doesn’t matter how well you know it – it will still surprise you.” For example, he suggested, you may know that “just around the corner there’s going to be that surprise interrupted cadence […] but when it hits you, it’s still just as good as it was the first time round. I don’t know how you explain that.”

Additionally, Howat noted that in many great works there could be “the feeling that something all belongs together but you can’t always tell why.” Again, using examples, he pointed out that the greatest works could be those where even the most skilled analysis cannot fully quantify the craft behind them:

Ravel talked about this. He was talking about Debussy, of course his great contemporary, and he was saying to somebody, if they look at Debussy’s La Mer, ‘the only problem I have with La Mer – it’s a great piece – but I’m aware of the cogs and how they’re interacting and how the piece is put together; if I’m being really critical I can see the intellectual construction of the piece.’ And he said, ‘for me the absolute masterpiece is the one where you can’t even see how it has been put together, it just links up naturally.’ And he said Debussy’s Prélude à l’après-midi d’un faune was an example of that, he said ‘play that at my funeral, it’s just so perfect, you can’t see how it works.’

Matteo Napoli explained that he spends a lot of time analysing the “proportions of the work” as “the structure of the work is what brings the scores alive.” Yet, echoing Howat, he also noted one could study great music for years, and continue to discover depths to it: “… you will never feel it’s finished.” Similarly, speaking from his perspective as performer and composer, Gao Ping felt that theory and analysis are “extremely valuable” in our efforts to explain music and “see how it fits together.” However, he also argued that “there are irrational parts of music,” and subsequently analysis has its limitations:

[Analysis] doesn’t tell us why that piece of music is good; it doesn’t really. It tells us something about the structure, and that certain structures work as a piece of music, and therefore it’s very valuable. We can learn a lot from it and why it works this way, but you can reproduce just the same structure and it could be completely a total piece of junk. So
there is that, you cannot explain. How can you explain that?

Michael Kieran Harvey also expressed his views as both performer and composer. He spoke of his particular interest in working with and performing music that has been “distilled” into notation: “You see, I get my energy from that distillation.” In contrast, he pointed out, in “a lot of free improvisation and jazz,” he finds “there aren’t strict enough parameters to make what you’re doing … compelling. I can’t put it any simpler than that.” As a composer, he described his focus on “the shape of the music” and form: “I’m interested in form, only. Form is the thing, not colour, not melody, not anything but form.” However, significantly, he highlighted his frustrations at the fact that even well-constructed or ‘distilled’ music could lack an ‘intangible’ and crucial something:

I don’t understand how composers work. I find it very difficult to compose, so I have a sense of awe and reverence for people who can compose, because it’s a mystery […]. I constantly talk to people who I respect as composers and run stuff past them and they’ll say ‘well there’s no idea in that, it’s good work, but there’s no idea in that, there’s no sort of significant moment, there’s nothing’ – ‘What do you mean?’ – ‘Don’t know, but there’s nothing of it in this though.’ That’s intangible.

As can be seen from the comments above, while there is much is to be found, studied and analysed in the score, there is perhaps equally as much that cannot. On this basis, it seems appropriate that more traditional views focused on the score as the main reference point for meaning in ‘the music itself’ have been reconsidered in the ‘new musicology’ to emerge in the last decades of the twentieth century (see Kerman, 1985; DeNora, 2000; Sullivan, 2005; Duckles & Pasler, 2012). As Boorman suggests, reflecting a number of the discussions above, the notation itself “is not the piece of music,” but rather “an allusive guide, offering the performer hints alongside the instructions, and therefore depending on the musician’s ability to understand these hints and allusions” (1999, p. 411). Or, as Gabrielson and Juslin observe, the “increase of interest in emotional aspects related to music performance” has “partly grown out of nagging concerns that the one-sided emphasis on structural aspects somehow does not capture the essence of musical activity” (1996, p. 70).

However, echoing some of the voices above, while serving to highlight the complex relationship between musical and personal factors in the construction of meaning, Stephen Savage suggested: “With the best music, one of the things that makes it that way, is its ability to mirror your own growth and it changes as you go on, so it will speak to you in different ways”:

The music speaks to you differently, because maybe it hasn’t changed, but you’ve changed. The image that seems to come to my mind is the music going through you rather like a light through a prism and maybe the nature of that prism changes […] One of
the ways you measure it is by going back to something and being aware that it means something differently. It’s difficult to be tangible about it.

Aaron Copland makes a similar observation: “If it is a great work of art, don't expect it to mean exactly the same thing to you each time you return to it” (2002, p. 11). Thus, while meaning may involve far more than can be quantified in the score, and – in the case of great music – may change over time, while we may not be able to quantify exactly how, the work itself remains a crucial factor.

Implications for the Intangible

This initial overview of perceptions on intangibles ‘in the music’ highlights the challenge of locating and making tangible the meaning of music. This includes a range of cultural and personal factors that will influence how meaning is perceived, and the degree to which the printed score is a reliable basis for determining what this is. To the question of what music means, the pianists argued that any answers to this are highly subjective, based on individual perceptions, and additionally, non-static. While both cultural and historical understanding were noted as relevant, at least two pianists explicitly highlighted their belief that the underlying purpose or meaning of music has the potential to transcend both. Significantly, it was noted that great music could be distinguished as having a flexibility and depth of meaning, with the capacity to reflect or mirror the changing (or developing) perceptions brought to it by the performer or listener. Conversely, their statements suggest that the degree of understanding and perceptions of the performer will have an influence on what this meaning is, and what is ultimately expressed through the music. Not surprisingly, few pianists seemed inclined to speak out on the highly problematic, complex and debated question of how music expresses meaning. While it was suggested that music acts as some kind of wave-form, trigger, or metaphor for meaning, answers on how this mechanism worked were not forthcoming.

While the score is a highly concrete reference point for musicians, and much can be gleaned from it, even the strongest advocates for the importance of careful analysis highlighted its limitations. Structure was noted as being a significant source of a work’s expressive content, however great music was perceived as containing an elusive factor that could not be found through analysing the score, or it was suggested, quantified through intellectual or rational means. Providing another angle on what this intangible quantity might be, several pianists noted a distinction between the great works of the standardised classical canon and what they felt could sometimes be lacking in more recent contemporary repertoire, with the latter variously described as being overly “cerebral,” “dry”, “clichéd,” and lacking in “feeling” or “beauty.”

As can be seen from the various opinions above, not only is the meaning of music contingent upon a number of variable influences, its intangibility is also evident in the ambiguities that
arise when approaching this topic from a number of angles. On the one hand, music was considered to be a carrier for meaning, and, as several pianists explicitly noted, it could be noticed when meaning was lacking, and even what kind of meaning was missing. Yet, as many of the pianists agreed, meaning is created by what we imagine of, project on, or bring to the music. In this circular relationship between perceived and inherent meaning, the potential of great music to be expressive may be significantly reliant on the attributes of those performing it.

4.2 The Intangible in the Musician

The skills and training required to become a professional classical pianist are well-documented and, while debated in the details, for the most part closely prescribed. Beginning at an early age, a piano student will engage in a long period of acquiring the practical skills of the craft, including fine motor skills and coordination (technique), refining these into musical and expressive interpretations (musicianship) and accumulating a body of repertoire and performance experience. Additionally, and most often honed through tertiary studies, a pianist will undertake studies in ear training, music theory, analysis, and historical styles and contexts. Dedication is an obvious factor, as Ericsson, Krampe, and Tesch-Römer (1993) report, a minimum of 10,000 hours of deliberate practice over more than a decade is required for the skills necessary for professional expertise (p. 394).

While there is a plethora of technical, analytical, and historical literature on music dealing with the above aspects, the characteristics that distinguish the finest musicians from the merely professionally competent are far less discussed. As Stryker points out, “countless books address the technical aspects of mastering an instrument and can help musicians learn to play faster, louder, and higher. Countless books profile great musicians, surveying the details of their lives, influences, styles and recordings,” however “few writers have developed a meaningful vocabulary to help focus our understanding of those qualities that separate the truly great musicians […] from the parade of aspiring marching behind them” (in Green, 2005, p. 2).

Given that intangible and ineffable qualities may well play a role, the question of ‘what makes a great musician’ was posed either directly to the pianists, or prompted through a selection of quotations from the voices of musicians or critics. While this topic was explored from a number of angles and returns in various guises throughout this document, the following section considers their specific comments on the commonly referred to concepts of musicality, talent, virtuosity and artistry. From these discussions, it was evident that intangible aspects are most prominent in the early identification of talent and at the other end of the pianist’s professional journey; the much aspired to yet elusive qualities constituting artistry.
Musicality and Talent

The question of whether a child has a natural ability for music, or exhibits musical talent is one very often considered at an early age, and a positive judgment – particularly in the case of the latter – can be a significant motivating factor for parents, teachers, and children alike in pursuing further training on an instrument. There is also the possibility of being heralded a child prodigy or genius, which, in its rarity, carries even greater prestige. Not surprisingly, the concept of talent – as it is exhibited across a range of domains – has received a great deal of interest from psychologists. Noticeably, there appears to be an increasing desire to find tangible explanations for it, with a trend towards theories of acquired expertise rather than “innate talent” (see Ericsson, Krampe, & Tesch-Römer, 1993).

However, according to Howe, Davidson and Sloboda (1998), the findings on either side of the “nature-nurture pendulum” remain inconclusive and “decades of evidence have shown that none of these standpoints alone is sufficient to explain why some people have extraordinary success whereas others do not” (p. 429). While neuroscientists are also increasingly investigating this realm, as Zatorre (2005) reports, “little progress has been made” in attempts to “explain individual differences in ‘native’ ability” or unravel “interactions between genetic and environmental factors” (p. 314). Nevertheless, many continue to challenge the perception that “the really great performers seem to be endowed with a ‘God-given’ insight” (Gabrilowitsch, in Cooke, 1999, p. 129).

While the pianists used the term ‘musical’ quite broadly throughout these discussions, in most cases they made a clear distinction between musicality and talent. Speaking from their own experience and from their observations of others, most appeared to share the opinion that everybody was born with a basic level of musicality, though noted differing degrees of talent that distinguished some musicians from others. Only one pianist was confident in explaining the origins of either. In addition to their overall comments below, further discussion on the subtleties and qualities required of the musicians when engaging in the processes of music-making are considered in more detail throughout the following chapters.

Roy Howat felt that musical responsiveness was something everyone was born with, noting he has “never seen a baby that doesn’t respond physically and emotionally to being played music.” On this basis, he observed, “I’m not sure there’s really such a thing as tone-deafness; it’s just [that] there’s something that hasn’t been woken usually […] I just say expose all kids to music and it can wake something up.” Howat did note, however, that some people could be more naturally suited to music: “I had the talent for music when I was exposed to it. When I was three I sort of jumped in like a duckling into water.” Similarly, William Westney felt that musicality was inherently natural, noting that his early exposure to Dalcroze eurythmics was beneficial in
“maximizing this sense of awareness to everything musical within.” He also suggested a distinction between this and talent, expressing his belief that he had “inherited some musical genes” from a great uncle who was a professional musician: “I just had a bundle of some kind of musical abilities that I was born with that manifested itself […] I don’t remember learning how to read music, I don’t remember having to struggle with any of that stuff.”

Freddy Kempf also believed that musicality was “natural to an extent,” while talent could be quite specific, and extend to the type of instrument one is more suited to. As he explained, while he “never had any trouble learning something on the piano,” he was less successful with other instruments: “I think to be expressive you have to have a natural knack for the tool that you’re expressing with.” Liam Viney spoke of encountering many degrees of talent, highlighting examples of extremely talented individuals, “where it’s as easy as existence, where there’s no sense of having to work for it – like Horowitz or Gould – who could do whatever they wanted.” As he further – and humbly observed: “But I don’t think that – well I know that’s not me.”

Gao Ping observed that “some people show signs at a very early age of a kind of innate connection to music,” but found it challenging to define talent, noting the “vague way” in which people talk about it: “We use this word ‘talent’ not very specifically. I mean when somebody plays well, he’s talented. But what is that talent? I don’t know. I don’t know how to define that word.” Gao Ping ultimately felt that it is “unknown to us what determines who is talented or not.” Jean-Paul Sevilla also felt that talent was unexplainable, though stated upfront: “This is a gift which God gave me. I am a believer.” As he further observed, “you cannot make a musician from somebody who is not. That is God.” Sevilla also recognised a distinction between talent and genius. Referring to the popular movie Amadeus, he pointed to what he felt was the underlying “confrontation between talent, which Salieri had” and the “genius of Mozart which cannot be explained.”

Reflecting and elaborating on the above views, Stephen Savage referred to musicality as a “set of reflexes” which could be “determined from quite an early stage in people, in response to what they hear.” As with Howat, he also observed that musical responses could be registered of babies while still in the womb. Talent, however, was something he felt was more complex, speaking broadly of a “combination of certain co-ordinations between mind and body and spirit.” In his attempts to explain this cliché, he further described talent as the ability “to realise what there is to be realised in the material you’re dealing with, and to in some ways infuse it with the intensity of coming to it through your own particular passions as a human being.” Or metaphorically, as “being really wired up to the music and wired up to your own personality […] and pure sparks being produced as those wires touch.” As with Viney, Savage also highlighted degrees of talent. While noting he was “never a prodigy” and thus couldn’t speak
from first-hand experience, he gave examples of prodigious talent he had encountered:

It’s someone for whom everything is wired up totally naturally and can be done without conscious thought, straight away […] There is this incredible wiring. I mean I don’t know if you would even necessarily call it musicality. But it’s an incredible interfacing with music.

Echoing the opinion of Sevilla, though less explicitly associating himself with the concept, Savage observed, “there can be a certain so-called ‘God-given’ thing,” while also noting a realm accessed by child prodigies which may be lost once they get “in touch with their humanness.” As he further noted, while we might attempt to measure talent through “reasoned ways” such as “testing the rhythmic acuity of young children” or “their ability to sing in pitch,” standard measuring tools could lead to inaccurate judgments: “Sometimes the prodigies fall by the wayside, and a lot of people who may have appeared talented but not that talented are actually the ones who come through.” While Savage was the only pianist to raise this topic, the unreliability of such testing methods is also highlighted in the literature (see Howe, Davidson & Sloboda, 1998, p. 429).

While musicality and talent are terms mostly associated with the earlier stages of a musician’s career, at the other end of the vocational journey, where these attributes are generally taken for granted, the terminology used to describe great performances can be seen to shift into the equally broad categories of ‘virtuosity’ and ‘artistry.’ As prominent and oft-cited concepts when referring to musicians, these are considered in turn below.

**Virtuosity and Artistry**

A virtuosic command of the instrument is now a prerequisite for the professional pianist, and without an extremely high level of technical mastery, it is not possible to succeed in the competition – or arguably the concert circuit. As Abbey Simon notes of his piano training at the Curtis Institute of Music: “The idea of a virtuoso technique was inculcated early in our mind, and we knew that unless one developed great agility, great stamina, there was no hope to succeed as a pianist” (in Grindea, 2007, p. 146). Presenting another angle on this institutional focus, Lawson (2002) suggests that it is not surprising to find that conservatories “encourage technical virtuosity […] since this is an aspect of performance which can be readily assessed” (p. 11). Indeed, virtuosity is both impressive and relatively tangible.

While generally considered a positive attribute, perceptions on virtuosity have varied over the course of history. Grove Music Online defines a virtuoso variously as “a person of notable accomplishment; a musician of extraordinary technical skill,” as “distinguished,” or “a musician of exceptional training.” However, in response to the increasingly “exhibitionist talents” displayed by performers in the late eighteenth century, attitudes towards the virtuoso also came
to adopt pejorative associations (Jander, 2012). Indeed this change in perception is the focus of the three dedicated dictionary entries on virtuoso in the *Oxford Music Online* portal. Parker (2011) notes that the term can “describe a performer whose talent was ‘merely’ technical, unduly crowd-pleasing, and lacking in good taste,” or as Kennedy (2012) highlights, it can carry the “implication that a virtuoso performance excludes emotional and expressive artistry, or subdues it to technical display.” Each of these sources concludes, however, by stressing that the term retains its positive associations of mastery.

In these interviews the pianists all spoke of technique as essential. However, in speaking of what they valued in great musicians, or strive for in their own music-making, virtuosity did not appear to play a role. Indeed, echoing the less positive associations afforded to it above, many highlighted the limitations and indeed problems of being overly focused on technical perfection or virtuosic display. While their comments on this topic return in various guises throughout this document, the following selection serves to highlight shared opinions of there being far more to their craft.

*Jean-Paul Sevilla* simply pointed out that a purely technical approach was not sufficient in order to be musically expressive: “Fingers are just robots, they are employees.” While acknowledging the practical necessary of a solid technique, *Matteo Napoli* suggested that if a pianist’s main focus is on being “faster and louder and cleaner […] you’re not going to be a musician; you’re going to be a typewriter.” Equally dispassionate, *Michael Kieran Harvey* noted his lack of interest in going to hear “the latest wiz thing do the latest version of *Gaspard* or whatever other war horse.” *Stephen Savage* highlighted his preference for playing that expressed something “intrinsic in music rather than in making a big display.” As he noted, he is not “a virtuoso by nature.” *Gao Ping* associated virtuosity with loud and fast passages, and “dazzling” the audience, though explained “it’s always the quieter things that I feel most intensely about.”

However, as several pianists explained, technical virtuosity was what they perceived to be important early in their careers. *Freddy Kempf* spoke of his desire to “please” and “impress” people by “trying to play a passage more technically accomplished” and “faster” than anyone else, noting, “that’s what I understood to be the goal.” Yet, he is now more interested in “quiet romantic playing” and considers emotional expressivity as his goal: “You can’t have any point where you’re at all thinking about your own mechanics. The whole time you’ve got to be dedicated to expression.” Similarly, *Liam Viney* noted that while in his teenage years “playing fast and loud was important,” his interest now is not in “fast fingers” but “appreciating beauty” and in “the joy of relating to the beautiful aspects of music.” From his experience of focusing on technique in his training, *Mark Kruger* suggested that it could be detrimental to experiencing a
fulfilling connection to the music. As he disclosed – and is discussed further in Chapter Seven – even at times when his playing was “technically quite polished” there could be “something really missing.”

Beyond the development and refinement of technical skills and musicianship, the qualities admired in great pianists, and arguably, those that distinguish ‘good’ from ‘great’ performances are often described in terms of the ‘artistry’ of the performer. As Cook (1998) points out:

You only have to scan the music magazines on your nearest news-stand to see how thinking about classical music centres on the idea of the ‘great’ musician, defined as an artists whose technical skill is taken for granted, but whose artistry lies in his or her (but usually his) personal vision. (p. 12).

Similarly, Frederickson and Rooney highlight, “serious musicians” are those “dedicated to artistic performance and a desire to be recognized as such by audiences” (1988, p. 228).

However, while anyone engaged in the art might be classified as an artist, reports of ‘great artistry’ in piano performance (as with other instruments) are not as easily given out. As pianist Peter Frankl argues: “The standard of piano playing nowadays is higher than ever, yet there are fewer great artists and individuals” (in Grindea, 2007, p. 145). Or as Fou Ts’Ong observes:

There are many virtuoso pianists, but I am afraid that I do not hear many young artists of great individuality. Sometimes I say to myself that ‘this one has been listening to a lot of Horowitz’ or ‘that one is trying to copy Richter’. But, the way they play the works has really very little to do with the way these great artists play. Of course, young pianists do everything they can to present interpretations which would impress the jury…I am looking for something else though, and the qualities I expect in a young artist to succeed in this profession are rare. (in Grindea 2007, p. 140)

Echoing this point, and further highlighting the importance of artistry to the profession, Abbey Simon observes that while a plethora of first prizes are awarded in international competitions, if a pianist is “not an artist of a certain caliber, he enters into oblivion” (in Grindea, 2007, p. 151). Many other renowned pianists have expressed similar views in terms of the importance yet rarity of artistry, in comparison with what appears to be an abundance of technically accomplished and virtuosic players (e.g., Banowetz, in Grindea, 2007, p. 157; Bolet in Noyle, 2000, p. 24; Badura Skoda in Dubal, 1984, p. 53).

Finding further explanation of what artistry in music performance entails however is difficult, and academic or official references or definitions of this concept are scarce. While the terms ‘artist’ and ‘artistry’ appear in over ten thousand articles in the Oxford Music Online portal, the majority of references are associated with jazz or popular music, and there is no dedicated entry providing a definition or explanation of what either might entail. This absence is similarly the
case when sampling a number of key music dictionaries (e.g., Blom & Westrup, 1971; Westrup, Harrison, & Wilson, 1976; Bowman, 2002; and Randel, 2003). Furthermore, and echoing the observations of Dunsby and Rink in Chapter Two, very few piano-specific publications offer much assistance for an aspiring pianist (or pedagogue) to identify, or develop the calibre of artistry highlighted by the above voices as crucial. While occasionally the topic receives some attention in publications based on interviews with pianists, beyond highlighting the absence of artistry, the references are most often scattered throughout more biographical or practical discussions, making a definitive summary challenging.

**Personality**

As Lisk (2000) has suggested, the artistic qualities that lie beyond technique may well be best classified as the “intangibles of musical performance.” This is perhaps understandable given that when speaking of artistry, the emphasis appears to shift into the less tangible personal attributes – or personality – of the musician. As Davidson and Coimbra (2001) observe, artistry is “the communication not only of the music, but the personal interpretation of that music to the audience” (in Davidson 2002b, p. 106). Or as Green (2005) more descriptively suggests, beyond the tangible aspects of technique, the pathway to artistry takes us “into a place that even the word ‘excellence’ can barely touch, that almost indescribable realm of human depth which we refer to by such terms as ‘character’ and ‘soul’” (p. 7).

This suggested link between personality and musical success is supported by a number of other voices. Pianist and pedagogue Nelita True emphasised “personality and imagination” as crucial, noting, “you can hear it instantly” in a performance (personal communication, July 24, 2004). Gabrielsson and Juslin (1996) acknowledge that “personality traits, such as empathy or outgoingness” might well account for differences in expressive capabilities – and the challenge in measuring these (p. 88). In his examination of “Individual Difference in Music Behaviour, Kemp (1997) suggests that “it may not be merely what [musicians] can do that separates them from others, it may well prove to be the kinds of people that they are.” Additionally, he notes, “it may well prove to be the latter that underlies the former and ensures ultimate success at whatever level” (p. 42). Violinist Elizabeth Morgan more succinctly observes, “who we are is how we play” (in Bangert, 2007, p. 4).

The importance of the personality was highlighted by nearly all of the pianists in this study. In addition to the following comments, this topic returns in various closely related guises throughout the ensuing chapters. **Liam Viney** considered the pianist’s individual personality to be highly valuable, while also observing the challenge this presented in identifying what constitutes a great musician:
When you talk about what factors are needed – what factors I value in a good musician – I don’t think that I could name any one because so often the things which make a musician good and distinctive are completely linked to some part of that person’s fundamental nature.

Using different terminology, though reflecting a similar focus, Matteo Napoli spoke of the individual’s “soul” as crucial to great artistry. Echoing the statements of Frankl and Ts’ong (p. 99 above), he observed a significant difference between the “quality and standard” of past great pianists, and those entering (and winning) competitions today. As he argued, artistry – as exhibited by such “big stars” as Argerich, Pollini and Michelangeli – comes from “cultivating your own soul” and “imposing” your own “standards” on the music, or as he added, having the courage to be “a human being, despite the wrong notes.” In contrast, he felt that unfortunately today’s “young pianists” simply “try to duplicate what the last winner has done.”

Mark Kruger similarly felt that artistry was determined by “who you are as a person,” citing the off-hand remarks of Rubinstein for support:

A young pianist had sent him a tape, ‘what do you think of my playing Mr. Rubinstein? Please help me.’ And he said, ‘yes, dear girl, you play lovely and that’s all good, that’s all in place, what can I say, work on your personality’.

As Kruger later observed, “your playing is just your business card of who you are. You can see straight through a person in their playing.” Echoing Napoli’s statements above, he also noted a link between the qualities of the person and the pianist: “I think the ones that have won competitions, Michelangeli, Argerich and Schiff, Perahia, you know, those artists are immaculate players, immaculate people, immaculate artists.”

In a similar way to his earlier attempts to describe great music, Stephen Savage again used a striking metaphor to highlight the importance of personality in performance:

The music is going through the personality of the player like light through a particular prism. So, the light will be refracted differently, and so the music is refracted differently from one player to another. That becomes one of the fascinating things about performance and assessing performance.

Further defining the personal qualities of great artists however was challenging. As Freddy Kempf noted, “the difficult thing to explain” about great artistry is the “fact that everyone responds to something different.” Or as Gao Ping observed, “it obviously goes beyond this word excellence” but “we are talking about things which language or words cannot truly describe.” Highlighting the challenges in pinpointing what this is, the pianists spoke of a variety of potential factors, often referring to more than one concept in the same sentence, as the following two responses highlight.
Gao Ping spoke of his admiration for musicians who “seem to have a kind of largeness” and can “embrace a lot of things” yet “at the same time it’s also very specific because it is made of very small fragments of very fine feelings, fine touches.” Further, he explained, “I’m not too fond of the kind of musicians who are good at just one particular thing […] the ones I like really very much are the ones who have a much larger palette, whether it’s spiritual, emotional or technical.” When asked whether he could pinpoint what distinguishes a great musician from a good one, Roy Howat immediately replied that it was a combination of concentration and passion: “It’s a concentration thing […] you need the passion to get that concentration. You can concentrate on something – but the passion is what makes you concentrate.” In a similar way to Gao Ping, Howat also noted that artists are those who can engage with “all the tiny details and see how all the tiny details belong together, in conjunction with getting the essence of – that whole sort of essence that’s the piece.” In addition to these references broadly highlighting concentration, passion, and emotional or spiritual qualities, two sub-themes emerged as prominent in both the literature and these discussions, and are considered in turn: Stage presence and charisma, and sensitivity to – and speaking through – music.

Stage Presence and Charisma
References specifically related to the inspiring or charismatic stage presence of performers abound, and as with the general concept of artistry, are equally elusive, as the following examples highlight. Leon Fleisher observes: “There are those who can pick up a bunch of black dots on a piece of paper and inspire the world” (in Dubal, 1984, p. 172). Ferrucio Busoni speaks of a “personal magnetism which sometimes enables the artist to inspire four thousand […] with one and the same feeling” (in Dubal, 1984, p. 12). Or as Vlassenko and Stepanov (2011) suggest, “inspiration, supported by professionalism and mastery, has always been the mark of the true art of piano playing.” Music critic Schuler Chapin notes the intensity of electricity between Horowitz and his audience, describing it as a “physical presence in the air,” and suggests it is not technique, but “how they can capture the audience” that makes performers great (in Sturrock, 1999). Rubinstein observes a similar physical, though intangible phenomenon at play:

I believe very strongly that when we play to an audience it is not just what they hear but what emanates from us. It’s what makes them come still so much to concerts instead of listening quietly in their slippers to a gramophone performance. It makes a big difference you see, because there is a personal touch, there is an antenna. (in Sturrock, 1999)

In attempting to describe the qualities of great performers, a number of the pianists similarly spoke of less tangible, embodied attributes, though expressed various opinions on what and how valued these were. Freddy Kempf described his own attempts to analyse why he is “touched by” certain performers, and similarly how he might touch his audience. From his observations
he suggested that the key criterion of a great performer is their ability to inspire an audience: “Whether it’s musical or whether it’s exciting or deep or you know just flashy, I think what we’re looking for is to feel inspired.” In describing the common factors he had found in those who do inspire him, he spoke of being able to sense their dedication and focus, irrespective of whether they were technically “very good.” Rather than “trying” or “thinking” about technical matters, they appear to be “completely focusing on the effect of what they’re doing.”

Matteo Napoli also highlighted inspiration as a key factor: “It is the inspiration to bring alive the score because the score is a dead piece of paper.” However, he did not further explain how this manifested in great performers. Mark Kruger attempted to explain what he felt was a powerful physical presence in the great past pianists he found inspirational (such as Rubinstein, Cortot, Arrau and Gieseking): “You just get the feeling that it’s the ‘real deal’ … it’s the real authentic thing, from each of them. It’s pure … it’s open … it’s free, no blockage.” Stephen Savage described the pianists he was most attracted to as having a “certain charisma,” a “classical poise and nobility,” and exuding a “sort of fantasy and poetry” in their playing.

However, several pianists referred to charisma or stage presence as something less intrinsic to the performer, and more of a stage ‘act,’ with many mentioning Horowitz as an extreme example. As Savage noted, there were those types of performers who communicated through “through electricity like Horowitz did, the razzle-dazzle,” to which he added: “I must say that’s not really me.” Liam Viney similarly noted, “there are so many different kinds of performers” and that he did not associate himself with “the domain of charismatic performance.” Also using Horowitz as an example, he suggested that this type of presence might be a manifestation of psychological imbalance, and additionally implied it could be ‘used’ in a less than appropriate way:

He was a highly intense psychologically… tumultuous individual but he sublimated all of that into his piano playing […] all of this kind of – basically sexual – electricity went into the piano and went out, and he was conscious of it and used it.

Gao Ping explained that at times he felt he could keep “the audience riveted and that’s a wonderful feeling.” However, he wondered whether this might involve a degree of manipulation: “Maybe there is a little bit of manipulation also, I don’t know. I mean Horowitz’s playing is extremely manipulative […] he could make you feel the way he wants you to feel.” With some disdain, he also noted that these types of charismatic performers “can seduce you,” and questioned whether this was an ideal form of communication. Similarly, Roy Howat noted the manipulation that could be involved, though he saw this as an accepted part of the arts: “Anything artistic, poetry, any art, anything creative you do plays on the listener or the reader […] It’s how it manipulates the recipient’s perceptions and evokes feelings and emotions in
them.” Echoing Howat, **Stephen Savage** also admitted that “you do play on an audience, you have to, because you have to involve them.”

**Michael Kieran Harvey** felt that reports of artists having a special charisma or electricity in performance were encouraged by media hype, and individual perception:

This idea that people have this electricity, or have this vibe or have this ‘x factor,’ it’s really in the minds of the onlooker and in the minds of the hype surrounding the person up for it. I don’t think there is anything actually there. It’s imagined. […] I just think it exposes what our desires for entertainment are. I think it’s got nothing to do with music. Notably however, Harvey made a striking comment during a later dinner discussion on great performances, referring specifically to one by pianist Roger Woodward: “It raised the hair on the back of the head. You’ve got to hand it to the guy, when that happens to me – despite myself – all my prejudices go out the window. I love that. I really do.” Evidently, whether imagined or not, Harvey could still be physically affected by certain performers.

**Sensitivity and Speaking**

Kemp (1997) points out that “no discussion of musicians and the personal qualities which characterize them would be complete without mention of their sensitivity” (p. 32). Citing previous research into this field, he reports that sensitivity “emerges as a stable trait in all groups of musicians regardless of age,” and can include sensory capacities of “perception of pitch, dynamics, tempo and timbre”; “less cognitive” aspects including feeling and emotional sensitivity; and “empathy, gentleness, imagination and intuition” (p. 32). On a subtler – yet contested level, others have suggested sensitivity to the ‘spirit’ in the music may also play a role (Sigel, 1966, p. 65). Even Juslin – who challenges the elusiveness of musical expressivity – acknowledged, “expressive skills may to some extent reflect the emotional sensitivity of the performer” (2003a, p. 4).

**Gao Ping** spoke of sensitivity to music in general, while also highlighting colour: “What I’m looking for when I listen to someone – well I try not to look for anything – but if I hear a real sensitivity for the music, sensitivity for the colour that appeals to me the most.” **Stephen Savage** noted that the word itself could be problematic, yet spoke of the importance of emotional and psychological sensitivity to the content of the music, the colour and texture, and less explicitly, empathy and imagination:

I think it’s a loaded sort of word – sensitivity – but I think being awake to the implications of what’s there in the music is the first thing – and not reading too much into it, but at the same time not taking it for granted. I mean what is going on here, so for example, if I was a flute player, how would that feel? Or, could I possibly be hearing this piece in a certain combination of colours or instrumental textures?
Savage discussed sensitivity further through a comparison of the works of Schubert and Beethoven. Underlining that the two composers were “totally different psychologically,” he argued that the performer needs to be “awake” to the wide variety of moods and dramatic content that can exist between different composers, and, also, within any individual work: “As a performer you have to be totally aware […] and be absolutely clear as to when something exactly changes in the music.” As he also noted, this should be based on a personal level of awareness rather than relying on the reports of others: “We have to look at them very freshly and leave all the preconceptions about these works, and the popular images of the composers right out the door, because they have a tremendous range: that’s what makes them great.”

Jean-Paul Sevilla emphasises that, beyond awareness of musical construction and the subtleties of rhythm, melody and harmony, classical musicians must be emotionally sensitive to the musical content: “Many people have the tendency to think that Bach was an architect. He was a great architect but he was a very sensitive person also [pointing to his heart]. And I like Bach more as a sensitive person than an architect.” Additionally, Sevilla observed that while he himself is particularly sensitive to “shape and colour,” the way in which people are “touched by this or by that is purely personal and cannot be explained.” Notably, when later asked whether we can ‘teach the intangible,’ Sevilla’s immediate response focused on this aspect: “You cannot teach sensitivity.”

Sensitivity towards the music could also be problematic, as Michael Kieran-Harvey disclosed when asked whether he ever felt overly sensitive (or ‘soppy’, using his expression) during performance:

I did a performance in Western Australia of the second Tchaikovsky and they started the trio – the slow movement – and it was such beautiful trio playing […] I couldn’t stop this torrent and it’s splashing all over the keys and everybody could see this, and I’m sitting there [crying] – couldn’t see the keys. They were all looking at me as they’re playing getting really worried, and I kept playing [laughter] … Girlfriend had left me or something.

As he further observed, while a musician’s sensitivity to music can be powerful, “it’s subjective, it’s related to what you’re going through.” Also underlining the highly “personal” aspect of engaging with music, William Westney referred to the sensitivity of musicians as something that needs to be taken seriously, particularly in assessment. His passionate views on this are considered further in Chapter Eight. While the term ‘sensitivity’ was not specifically used by all of the pianists, many related comments were made in relation to feeling the music and the emotions, and appear throughout the themed discussions below.

Evident in many of the comments above, it is difficult to separate the musician from the music in these discussions. This was made more explicit in those comments on artistry that
emphasised the ability of the pianist to be in touch with, and communicate a musical message, with comparisons made to speech and storytelling. As Gao Ping noted, what he looks for is “someone who can speak this music through their instrument.” Most musicians, he suggested, “don’t speak, they play it well, they play it perfectly. You can’t say anything is wrong with it, but it doesn’t speak.” In contrast however, “Horowitz speaks, and Rubinstein speaks, you know it seems like they’re talking through that music, even though what they are talking about is beyond words.”

Roy Howat highlighted on several occasions the importance of “clarity of communication.” Great artists, he observed, “feel something incredibly intensely and somehow they manage to communicate it” or get “the story across to you.” As he noted, this necessitated the ability to be in touch with the “essence that’s the piece, and surprising you with it, and making you think I didn’t know it could sound like that. Or, making you think, ‘I knew it could sound like that but I’ve never heard anyone do it.’” Stephen Savage similarly suggested that a key difference between musicality and artistry is the degree to which a musician is in touch with, and can ‘speak’ from “the depths” required of the music:

I think musicality might be equated to the ability to speak well […]. Somebody speaks well, they can turn a polished phrase, they can provide an entertaining after-dinner speech. I would say artistry though is someone who speaks more from the depths, who speaks eloquently but also is in touch with something that’s appropriately profound – yes appropriately profound – to the kind of status of the material they are playing.

Thus, in addition to the very personal and individual factors that contribute to artistry, the challenge of pinpointing or accounting for great performances inevitably must take into account the interaction between the music and the musician. As Savage suggested, it’s about being “awake” to “what’s there in the music,” or as Mark Kruger observed, struggling to describe great performances: “I don’t know what it is…see you can’t talk about what it is. It’s something about the person and the music.”

Implications for the Intangible

From their comments it appears that the majority of the pianists interviewed felt that musicality was a natural trait and could be encouraged through early exposure (developing nature via nurture). Talent however – as it relates to Western classical music – was noted as being far more selective; varying in degrees; potentially instrument specific; and either genetically inherited, unexplainable, or a God-given gift, particularly in the case of prodigy or genius. As Savage further observed, while we may be able to test for certain musical acuities, there is much more to the concept of talent than can currently be made tangible.
While the pianists considered technical skills crucial, and several noted their particularly technical focus when young, virtuosity was largely discarded as fast, loud or dazzling playing, and primarily discussed as a potential distraction from the more elusive yet ideal goal of artistry. The pianists presented a host of less tangible qualities contributing to an artistic performance. The personality of the performer was highlighted by most – whether explicitly or implicitly – as a crucial aspect of artistry. Defining what this was however was challenging, with a range of potentially contributing factors suggested. Great performers were noted for having a balance between concentration and passion; a broad conceptual understanding combined with attention to detail; a sensitivity to the colour, texture, or shape of the music; being aware of, awake to, or in touch with the dramatic, emotional, psychological, beautiful, spiritual or profound content of the music; able to engage empathetically or imaginatively with the music; and having the ability to communicate by ‘speaking’ or telling a story through music.

The pianists’ responses in terms of stage presence or charisma ranged from more positively perceived attributes of poise, nobility, being clean, pure, or authentic, inspired and inspiring; to those which suggested a less than ideal manifestation of sexual electricity, psychological imbalance, or conscious manipulation of the audience. Highlighting the ambiguous and contested nature of this embodied ‘x-factor,’ while Harvey argued that that any such impression is purely in the “eye of the beholder” and based on media hype, he also observed occasional performances that challenge his prejudices in this regard. More implicit and even less tangible qualities such as morality, purity, integrity, and sincerity also emerged throughout these discussions, and are discussed further in Chapter Six.

The pianists’ opinions above confirm the findings of Creech, Papageorgi, and Welch (2010), who report that perceptions of “innate talent” persist in “contemporary discourse relating to ideal musicians in the Western music tradition” (p. 15) and that musicians are increasingly “privileging the role of personality” in their discussions of what constitutes an ideal musician (p. 15). As they conclude, the concept of an ideal musician “remains both elusive and open to further discussion and exploration,” particularly in terms of how these ideals are reflected and “operationalized within music education contexts” (p. 16). The pianists’ views on the latter are presented in Chapter Eight.

As can be seen in a number of the pianists’ reflections in this chapter, when discussing the intangible in either the music or the musician, the conversations often referred to the interaction between the two. There are many factors that influence how pianists approach, interact with, and communicate ‘the music’ of the Western classical canon. When considering the core components of composer, instrument, and the audience, various spaces of interaction emerge, each with its own challenges that must be negotiated by the performer. These include translating
or interpreting what is notated in the score and the many expressive subtleties that are not, manifesting these through the instrument into sound, and communicating these to the audience within the physical spaces of performance. These spaces of interaction and the many factors that can be seen to influence the act of music-making are considered further in the following chapter.
Chapter Five: The Intangible Between

5.0 Introduction

While the score plays a crucial role in the tradition of Western classical music – constituting the main reference point for the canon of works at its core – the art of bringing music to life in performance lies in how musicians interpret, sonically transform, and communicate what is notated. Yet, as Pablo Casals suggests, “the written note is like a strait jacket [...] it has a very limited power to express what the music actually means” (in Blum, 1980, p. 70). As highlighted in Chapter 4.1, many of the pianists agreed with this view, along with the increasingly widespread perspective that the score “is not actually the musical work,” providing “no more than the minimal necessary information for a new performance” (Boorman, 1999, pp. 405-406; cf. Sullivan, 2005, p. 1541).

Referring to the limitations of the score, in a lecture on *Intangibles in Music*, singer Katie Noonan observed that artistic performance is “all about the space in-between the notes” (K. Noonan, personal communication, August 2, 2005). In this chapter, this phrase has been adopted as a metaphorical reference for all that is considered important – or essential – in a musical performance, yet not tangibly represented in a notated score. Many musicians will make similar reference to the importance of this ‘space between.’ Speaking in terms of timing, Isaac Stern suggested that “music is the thousandth of a millisecond between one note and another, how you get from one to the other - that's where the music is” (in Green, 2005, p. 2); while Artur Schnabel claimed: “The notes I handle no better than many pianists. But the pauses between the notes? Ah, that is where the art resides!” (*Chicago Daily News*, June 11, 1958, in Margulis, 2007, p. 485).

In addition to the expressivity inherent in timing, others will allude to a host of considerations that are perceived metaphorically to lie beyond or behind the notes. To note just a few of the many opinions that could be cited in this regard, Lisk points out, “for artistic expression and meaning to occur, we must look beyond the symbols of musical notation. Simply responding only to the specifics of notation leaves little room for one’s imagination when expressing the composer’s intent” (2003, p. 30). Pianist and pedagogue William Sherwood asserts: “There is so much in being able to find what is hidden behind the notes. You must get an insight into the inner idea; must feel it. This is not technic, not method even; it is the spiritualization of playing” (in Brower, 1915). Almost 100 years later, the former Dean of the Sydney Conservatorium of Music advised: “You have to master your body, your soul – it’s not about the notes” (K. Walker, personal communication, September 13, 2005). Audiences also appear to recognise that
artistry goes beyond merely adhering to the notes on the page, as highlighted in the following review of renowned pianist Evgeny Kissin:

In this evening’s recital he will play more than 30,000 musical notes; all in perfect sequence, all within the most delicate balance, and all from memory […] But even these astonishing things are not what matter most. There is something else, something between the notes, or behind the notes or contained within the notes, that generates in his audiences an extraordinary enthusiasm, a deep response which is just as indefinable as his gift. (in Nupen, 1999)

As evident in the above, in negotiating the space between the score and its realisation, the considerations for the performer include not only the sonic spaces between sounds, but also the larger conceptual and communicative spaces between performer and composer, and performer and audience. Many have identified the complexity of this relationship (Swanwick, 1979, pp. 19-21; Lawson, 2002, p. 3; McLamore, 2005, p. 1530; Narmour, 1988, p. 318), however, this is a largely unexplored area of research. As Gabrielsson and Juslin highlight: “The communication chain from the originator of the music to the recipient contains a number of intervening elements” which “includes the composer, the score, the performer(s), the sounding music, and the listener […] To our knowledge, there is practically no valid empirical research on musical communication including all elements sketched above” (1996, p. 68).

While the areas of music reception and perception have since received a lot of attention from sociologists and scientists (see DeNora, 2000; Tirovolas & Levitin, 2011), as highlighted by the voices of the musicians in Part One of this thesis, the relevance for the performer of much of this research has thus far been limited. Indeed, as Tirovolas and Levitin highlight from a review of empirically based perception and cognition studies from 1983-2010, in many of the experiments involving pre-composed music, information about the music, “such as the performer” was simply “unknown” (p. 31).

The following chapter then considers the pianists’ perspectives on these ‘in-between spaces’ or relationships from three musical contexts: The interpretative spaces between pianist and the composer; the expressive spaces between the score and its translation into sound; and the communicative space between performer and audience. When considered from the pianists’ perspectives, these various spaces of engagement in the act of music-making contain a wealth of both ambiguous and intangible aspects.
5.1 Interpretative Spaces

Between the Composer and the Pianist

When approaching a work in the Western classical canon, a performer is faced with many possibilities and choices in how to interpret what is presented in the score (see Emmerson & Turner, 2006). As DePreist points out, “the gap between the musical blueprint, that is, the score, and the interpreted sound is a universe of options and potentialities” (1999, p. 11), or as Lisk similarly expresses, “the space that exists between a mechanical response with notation and an artistic expression is quite large (2000, p. 6). Pointing out that musicians “must learn not only to read between the lines, but also to consider the variety of possibilities that an interpretation can offer,” Fischer-Dieskau further observes, “come to think of it, it’s almost comical how many expressive possibilities there are” (in Bardet, Klein, & Monsaingeon, 1998).

While these comments appear to suggest great freedom and potential for creative license when approaching the score, there are a number of factors that will both inform and restrict the interpretative decisions made by a pianist. Noting that performers’ interpretative decisions are “still little investigated,” Juslin suggests that “the process of interpretation seems to be influenced by both ‘internal’ factors (e.g., emotions, wanting to express something personal) and ‘external’ factors (e.g., musical style, the structure of the piece, the composer’s intentions)” (2003b, p. 276). The latter, as Gabrielsson and Juslin note, includes many “implicit rules associated with different musical genres, which are taught and learned in actual practice” (1996, p. 69). Additionally, as McLamore (2005) highlights, the listener’s “cultural and aesthetic expectations” will play a role in determining what constitutes a “good performance” (p. 1531).

McLamore (2005) provides an overview of possible approaches to a musical work, while suggesting the impact these may have on how the performer is perceived:

Musicians might improvise freely or provide their own interpretations of traditional repertory, or, at the opposite extreme, they may be endeavoring to recreate a preexisting musical artwork as exactly as possible. Correspondingly, performers are viewed varyingly as free agents, composers’ interpreters or “ambassadors,” and even automatons. (p. 1532)

She also reminds us, however, that the goals of performance practice are a controversial aspect of music-making (p. 1535). Highlighting key factors that underlie this controversy, in his Grove Music Online commentary on how we currently evaluate a ‘good performance’ in Western classical music, Davies (2012) locates the performer’s role rather ambiguously within the above continuum:

We esteem the performer’s efforts, both as these succeed in delivering a faithful version of the work and also as they are creative in going beyond that which is supplied by the
composer, so that what is sounded forth presents an interesting and satisfying interpretation.

Yet, while Davies here features the performer’s creativity as a key component, he qualifies this in his ensuing discussion stating that “the faithfulness with which the composer’s work-determinative instructions are met must be central to the enterprise of performance,” and “authenticity normally should not be traded for the sake of heightening other performance values.” Clearly, he does not approve of the performers as ‘free agents’, and values the score over any potentially creative additions they might bring to it.

The concept of authenticity in performance practice presents a fascinating and perhaps ironic example of an approach to music-making that is focused on quite tangible criteria, yet has stimulated some of the most powerful, arguments and evidence for the intangible. Widely documented since emerging as a prominent force in the 1970s, it was spurred on by those searching for the composer’s original musical intentions less encumbered by contextual inaccuracies. In practical terms, this translated into an intention to produce performances “as historically appropriate as possible” (Sullivan, 2005, p. 1539) with a focus on mostly tangible historical data, including original instrumentation, scores, knowledge about performance conditions, and when available, any clues of evidence of what the composers’ intentions may have been.

Many, however, have since pointed out philosophical and practical contradictions inherent in claims to ‘authentic performance’ (cf. Kerman, 1985; Kivy, 1995; and Taruskin, 1995). As Sullivan (2005) summarises the issues: “The actual circumstances of composition indicate that often there is no single ‘correct’ version of a musical work. And the degree of ‘authenticity’ of a performance is difficult if not impossible to assess” (p. 1541). Or, as Lang (1997) expresses a now widely held view, “historical authenticity alone will never lead us to a true revival without an admixture of a degree of our own artistic beliefs and instincts” (p. 179). Yet, despite these objections, expectations that the performer should be faithful to the score or the composer remain pervasive across the culture of Western classical music. As reflected in Davies comments above, and reiterated by Dunsby (2012) in Grove Music Online, “performance is being interrogated continually by the concept of ‘authenticity.’”

The perception that there can be an ideal or correct performance can also be implied under the guise of ‘perfection.’ As Dunsby suggests, while the ideal of perfection exists “in delicate balance with the fact that real-time musical performance is inevitably contingent, always involving an element of risk,” the “ineffable quality of musical performance at its highest is bound up with our tendency to believe that something may be ‘perfect’” (2012). In addition to this conceptual ideal, the rise of the recording industry has led to a more practical demand for
perfection in tangible aspects such as note accuracy (Lawson, 2002, p. 12). However, and echoing McLamore’s reference to “automatons” (p. 111 above), many believe that these demands have led to a rising incidence of pianists more akin to computers and robots rather than musicians (e.g., Bolet, p. 79; Badura-Skoda, p. 52; and Entremont, p. 152 in Dubal, 1984).

It is noted, nonetheless, that discussions about authenticity do not imply singularity. Indeed, the notion that there may be various interpretations qualifying as ‘authentic’ contributes to the intangibility of this concept. Negotiating this tension between recreating a preexisting score as exactly or perfectly as possible, being authentic or faithful, yet also creative, presents a significant challenge to contemporary classical pianists. As Bowie (2009) observes, “the idea of a right interpretation” seems “both inescapable, and yet also at odds with the actual practice of music” (p. 324). These factors were discussed with the pianists through a consideration of what they strive for in performance, and their perceptions of what is expected. The pianists presented a variety of attitudes and perspectives towards the ideals of perfection, faithfulness and creativity, which when considered together serve to highlight the challenging, contentious and intangible nature of this conceptual space between the performer, the score and the composer.

Striving for Perfection
Bowie (2009) points out that while ideals in musical interpretation are “often local, and transient,” the very fact that interpretation is so controversial highlights that there must “be some underlying agreement on the aim of getting it right, even between those with opposed views on what this concretely consists in” (p. 324). Cook (2005) suggests that this concept of “getting it right,” whether in terms of the perfect reproduction of the text, or “conforming to the intentions behind the text,” is less representative of the performer’s ideals, than a reflection of musicology’s traditional focus on the score as the source of “meaning,” or “the vehicle for composer’s voice” ([6]). This begs the question of what kind of perfection it is that pianists strive for, and whether this is a concrete or intangible one. Almost all of the pianists spoke of striving for some kind of ‘perfection’ or ideal in their playing, however, aligning with Cook’s observation, this encompassed far more than note-perfection, and as several pianists pointed out, could in fact be in conflict with it.

Liam Viney was of the opinion that “perfection by definition is not something that human beings are really capable of,” and striving for it is “what drives a lot of musicians to neuroticism.” It was nevertheless something he aspired to:

You aim for it and you struggle to achieve it and then that ties in with issues of sublimity and divinity, this idea that we can achieve this kind of platonic ideal or perfect interpretation, but we can’t – and so the closer, the more you try and get there, that’s all you can really do.
Viney spoke of his interest in a ‘holistic’ approach to interpretation that included historical and stylistic considerations and an awareness of the composer’s intentions. Within this context he noted, it could sometimes be necessary to aim for “contextual perfection or a gestural perfection” rather than note-accuracy. As he explained, in some situations “you should have clusters of wrong notes in there because the point is absolute abandon,” and in these cases the goal should be to get the “right feel for those wrong notes.” Adorno (2006, p. 140) similarly suggests that, “in a certain sense true interpretation reverses the notation” (cf. also Lawson, 2002, p. 11; and Bowie, 2009 on this topic).

**Gao Ping** similarly observed that even mistakes could ‘sound good,’ suggesting that the intention of the pianist would influence the ‘integrity’ of the music:

I always have this notion of good and bad mistakes, because when I listen to a pianist like Cortot – the way he plays wrong notes – it never really disturbs me because the integrity of the music is always present. As for a very nervous student who wants to play every note perfectly and suddenly makes a mistake, it’s so out of place it destroys the music entirely, because you know they are worried about it and the whole thing becomes like walking through landmines.

Gao Ping explained that while he does strive for note accuracy, he has a “resistance” to the concept of note-perfection, as “anything that’s really, really perfect also is dead”:

I like people who make magic rather than a perfect performance […] I’d rather have a performance which is not perfect but has a lot of interesting things to listen to, and I find I’m much more drawn to pianists who are imperfect, but with so many other things.

Highlighting the lure of perfection however, Gao Ping also acknowledged he was “idealistic,” noting that while “it’s not so human to be so perfect, the search for that perfection – that spirit – I think it’s good because otherwise you just accept that you are imperfect.” As he observed, “it’s the process of searching for it rather than getting there” that is important.

**Michael Kieran Harvey** similarly spoke of striving towards an “impossible” ideal in performance, while highlighting the importance of the process:

It’s about the performance you come away from, where you feel like yes – I got close tonight. […] It’s a process you see. You’re trying to do this thing which is impossible, and in the public domain, it’s even more impossible. So if you get anywhere near it I reckon you’re doing pretty well.

**Freddy Kempf** highlighted the “challenging and exciting” demands of aspiring for perfection as what attracts him to piano performance, even though achieving it was virtually impossible. As with the pianists cited above, he agreed that in some technically challenging works, the “effect” was more important than playing exactly what was written:
[The] piano’s pretty much the only instrument where the composer does ask the impossible of the performer and you’re almost trying to give the effect of what the composer wanted by pedaling, by spreading chords or whatever, where it’s not actually humanly possible to play the exact notes in the exact time that the composer suggested. When asked to clarify his views of perfection he noted that while initially it was technical accuracy that he “understood to be the goal,” he now prefers to think of perfection as achieving “the most intense emotional exchange you can get from the performer to the audience.” Here again however, he observed the challenge in reaching this goal: “I don’t have this idea of an ideal interpretation – I kind of lost that feeling. I just don’t think it exists, because you change as a performer, as well as all your surroundings.”

To the question of whether he strives for an ideal when performing, Roy Howat responded: “Yes and no. You can’t fix an ideal too precisely, because you can never get there and it will frustrate you.” As he also explained, “something will suddenly happen in the performance and you’ll hear it going in another direction” and “it’s nice to be surprised by what comes out sometimes, because what comes out will give you a new ideal, so the ideal’s always changing, and it’s different every day. And it’s dependent on what you hear.” Echoing Kempf, he spoke of the value of seeking perfection, yet focused on the importance of emotional ‘clarity’ rather than note perfection:

I like what Ravel used to say, he said, ‘I always strive for perfection, knowing that I will never attain it, but it’s a thing to strive for,’ meaning trying to get rid of everything that’s just not quite right. He would just do everything as well as he possibly could and try and leave no evident faults in it, or no clumsiness or inclarity in it, which means no emotional inclarity.

However, highlighting the challenges in achieving this clarity, Howat spoke of music as a “sort of sentient being,” with its own changing moods and character:

It’s almost like a friend, and you’re trying to get to know it and you’re relating to this strange being that is a Sonata or a set of pieces or an individual piece […] It’s like a person who’s in a different mood every day. Sometimes, some days the piece will be nice to you, sometimes it will be cranky to you. Sometimes you’ll see a new angle of it.

When asked whether he strives for some kind of perfection in performance, Stephen Savage focused on aspiring for a personal integrity in relation to the music, noting, as with others above, the non-static nature of this ideal:

Well you can’t … Strive for perfection … Well I mean there’s the obvious thing of accuracy, and that’s a perfection, that would be nice. But no I don’t think it’s perfection, I think it’s perhaps trying to do justice to whatever degree of perception you feel you might
have attained at that particular point, in the knowledge that that will probably change because the goal posts will move.

Savage also noted the problematic aspect of aiming for note-perfection, suggesting that it could be at the expense of the musical content: “It’s tricky if a young player gets too seduced by the idea, that just keep it all clean and neat and it will all be alright, because it’s not quite like that, I mean you really do need to say something as a performer.”

**William Westney** did not use the word perfection in his discussion. However, reflecting the views as expressed in his book *The Perfect Wrong Note: Learning To Trust your Musical Self* (Westney, 2003), when asked whether he felt there was an ideal intention for a performer to have, he similarly placed the emphasis on the performer’s perception and contribution, noting the importance of the individual’s particular goal in performing the music, whether this was emotional, dramatic, showy or simply “to get to the end of piece and still be alive and breathing!” Presenting a contrasting voice to those above, **Jean-Paul Sevilla** pointed out that the most important factor of striving for perfection is “being very faithful to what the composer wrote, the demands of the composer, knowing of course everything he asked for.” Highlighting the challenges of this goal however, he also noted that his “very high” aspirations were such that he never plays for his own pleasure, “what I would play is so far below what I would like to play.”

**Being Authentic**

Returning to the vexed issue of authentic or ‘right’ interpretations, Lawson (2002) points out that while “claims to authenticity or even historical accuracy have become ever more muted” (p. 15) “today’s overwhelming authority of the score” still demands “fidelity and accuracy at all costs” (p. 4). This is echoed by McLamore (2005) who observes a “growing tendency in recent years to treat the score as sacrosanct,” and that “in most instances in which performers bring ‘to sound’ a notated score, their faithfulness to that score is often a leading measure of their success.” Additionally, she notes, while “philosophers and critics disagree as to how to measure that faithfulness [...] many feel that when a musician exercises too much performance freedom, the original work’s integrity is at risk of being lost” (p. 1535).

Informal and widespread discussions about ‘authenticity’ amongst practicing musicians have locked on to a few terms from these discussions, tending towards a personal rather than dictionary reading of the terminology used. While this inevitably makes it challenging to clarify the underlying issues, it serves to highlight that ultimately, judgments about authentic performance will be both personal, and reflect on the performer. As can be seen by the use of terms such as ‘fidelity,’ ‘faithful,’ and ‘integrity,’ the impact of the authentic movement on
performers has become far more personal, loaded with moral overtones, and less tangible than the movement’s origins, with underlying inferences of being virtuous (rather than virtuosic).

Conversely, those who argue against the aims or validity of the authentic movement have cited not only its impact on music-making, but will similarly suggest it reflects negatively on the character of the performer. Peter Frankl observes that “many pianists are too faithful to the printed score, particularly to Urtexts” and “this rigid purism leaves very little to the imagination and the playing becomes sterile” (in Grindea, 2007, p. 145), or, as Daniel Barenboim argues:

Simply playing piano only because it says so on the printed page may be a sign of modesty, but it is also an instance of sinning by omission. The three permanent questions that a musician must ask himself are: why, how and for what purpose. The inability or unwillingness to ask these questions is symptomatic of a thoughtless faithfulness to the letter and an inevitable unfaithfulness to the spirit. (2009, p. 18)

Taruskin – one of the most outspoken voices against the movement that claimed to present authentic performance practices – states more boldly that “our need to obliquely gain the composer’s approval for what we do bespeaks a failure of nerve, not to say an infantile dependency” (1995, p. 98). Equally critical, Kivy (1995) turns the argument around, questioning how performers can be considered as displaying an integrity or authenticity to their own musical or artistic impulses. The latter, as he points out, implies some degree of originality and creativity.

The pianists presented a range of opinions in discussing their perspectives on the relationship between performer and composer, and the degree to which the pianist should respect the score. Two of the pianists felt strongly that their primary role was to serve the composer. As Jean-Paul Sevilla explained:

I think that an artist is nothing – he should be the last wheel of the cart. The first one is the composer. I am nothing. […] I would never say that an interpreter is a genius. I would say he is a good interpreter – he is faithful to the composer. But I would never use the word genius for the interpreter because I think that even the best performer is very small compared with the genius of the composer.

Echoing Sevilla, Matteo Napoli explained: “Whatever is written in the score, for me it’s a religious kind of mark.” The “faithful translation of the score” he argued was crucial “for the simple reason that guy writing that piece is a genius and I’m not. I’m a servant.” The greatest performers, he argued, are those who most accurately capture all the composer’s details:

For me, the command is that that guy’s a genius and I’m going to try to translate that score for the people as much as I can. Usually some time you lose part of the details because you always lose part of the details. That’s why the big guys are the big guys.
However, highlighting the balancing act and ambiguity involved, Napoli also felt it was important that pianists explore their own emotional engagement with the music, and make choices based on their feelings. Yet, as he noted, if their choices – for instance in dynamics – contrasted with the marking in the score, then the pianist must defer to the latter:

We have to respect the score because that’s the guy we are playing. We are not playing ‘ourselves’ but the philosophy is, you have to make your own choice in terms of emotional energy, which is not a total freedom, but it is a way to look at it.

Paradoxically, as noted earlier, Napoli also argued strongly that great artists were those who brought their own “soul” to the music.

In complete contrast, two other pianists argued passionately for their freedom as interpreters. Mark Kruger felt that a pianist should have the right “to be able to do what you want to do” and similarly, that the performer’s expressive contributions were of crucial importance to the audience:

Why else are we doing it? … Sorry?!… Why else would you pay money to go to the performance if you’re not going to hear the person’s feelings? Sure, you want to hear the piece, but you could do that with a CD for a cheaper price and you could hear it as many times as you like. Why else would we go and hear someone?

In describing what he strives for in performance, Kruger spoke of seeking a personal authenticity: “We keep trying to get it – I was going to say better – maybe better is the word, truer to ourselves or our authentic sort of expression or our path. And that’ll keep changing.”

Michael Kieran Harvey spoke of having “a sense of awe and reverence for people who could compose” yet argued strongly against any expectations that there could be a definitive or authentic way of playing the piano, and was passionate about his right to experiment with his interpretations of the repertoire:

I used to like Glen Gould’s attitude. There was a recording of his – he did three of the main Beethoven Sonatas with all the dynamics turned upside down, just to irritate people I think. And it sort of worked – it’s interesting. What it does is completely free you up. […] I’ve grown up in an environment where – ‘Harvey places his own ego above the music, he imposes his will on the music and it should be about the music speaking for itself,’ and all this sort of crap. What – because I get excited about these sounds or get excited about wanting to be involved in it? I’ve got to sit there like a…ing machine. Is that what you want? Play, you know, C sharp minor Rachmaninov Prelude like Rachmaninov does on his DEFINITIVE recordings! [stamping his foot]. That’s it, that’s all there is to classical music? It’s just a series of going through the motions?

He noted that while some may “perceive that as arrogance,” he felt it was how performers could “get to the experimental nub of where the music came from in the first place.” As with his
comments on perfection, the need for a performer to be “engaged in the process” of music was a strong theme in Harvey’s conversation: “It’s a process. I think it’s the way that music stays alive. I think it’s the reason you still play the music. There’s something in it you’ve found, there’s something that excites you about it and you can communicate that.”

Reflecting a position in between the above extremes, two of the remaining pianists highlighted the importance of respecting what was in the score, while advocating the need for a personal, yet informed input from the pianist. Roy Howat spoke of the lessons to be learned from the historically informed performance movement, and the value of learning from an authoritative score rather than a recording. While he believed adhering to the markings in the score was important, he also warned of the danger however “if we get too glued to the page and forget that the page is the recipe book, not the cake.” As he explained, performers “have to have a certain freedom” as “there’s a natural expression that you can’t get down on the page.” Additionally, he highlighted that this freedom was part of the challenge and appeal of performance: “Assuming you’ve got a good edition, you see what the composer put down on paper, and it’s open to us to discover something that most performances are missing. And that’s so exciting.”

Similarly, Stephen Savage observed the importance of “getting beyond in all sorts of ways what’s on the page and what the fingers are doing.” He was keen to point out that performers “need a rather specialist knowledge of the style and the content” of the work, and the ability to “really read implications into it which are appropriate.” Furthermore, he argued that interpretations “shouldn’t be imposed on” but “arise out of the material.” However, he also felt the performer’s personal contribution was important:

- I’m not somebody who talks or thinks just in terms of the ‘performer is just there to serve the composer.’ I don’t believe that. I think the performer must bring something of his own to the work. And I think he will anyway because he’s living at a certain time and he will be subject to certain contemporary influences and so on. Any masterpiece, as Barenboim I think somewhere says, is two faced – it is of its own time but it also faces the future, and it’s capable of renewal by each succeeding generation.

Thus, Savage highlights a point made by many critiquing the possibility – or validity – of aspiring towards historically authentic performance; with shifts in culture and time there will inevitably be changes in perceptions and reception.

**Being Creative**

The expectation that a performer is, or can be, a ‘creative’ artist is one embedded in the way many perceive and speak about the vocation, as the following examples – to note just a few of many – highlight. Pianist John Lill suggests that, “at the moment of performance, the interpreter must become not only the re-creator of the score, he is also the creator of his own performance,
receiving the inspiration from within and from without” (1986, in Grindea 2007, p. 104). Pablo Casals eloquently offers a similar perspective:

> We can never exhaust the multiplicity of nuances and subtleties which make the charm of music […]. How can we expect to produce a vital performance if we don’t recreate the work every time? Every year the leaves of the trees reappear with the Spring, but they are different every time.” (in Lisk, 2000, p. 29)

In addition to the music itself requiring creative input, the individual’s need and aspirations to be creative are also recognised. In outlining the rigorous demands placed on those entering international piano competitions, Vlassenko and Stepanov (2011) encourage aspiring pianists to find “the power to fully realise their creative potential.” Creative interpretations are also valued by critics and audiences alike, as can be seen in such cases as Glen Gould, who is hailed by many if not all for the way in which “he identifies creatively with the work performed, and can therefore allow himself a critical and non-servile attitude to the score” (in Monsaingeon, 1981).

However, as this last example highlights, the concept of creativity appears to be at odds with other expectations on interpreters.

While the pianists were not asked the direct question of how they felt they were being creative as interpreters, when invited to discuss their approaches to the score, and the composers they play, it was still surprising to find that only two of the pianists commented on the way in which their role as interpreter could be considered a creative one. Mark Kruger simply observed that while “there are stylistic bounds” inherent in any composition, a pianist could be creative in their choice to “play with them or break them or completely go against them.” On a more subtle level, Liam Viney explained how when he is “striving to realise something as perfectly as possible” this is when he feels he is “actually creating something” and he begins to “enjoy that for its own sake.” Yet, as he added “I don’t know what the word is—but it’s worth it though.”

However, as Viney also suggested, “playing the piano can easily become the least creative aspect of music,” referring to the concept that creative genius was the domain of others: “Brendel once said that no performer should be called a genius and I kind of agree with that. The most amazing genius who’s playing the piano, you feel like their genius is being expressed when they’re composing or improvising.” Indeed, it was notable that these more obvious forms of creativity were a focus for a number of the pianists when speaking of their desire to be creatively engaged with music. Yet, reflecting cultural expectations on the role of the professional pianist, they also noted how these were actively discouraged.

Jean-Paul Sevilla explained that when he was young he was far more interested in composing at the piano rather than learning repertoire, though there was significant pressure to focus on the latter:
I wrote lots of things but my father knew that I was not playing what I should have been playing, that I was improvising. With the French equivalent of what you call the ‘cat of nine tails’ he forced me to play, to practice.

Given this explicit direction, it is perhaps not surprising that Sevilla continued by noting:

“When I was 17, I realised that I did not have any gift for composition and I decided to destroy everything I had written and I never tried to compose again.”

Stephen Savage highlighted that the absence of improvising and composing amongst modern classical pianists has been the result of “this huge divide since the nineteenth-century as piano playing has become more and more specialised.” As he observed, unfortunately improvisation “goes out the window, because everyone is too busy really learning scores,” and with composition also becoming a “highly intricate” task, “the idea of someone who encompasses both is extremely rare now because they become sort of specialist areas, which is a shame.” Additionally, he noted the difficulty of having “satisfying experiences” in performance without having had “enough lead in” time to fully feel confident. In comparison, “the process of performing doesn’t end when you finish playing, it ends when you finish editing, and what you’re doing with the editing is a very creative process.” This, as he pointed out, is “a very different situation” to live performance.

Gao Ping spoke of being “crazy about” improvising when young: “Once I could start to play the piano and I could start to hear music of my own, then that was definitely a decisive moment.” Yet, he improvised in secret as his teacher did not allow it: “It’s going to ruin your technique; no improvisation.” As he noted, this was a common perception amongst teachers in China, “it was just not something that people encouraged their pupils to do […] ‘what are you doing? You should play proper music’.” This “mentality,” he observed, still exists, and not just in China: “I think it comes from a western influence.” Similarly, while Gao Ping described composition as his real love, he “wasn’t encouraged” to pursue it. While hesitant to talk about this in much detail, he sensed it “was considered a very dangerous and risky thing by both my parents,” and perhaps a reflection of the political and cultural climate at the time. While noting his regret at not being encouraged to compose or improvise, Gao Ping now successfully combines these with his performing career, representing, as Savage suggests, perhaps a rarity among professional pianists. Also rare in this regard, Michael Kieran Harvey spoke about composing as crucial to his efforts at being part of the process of music-making: “I compose to maintain my sense of awe at composers. It is to keep my excitement with the process, because you can become very blasé as a player.” As he observed, when performers find themselves just processing the music, “that’s when the music disappears.”

A number of voices advocating more research into artistic practice have highlighted the challenge in locating and defining the nature of a performer’s creative contributions. As cited
earlier in Chapter Two, Coessens, Crispin, and Douglas (2010, p. 45) referred to “the artist’s hidden creative process,” which can be “implicit, non-discursive” experiences that “defy analysis.” As they noted, this can include such aspects as “idiosyncrasy, temperament and the imagination” (2010, p. 44-45), or as Chan highlighted, a complex interaction of “emotion, intuition, multiple senses, and other ambiguous feelings of knowing” (2005, pp. 39-55). While the pianists did not speak directly to these in relation to creativity, words such as ‘create’ and ‘creating’ were often used when discussing intangible aspects of their performance practice, including the desire to create a vertical “resonance” (Harvey), “excitement” (Kempf), an “energy” (Napoli/Kruger), or a special atmosphere in performance or “creative practice” (Kruger). Indeed, in order to determine where and how creativity manifests in the performer’s practice, it might be necessary to embrace a wider scope and potential subtlety of experience, and the possibility that the heart of creative practice may include experiences, ideals, attitudes, sensations and feelings that are difficult to either conceptualise or put into words.

**Implications for the Intangible**

Expectations for the performing musician to deliver what Davies (2012) refers to as a ‘good performance’ are ambitious, inherently ambiguous, challenging to negotiate, and even the most tangible of the demands involve significantly intangible elements. While the majority of the pianists spoke of striving for a form of perfection or ideal in their playing, this encompassed far more than note accuracy. In fact, the pianists’ perceptions scaled a broad continuum from quite tangible note-perfection to highly abstract and ultimately intangible ideals.

Significantly however, several pianists observed that being overly focused on note-perfection could be in conflict with these higher ideals in music-making, both from the perspective of the underlying expressive intentions of the composer, or their own expressive contributions to the performance. This included such factors as striving for a “contextual” or “gestural” perfection, finding the “right feel” (Viney), “attitude” (Harvey), or “effect” (Kempf) to do justice to either the “integrity of the music” (Gao Ping) or one’s personal perceptions of the work (Savage); or achieving emotional “clarity” (Howat), connection or “intensity” (Kempf). Adding further to the elusive nature of these goals, they pointed out that their ideals were non-static, and influenced by a range of factors, particularly in the act of performance.

There was a tension noted amongst the pianists between representing the intentions of the composer – however these are perceived – and expressing their own voice or interpretation of the music. While there were two pianists who specifically highlighted faithfulness to the composer as their primary aim, with the exception of Sevilla, in various degrees they all presented a more personalised approach to the music and performance. This included the importance of the performer’s personal voice, soul, emotional connection to, and perceptions of
the work; the search for authentic self-expression or the true self; and the argument that the personal process of discovery, experimentation, and the influence of culture and time were all crucial components of the continuation and renewal of the musical canon. The concepts of integrity or being true to ‘the music’ and ‘the self’ are discussed further in Chapters 6.2 and 7.3.

While the topic of creativity in interpretation was not raised directly in many of these interviews, the lack of discussion around it was still notable. When mentioning creativity, many of the pianists focused on their interests in, and the potential benefits of being creative through improvisation and composition, while also noting that these were not encouraged, and in several cases actively discouraged during their training. Only two pianists referred to ways in which their role as interpreters could be potentially creative, noting the choice whether to adhere to the rules, bend or break them, though within stylistic boundaries, and the feeling that striving for perfection can bring. This suggests that the expectations on pianists to be either note-perfect, or faithful to the score or composer might be compromising one of the more personal, intangible and perhaps crucial aspects of the profession. While on the basis of the opinions above it is difficult to characterise the interpretative aspects of piano performance as ‘creative,’ most of the pianists seemed to highly value the interpretative spaces available to them beyond mere mechanical reproduction.

5.2 Expressive spaces

Between the Score and Sound
While sound waves themselves are a tangible phenomenon – in so far as they can be measured in various ways – our aural perception of sound is far less so. As Stein notes, “quite at home as we are in the world of the eye, the realm of the ear is a fairly strange country” (1962, p. 23), or as DeNora points out, “sound objects are fleeting, mercurial […] it is difficult to ‘point’ to them, or ‘see’ them” (2000, p. 133). Indeed, suggests Greenfield, “the pleasure of music may be, at least in part,” the fact that “sounds can far more easily remain abstract than can visual images” (2002, p. 100).

Sullivan highlights that “the fundamental aim of music notation is to make a lasting visible indication of musical sound, which is invisible and ephemeral” (2005, p. 1541). In this respect, the score is an essential reference point for the tradition of the Western classical canon. However, in comparison to the visual, measurable and largely reliable physical ‘space between’ two notes on the page, the distance between a printed note and its expression in sound constitutes a far more flexible and perceptual space for the pianist. As Barenboim observes, “in the world of sound, ambiguity becomes a virtue by offering many different possibilities from
which to proceed” (2009, p. 19). While the fields of music reception, perception and cognition are beyond the scope of this thesis, the way in which pianists perceive and approach sound constitutes a crucial intangible aspect of their music-making.

In these interviews, the pianists highlighted attraction to sound as a key factor in their early interest in music and the piano. Freddy Kempf spoke of “being fascinated” by sound from an early age, though not knowing “what it was about.” For Liam Viney “it was basically a love of sound at first, sound as it struck my imagination.” Mark Kruger spoke of the “glorious sound” of early family ‘sing-alongs’ around the piano, noting: “I still feel the sound, hear it and feel it.” William Westney “figured out early on that this was a new world of sound I could get into; I felt I understood it.” Similarly, Stephen Savage spoke of how he was attracted to “the intrinsic aspect” of sound from a young age, and “instinctively started to go to the piano” sensing he could “create” his “own world” at the instrument.

Several pianists explicitly mentioned the way in which sound could affect them physically and emotionally. Mark Kruger spoke of the physicality of sound when at the piano: “There’s vibration in the key, you play a piano key and you feel the sound physically.” Gao Ping similarly noted he can “feel music physically,” and that sound both “touches” and “moves” him. Michael Kieran Harvey described how sounds “excite” him, and William Westney spoke with great enthusiasm about the “intensity” of sound and capacity it has to open the listeners to “forces that can’t be named.” Stephen Savage also referred more broadly to the power of sound to act as a “kind of vehicle […] through which you can be transported,” and, echoing the comments above, noted, “when you hear, you are being taken on a journey” not possible “if you’re relying on seeing something.”

As these descriptions suggest – in its capacity to have such physical, emotional or mental impact – sound is far from an illusion. However, when translating this variety of experience into a musical context, the ambiguous and elusive nature of this sonic world becomes evident in the many ways in which the pianists perceive, approach and manifest sound in their music-making, and the quite personal factors that influence the expressive spaces between them. When discussing sound in the context of piano playing, the pianists spoke of the subtle distinctions between sounds, their interest in sound ‘quality,’ and the many factors that impact how these are achieved at the instrument. While several noted various technical and physical considerations, significantly, they highlighted that the ability to distinguish and produce ‘quality’ sounds was largely influenced by individual perceptions, sensitivity, imagination and ideals.

Roy Howat suggested that the piano’s inherent sound was limited, emphasising the role of the imagination in bringing out the instrument’s potential:
The piano is a box of strings and hammers, and one’s only excuse for it is to make it a sort of substitute orchestra, so I’m always thinking of the orchestra when I play, or singers or you know, whatever, but you’re thinking of anything but there just being a piano that goes ‘ping ping ping’. That’s one thing you don’t really want it do.

Stephen Savage spoke of “the act of touching the piano” as “a very intimate one,” noting that the way in which pianists “approach the keys and therefore the ways the hammers work is capable of an extraordinary degree of modulations of touch, and therefore results in sound.” Placing great emphasis on sound quality, he argued that “even if you’re doing technical work, the intrinsic aspect of the sound and the quality is paramount,” suggesting that a pianist must take into account such factors as “the shaping of sound, the treatment of textures” and “how much weight is there in the sound.” However, echoing Howat, Savage also noted the limitations of the instrument, pointing out that the imagination was “of paramount importance”:

I think it’s a matter really of getting beyond – in all sorts of ways – what’s on the page and what the fingers are doing […]. It’s all derived from imagination I think, because if you play the piano just like a piano it doesn’t work. It only works if you’ve got a big repertoire of possibilities going on in here [pointing to his head].

Matteo Napoli similarly spoke of the importance of achieving the right “quality of sound.” He suggested that in addition to technical and physical considerations, the quality and impact of the sounds on the audience would be determined by subtle differences in a pianist’s intention: “In my experience, if instead of using the ‘how much sound?’ we use ‘which sound?’ – connected with ‘which emotion, feeling, mood?’ – that, I feel, moves the people.” Liam Viney also referred to the close relationship between how sound is perceived and physically manifested, noting, “you need to have control of your touch to get the exact sound which you’re hearing in your mind.” Yet, he also spoke of the challenges in doing so: “The biggest difficulty in my whole life, of anything, has been being able to objectively hear the sound of the instrument while I’m playing it – to actually listen, to truly listen, not to hear the version in my head.”

The subjective way in which sound is perceived was further highlighted by two of the pianists. Mark Kruger was of the opinion that each person must find their own “idea of what a good sound is,” and felt this would be ultimately be influenced by each “person’s relationship with music.” As he also noted, this relationship was not static:

I think we keep changing […] the things you liked ten years ago aren’t the things you like now necessarily. You might have appreciated certain things, certainly styles, composers, sound, and that will change of course. It’s always fluid, I guess, there are no absolutes.

Roy Howat similarly observed that cultural expectations and ideals in sound quality are subject to change over time, noting several factors, including perceptions associated with various
historical eras, and developments in the design and capabilities of the piano. As he explained, one manifestation was an increased interest in beauty of tone:

As instruments were developed that could sustain more, and as recording techniques improved so that you could hear beauty of tone – beauty of tone I think got prized to such an extent that it became obsessive in certain performing circles and it was pushed out of perspective.

While Howat did not further explain what constituted a beautiful tone, as will be discussed further in Chapter 6.2, this is perhaps not surprising given that beauty itself was highlighted by the pianists as a significantly elusive concept. Indeed, speaking directly of what constitutes “a beautiful tone colour,” Charles Rosen suggests that it “depends above all” on the pianist’s “intuition” (2002b, p. 28).

**Space and Silence between Sounds**

In the quotations at the introduction to this chapter, Schnabel and Stern suggested that the art of music-making, or the even the music itself, lies respectively in “the pauses” or the “thousandth of a millisecond” between the notes. Bunt (2012) similarly observes in *Grove Music Online*, that the “silence” and the “spaces between sounds add meaning and significance to the musical events.” While Western classical notation caters for a prescribed and mathematically divisible calculation of rests in the score, the significance of these expressive silences and spaces transcend the measurable. When prompted to discuss the ‘space between the notes,’ the pianists emphasised the importance of the subtle connections and relationships between sounds, and the silences between them. While referring to the influence of both technical and stylistic factors, they highlighted the subjective nature of this expressive space, and the importance of the personal contribution of the musician.

Giving further weight to the metaphor of the space between the notes, Gao Ping observed that it was “definitely intangible” and that negotiating this space was the challenge of technique:

I think, on the piano, if you ask anyone to sit down and play one note it will sound more or less the same. But if you ask them to play two notes then they are thousands of miles apart … that is the technique of piano playing, because one note doesn’t count. You can play one note anyway you like – but how you play the second note is what truly matters.

Roy Howat similarly agreed that the expression in music is found in the “interaction” or “relationship between” the notes, while adding that even one sound “has a certain expression to it.” Highlighting the importance of “sensing the expressive relationship between” the sounds, he suggested a number of ways in which pianists could be encouraged to do so, ranging from simple technical adjustments to encouraging feeling and the imagination: “You can get that person physically [to feel it] … or you can say ‘can you imagine how expressive these two notes can be, what can you do to make them expressive?’”
Echoing the challenge noted by Viney (p. 125 above), Howat pointed out that, once sensed, felt or imagined, this personal perception of sound then needs to be constantly reassessed in relation to what is actually being projected:

As professionals we have to feel intensely whatever our ideal of that piece is at that point, which is constantly being operated on by the sound that’s coming out. There’s a constant interaction, but we’re having to respond to every sound very alertly and adjust the next sound in order to get a coherence in the performance and convey something to the listener. So, it’s very subjective but it also demands a huge measure of objectivity.

Further illustrating the potential variety and subjectivity of these spaces between sounds, Howat spoke in detail about the importance of “the rhythmic relationship between” sounds, noting that expression will be dependent on “whether we play the rhythm strictly as the composer has marked it, or whether we decide to be free.” As he explained, perceptions on the value of rubato could be influential, as while pianists may believe rubato to be synonymous with expressive playing, it could have a negative effect on the structure – which “itself is expressive.” He also highlighted a cultural subjectivity in this regard, noting that while in French music there is a tradition “of keeping the music fairly well in time and not emoting with it,” other traditions may be more focused on the emotional expressivity of the lyrical line, and thus more liberal with rubato. As he additionally pointed out, an individual piece in any tradition could contain both styles: “You have to be alert in any piece, it can be jumping from the one to the other the whole time and you want to catch both.”

Presenting another way in which to perceive the relationship between sounds, Stein observes that, just “as light and shade disclose the outlines of a visible object, so the changes of sonority give shape to what we hear” (1962, p. 23). Speaking in similarly visual metaphors, Stephen Savage pointed out that the connection between two sounds would be dependent on a consideration of subtle stylistic differences between individual composers:

If someone’s playing a Mozart Sonata and you don’t get this feeling of light and shade, say in slurs so that the resultant slur – the end of the slur – is always lighter, you would probably jump to the conclusion that it’s not a very musical performance. But of course, and the point is, that the sound is not appropriate to the style.

As he further explained, while musical expressivity may involve “the precise shading of one note to another” in works such as Mozart or Bach, it “may be quite different if you’re playing say Boulez or Xenakis” or the “Bartok 1st piano concerto for example which is quite a brutal sort of work.” Savage also highlighted the importance of appreciating and expressing what he termed “intervallic tensions” particularly on the piano:

All intervals feel much the same on the piano, you don’t get the feeling you are sort of reaching out, as you do on the violin or high notes on the oboe, or whatever, they just don’t exist, of course you can have jumps like in *La Campanella*, but I’m not thinking of
that, I’m thinking of intervallic tensions. It’s an instrument that – if you’re mundane it will remain mundane, but at the same time, it is also capable of reproducing something rather more interesting.

As Savage suggested, the extent to which a musician hears or feels this intervallic tension on the piano is not just related to the limitations of the instrument, but also influenced by the personal potential of the performer.

The art of connecting sounds – or legato – proved somewhat contentious in these conversations, both in the possibility of achieving it and the aspiration to do so. Gao Ping spoke of the challenges in achieving a true legato: “As pianists we are fundamentally confronted with that problem, because we are percussionists. How do we make one note to the other seem like they are truly, and really connected?” As he suggested, “it’s an illusion, but we have to hear it, and when we truly hear it, we convince ourselves we hear it, I think that also comes across to others.” In contrast, Stephen Savage argued that despite perceptions of the piano as a percussive instrument, it was possible to achieve a true legato through controlling “the speed” of the “strike” or the “stroke” of the keys to subtly influence the duration of overtones. Arguably, both of these scenarios presuppose the ability to listen for subtleties in the connection of sounds, and potential gaps between them, a skill that demands particularly sensitive listening.

With his interest in historical performance practice, Roy Howat presented another perspective on legato, suggesting that our desire to connect the spaces between sounds was not always an ideal one:

In the nineteenth century, the longer legato became customary, where you join everything together. And right through the twentieth century, one of the ideals in performance – I think we’re seeing through this now – was an obsession with generating a seamless legato like a singer who never breathed. […] We got obsessed with trying to make long, long seamless lines in music that wasn’t designed to sound that way.

As discussed further below, Howat also spoke of the implications this had on the way we appreciate both sound and silence.

Michael Kieran Harvey provided a particularly visual metaphor when describing his appreciation of both sound and the spaces between, referring to sound in terms of shapes and sculpture: “The sculpture hangs in the air if you like, as you’re going through it […] or the shape of the piece. It’s all interwoven.” He appeared less interested in the horizontal connection between individual sounds than the “resonance” that can be created from their vertical combination. Through making an interesting connection between “magic eye” illusions and the music of Messiaen, Harvey compared the ‘space between the notes’ to “all these things that we don’t quite understand”: 
Describe how the brain works when you look at a magic eye picture. How does that work? We don’t know. How did the Hungarian come up with that idea? We don’t know. But you see I see in that magic eye the resonances of Messiaen, because in Messiaen you play a series of things on the piano where every note is weighted differently so that you create resonance. The after resonance is the important thing that he’s after. It’s not the actual chord. So, it’s the after-burn. And Schnabel said it’s the space between the notes. I agree, it’s how you do it – it’s your timing, it’s your … [motioning with hands side-to-side to signal ‘this and that’]

While not able to describe this concept any further in words, Harvey also suggested that “pianists get hung up” about the spaces between the notes “because there’s nothing you can do once you’ve played the note. We get hung up with that. That’s the intangible.” Further, he observed, while many pianists are overly focused on what they can control about the “piano technique or the mechanism,” he felt that “really it’s about music and about shapes. It’s about these shapes and how they come into being, and why they are interesting. Are they interesting? Some are, some aren’t.”

The concept of silence was a significant feature in these conversations. While it returns again in the following discussion on communicative spaces in section 5.3, a number of comments related specifically to the expressive aspects of silences between sounds. Gao Ping observed the important role of silence in bringing meaning to the sounds:

I think it was Miles Davis who once said “I play silences” or I play “spaces rather than notes,” so in other words the silence between the notes are far more important than the notes themselves, because maybe those silences make the notes meaningful.

Matteo Napoli explained that part of the performer’s role was “to use the silence” which he noted “is not just the rest. Phrasing has some kind of silence in the middle.” He suggested that if a pianist can “play the rest in the right way it’s a way of evaluating the silence” as that “silence has a sound.”

In a continuation of his earlier discussions above, Roy Howat argued that our current fascination with beauty of tone and long seamless legato lines has been at the expense of the importance and “expressive possibilities of silence” (an opinion shared by Bilson, 1992). Bringing a provocative, yet potentially significant addition to the discussion, he added, “it’s a psychological thing; we’re scared of silence.” This he suggested led to “an obsession that got into teaching – that was probably largely an unconscious one – of never leaving a silence.” Howat further explained how this fear of silence in music could be related to how we deal with it in our daily communications, noting a psychological study he had read on this topic:

They had measured the precise number of seconds that passed in a conversation between two people; the maximum amount of silence – it’s something like two or three seconds –
before somebody is always going to get embarrassed and perhaps say something completely stupid but in order just to fill the silence. [Apparently] five seconds is really straining the tolerance barrier, except with people who really know each other well enough and are aware of that enough and can just sit quietly.

As he observed, very often to avoid feeling uncomfortable “we say any old thing instead to punctuate the silence” and noted the phenomenon of ‘muzak’ as an unfortunate result of society being “uncomfortable in this silence.”

This connection between silence in music and as it occurs in other areas of our lives was also noted quite powerfully by Stephen Savage. Savage suggested that the way in which music “starts from silence and it ends in silence” and develops and evolves in between, may in some deeper sense be a reflection of “a kind of birth to death experience.” While the only pianist to refer to this, Barenboim also speaks at length on the significance of this analogy (2009, pp. 8-10). As he highlights, it can be similarly applied when dealing with just one sound: “The musician who produces a sound literally brings it into the physical world. Furthermore, unless he provides added energy, the sound will die.” Thus, he suggests “the disappearance of sound by its transformation into silence is the definition of its being limited in time,” whereas “sustaining the sound,” can be considered “an act of defiance against the pull of silence,” or in other words, our own mortality (p. 8).

**Implications for the Intangible**

The pianists highlighted on one hand the limitations of the basic sound of the piano and on the other, the range and variety of potential sounds that could be produced on it when in the hands of a skilled and imaginative pianist. While quality of sound was evidently important to the pianists, rather than providing a definitive description of what this was, they highlighted the challenge of doing so in their focus on such subjective factors as imagination, emotional connection and intention, and internal perception. Indeed, from their comments, quality appears to be determined by a particular type of interaction between the pianist and the sound.

As explicitly noted by Savage, much will depend on the personality and capabilities of the pianist. As the pianists variously described it, this interaction included factors such as being aurally and physically sensitive to subtleties of shape, texture and weight; being able to imagine a range of sounds beyond the instrument itself; being aware of and translating one’s emotional intentions into sound; and at the same time achieving a balance between perceived and projected sound, or subjective and objective listening. In addition to these many variables, the influence of changing personal and historical factors in what constitutes a good or ideal sound further highlights its elusive aspects.
The spaces between the notes were considered from a range of perspectives and metaphorical associations: the connection between sounds – or lack thereof – with some contention whether a true legato was an illusion; the rhythmic or lyrical relationship between notes; the expressive qualities of light and shade; intervalllic tensions, both horizontal and vertical; and the shapes or sculpture created in the resonance of combined sounds. Again, it was noted that in negotiating these spaces in performance there is a constant balancing act between the internal ideals of the pianist and the external realities of sound.

Clearly, the concept of ‘silence’ used by the pianists is quite diverse. Some consider it to be a pause between sounds within a phrase or expression, or between different yet consecutive phrases, others to the momentary absence of sound within a given composition. It was suggested that these spaces and silences could impact on the meaning of the sounds they separated; be expressive or charged with meaning in their own right; be even more important than the sounds; or indeed have their own ‘sound.’ Additionally, Savage observed a broader metaphorical – or metaphysical connection between silence in music and life, and Howat suggested our tendency to avoid the silent aspects of music-making may reflect a deeper resistance to it in our lives, implying that silence in both was a sign of being truly comfortable in communicating with others.

As will be discussed in the following section, the expressive potential of sounds, along with the spaces and silences between them, will be further influenced by a host of tangible – and intangible – factors that arise in the communicative spaces of the performance environment. As Narmour points out, “the temporal materialization of a musical artwork emanates not from the composer alone or from the performer alone but from a triarchical interrelationship among composer, performer, and listener” (1988, p. 318).

5.3 Communicative Spaces

**Between the Performer and Audience**

Johnson (2002) suggests that in approaching the question of what music means, “a far more useful term than ‘meaning’, ‘expression’, or ‘interpretation’ is that of ‘understanding.’” This understanding, he observes, is to be found in the shared journey “in which art-works invite us to participate” (p. 83). The sharing of music with an audience in performance constitutes an integral part of the pianist’s engagement – or journey – with music, and their perceptions of this experience yield rich insights into intangible aspects of music-making.
In speaking of the unique and potentially transformative effects of live performance, musicians and audiences alike highlight particularly intangible factors at play. Dunsby (2012) suggests that the “excitement of actually witnessing performance” lies not only in “the nature of sound,” but in the “balance of the expected with the unexpected” and the “stimulus to be found in any communal activity.” As he notes, there is “something that touches our primeval sensibility in the ‘buzz’ of a crowd of people.” Hagberg observes that great performers have “an uncanny ability to connect with their audience” (2003, p. xiv). Pianists will speak in similarly elusive terms about this connection. Paul Badura-Skoda describes “a give and take, a wave that increases through the recital and which pushes you beyond your ordinary limits” (in Dubal, 1984, p. 53). Or, as Tausig poetically notes: “I shall play it much better this evening, my wings grow when I play in public” (in Lenz, 1971, p. 66).

The degree to which a pianist successfully communicates or connects with their audience will be influenced by many factors related to the environment in which it takes place. As Deary and Matthews point out, it is now widely appreciated amongst psychologists and sociologists that any form of individual behaviour will depend “on an interaction between qualities of the person and qualities of the physical and social environment” (1993, p. 299-300; cf. DeNora, 2000, p. 31). In referring to the particular interaction between performer and audience, many have emphasised the role of intentions. Musicologist Narmour suggests that “for performers to discharge faithfully their aesthetic responsibilities, they must give considerable attention not only to their understanding of the composer's demands and desires but also to the sensibilities of the audience” (1988, p. 318). Psychologists Gabrielsson and Juslin similarly report that research has shown that “the performer’s intention” will have a “marked effect on the listeners' responses” (1996, p. 68). Others however will suggest the responsibility is a shared one, as Alberici (2004) argues, the “intentions of both performer and audience” will “directly influence and determine the performance itself” (p. 41).

Davidson (2002a) discusses in more detail the “two way communication” that occurs in performance, presenting a range of both tangible and intangible explanations. As she points out, beyond communication through sound, “it is evident that an audience discerns all kinds of subtle information about performers from their body movements and general appearance,” and that “the performer also picks up many different cues from the audience,” including “the general degree of enthusiasm and concentration” (p. 149). Additionally, she notes, the “psychological and physiological arousal” experienced in live performance can lead performers to arrive at new decisions about interpretation:

If the performer senses the many cues of the live performance context and interprets them positively, a new state of psychological awareness can be achieved which allows the
individual to become both highly task-focused and able to explore spontaneous thoughts and feelings in a creative manner. (pp. 149-150)

Given the earlier comments of the pianists in Chapter 5.1, the degree to which creativity, or indeed personal spontaneity is involved is variable. However, as Dunsby suggests, while “specialists will surely continue to disagree on quite how it works in all its aspects, few would contend that performing music does not result in some form of communication” (1996, p.10).

In these interviews, the pianists spoke at some length, and in many cases with great enthusiasm about their interest in communicating with their audience during performance, and their various experiences and impressions of the factors involved. These ranged from more practical and sonic considerations, such as the quality of the instrument and the acoustic space, to the less tangible contributions, aspirations, intentions and expectations of both the performer and the audience. Their comments are presented here according to the more intangible themes to emerge, beginning with performance as a means of communicating and connecting, followed by their opinions on the degree to which sound, silence and other means of sensing their audience play a role. While a number of the pianists spoke further about these when discussing their most powerful ‘peak’ experiences’ in performance (see Chapter 6.4), their comments below highlight their ongoing aspirations in performance and their impressions of the particularly intangible elements that influence these.

**Communicating and Connecting**

A majority of the pianists emphasised that the opportunity to communicate through music was one of the key motivating factors in their choice of profession. This ranged from the chance to give, share, or fully connect with their audiences during performance. However, there were various opinions expressed as to whether focusing on this particularly intangible aspect of the performance experience was beneficial. Additionally, several questioned the degree to which, they considered – as Narmour suggested above – the “sensibilities” of their audience as part of their “aesthetic responsibilities.”

**William Westney** eloquently described in the early stages of the interview that the potential of connecting with an audience was the motivating factor for his interest in piano performance:

My motivation as a musician, as a teacher and a performer is about – I wouldn’t say communication, because it seems like too weak of a word – it’s contact and oneness through music; the transcendent, the joyful, all the things that people have written about for centuries, it’s possible for us to do it.

**Mark Kruger** similarly highlighted the potential for a performance to be such that “there is this connection between you and the audience but also between the audience members themselves.” He spoke of how he tries to “create that special atmosphere” and “establish” a connection with
his audience through his intentions in both practice and performance: “You can cultivate it and you can make it happen with your intention or your thoughts [and] your feeling towards the audience.” **Gao Ping** explained that while he suffers from the stresses of performance, it is his love of the “communication – this atmosphere in the hall when you get something going” that keeps him returning to the stage.

**Freddy Kempf** explained his strong desire to “create as much excitement” as possible for the audience, and how this encourages him to take risks in technically challenging passages: “I find the whole performance is a series of those things where you’re pushing your own barriers, your own limits, for the sake of everyone’s enjoyment or excitement.” As he explained, the performance environment and audience could be a source of inspiration: “I find that I can’t push myself to try as hard when the audience isn’t there.” He also highlighted that “performance is an exchange,” and as noted earlier, his primary goal was to achieve the “most intense emotional exchange” possible with his audience. **Matteo Napoli** similarly described his desire to share an emotional journey with his audience: “Once you have fixed the emotional ground – where you want to go, and where it will shift your soul from ‘here’ to ‘there’ – you want to have this journey together with 200 or 2000 people.”

**Stephen Savage** spoke of performance as “an occasion where one wants to give” and the potential to communicate through music as what “drives” him: “For me [music] doesn’t happen in a vacuum […] it seems to be important to actually be there as a conduit through which something passes which you can then offer. So I do believe in that – that music is an offering.” He also described performance as “collaboration” and suggested it was important that at least the majority of the audience is “geared in to the vernacular of the music that’s being performed.” **Jean-Paul Sevilla** explained the joy he receives from communicating in performance:

> It’s the boomerang effect. I enjoy it if I know that somebody’s enjoying in the hall. So, if I feel that somebody’s enjoying it, it comes back and I enjoy it […] but if you give and there is no response, you’re wasting your time.

While expressing his belief “in the power of communication with music,” in contrast to Savage, he felt that this had “nothing to do with education,” citing several performances where he had felt powerful responses from audiences that he considered ‘uneducated’ in classical music. In relaying these experiences, Sevilla was keen to point out that while he is “very sensitive to the reaction of the public” he will “never play down to the audience. I think that’s not the role of the interpreter. He has to bring the audience to him.”

Two of the pianists agreed that while ideally they hoped to communicate with their audience, in slightly different ways they highlighted that their focus was primarily on their relationship – or
Roy Howat explained that while he loves being able to share great music with people who want to hear it, “one just doesn’t want to hang too many pegs on whether they’re enjoying it or not because that will lead to anxiety”:

All you can do is listen to the hall, listen to the music, play the very best you can – and one’s aware of course that there are people listening there, but in a way you play regardless of whether there are people there or not. You don’t want to think too consciously of the audience when you’re playing, because your communication is with – really an inner communication with that piece of music. […] It’s a strange feeling of the piece as a sort of living entity that you communicate with – I don’t know how you describe that – you just get that sense.

Liam Viney explained that having an audience stimulates a desire in him to communicate:

“When I’m enjoying the performance I actually do feel a much stronger urge to communicate and I do play differently.” As he explained, when in front of an audience “you’re suddenly forced to ask yourself – subconsciously I would say – ‘Why am I doing this?’” noting that the performance environment is significantly different to the daily life of the practising pianist:

In the practice room, it’s a very kind of you – piano – circular, solitary, inward, introverted, unhealthy relationship. You’re perfecting this thing which no one really cares about except you. But then in a concert hall, you say ‘well all of these people have come to listen – and I need to communicate something.’

Viney described how he aims to connect with his audience “simply by trying to present the music as well as I can,” noting however that he can’t afford to “think about that too much because there’s a fine line between letting that happen and trying to force it, which means a loss of control.” Echoing Howat, he highlighted that the audience could be a distraction: “I can’t be thinking about connecting with the audience because I’m trying to focus on the sound itself […] so in performing there are distractions for me. The audience is actually a distraction.”

Reflecting a similar, yet far more strongly argued view, when asked whether he feels he connects with an audience, Michael Kieran Harvey responded quite directly:

I don’t care if I connect with the audience or not. I don’t care if they stay or walk out. It’s absolutely of no account to me. […] I don’t expect or want approval or, you know, any of those things.

He explained that his main aim as a performer is to “put across the music in a way that I think is exciting for me to do and is satisfying for me to do.” While passionately expressed, on the basis of his later comments, his statement may reflect his reaction against the commercialism and “mystique” of the music industry, which he suggested encouraged expectations of praise and the chance of “earning megabucks.” As he observed, this could contrast greatly with the reality of the experience of the performer, and leave pianists “coming away feeling completely empty.”
Though argued from a slightly different perspective, it is worth noting that Claudio Arrau expresses a similar opinion:

I always try to be independent of audiences. I am pleased if they understand what I am doing, but if they don’t, I cannot let this influence me at all. I just go on with what I have to do with the music. The thing to be aware of in a concert situation is vanity […] Vanity kills the whole relationship between the music and the interpreter. (in Dubal, 1984, p. 21)

**Sound, Silence, and Sensing**

The pianists spoke further about the variety of factors that might impact on their ability to communicate – or connect – with their audience, and the ways in which they felt able to gauge their success. Reflecting the emphasis of comments provided in the introduction above, while a few spoke of the role of sound and the music itself, the conversations very quickly moved into the communicative power of the silences, or more embodied ways in which they sensed a connection with their audiences.

**Roy Howat** spoke of the importance of both projecting sound, and using sound to “draw the audience” in: “You have to communicate to your audience, but projecting to your audience doesn’t necessarily mean blasting them with a lot of decibels.” As he explained, in loud passages, “you can draw them in to listening to your fortissimo making it a non-blastissimo fortissimo, but a full one. You can read that between the lines of a lot of composers, they’re saying – yes fortissimo – but not harsh.” He also described “a short hand trick of playing quietly enough that you can draw the audience to you,” but noted that even in dynamics marked ppp, “there’s got to be a core to the sound. Something has to carry.” Further, in this regard, Howat also noted the importance of silence as a way of engaging the audience: “The silence makes you listen, and listen out for what’s going to come next.”

**Stephen Savage** also highlighted sound ‘projection’ as crucial to ensure that “everything is spoken; is going to be expressed and given out.” While Howat referred to a ‘core’ in the sound, Savage suggested, in an equally elusive way that it required an ‘intensity’ of some sort:

If you’re aware of having to go quite a long way back, so someone in the back row really feels as if they are being spoken to as much as someone in the front, then there is this sort of intensity in the fingers, somehow, even when you’re playing very quietly. Noting that the acoustics of the performance space are essentially “an extension of the instrument,” he explained how they could directly influence the performer’s treatment of sound and silence:

You start to hear the sound differently, because it’s coming back to you. […] For example if an acoustic is too dry then it’s going to affect how you can really deal with shadings of sound, because they are going to decay too quickly, but if they hang slightly,
that inspires you to do more shadings and really play a little bit more on the brink of silence.

Savage emphasised silence as a significant factor in the attraction of live performance, describing his experience of audiences who “listen with this incredible attention and impeccable silence,” and observing that there appeared to be a “terrific hunger” to do just that, particularly “as music becomes more and more commodified.” He suggested the chance to be in communal silence was “in response to this kind of indiscriminate chaos of sound” which, he felt, “devalued music” in modern society.

**Freddy Kemp** similarly felt that silence was “very important” and as much a “part of the music” as the sound. Echoing Savage, he spoke of his interest in making subtle transitions between the two in performance, and the influence of the acoustics on his ability to do so. As he explained, he prefers those halls where “the echo is so well constructed” that “you find yourself listening to the notes waiting for them to disappear.” In contrast, when the sound immediately dies away he finds it more difficult to work with the subtleties of silence: “I’ve found I don’t pay much attention to it unless I’m hearing it.” Alluding to more intangible factors that might be at play, he also noted that the acoustics will be affected by “the level of concentration of both the performer and the audience.” Kempf additionally spoke of how he attempts to embody his intentions with silence, using subtle body language as well as “other ways” to hold an important silence during key moments of a piece. While not elaborating on what these were, he put these down somewhat mysteriously to experience.

**Jean-Paul Sevilla** provided several examples of how he judges whether he has communicated successfully with his audience through the “quality of the silence.” As he explained of one particularly powerful performance experience: “I have never been so moved in my life […] the silence was incredible – I have never heard anything like that. The quality of the silence […] it was beautiful. I felt a response.” When asked to talk further about this silence, Sevilla simply stated: “There are two kinds of silence; the kind of silence of people who are interested and the kind of silence of people who are bored. And they are not the same believe me.” However, he could not describe this any further: “I cannot define it, I don’t know, it’s difficult to explain. You just feel it!” [holding up hand and rubbing fingers together to gesture something with texture]. **Matteo Napoli** similarly referred to the silence in describing how he senses whether his audience is connecting with him, noting that while the applause at the end will not always “tell you what happened […] for sure, always, the quality of the silence when you play, it does tell you what is happening.” As he explained: “A concert hall has a special sound because of the silence. When you have 300 people, 600 people or 2000 people, it doesn’t make the same sound. Silence has a sound.”
While **Gao Ping** noted that “in loud passages” there can be a “kind of intensity, or perhaps a certain kind of virtuosity that you are dazzling” the audience with, he spoke at great length about the importance and communicative power of the silences, which he discussed while using many hand gestures to illustrate his points. As he argued, “silence is one of the greatest things to involve your audience and activate their imagination”:

> Silence is so important in the music because that’s when you are communicating – the silence. Because if you always have sound, sounds, sounds after sounds, you are always giving them, you are not receiving anything back from the audience. The way to put it should be – because there’s silence, the audience has to fill in the blanks in a way. If they have to hear music in the silences, when there’re actually no notes – no sound, therefore you are actually involving them rather than giving them information. It’s like the Classic philosophy – the idea of Chinese paintings: Some of them only a few brush strokes and the rest is completely space, just nothing, but they are not really just blank paper there’s stuff in there.

Gao Ping also observed that it was in the silences that he was able to feel a response from his audience, noting that in the “silence returned to you, you feel that this music has done something to them … and that’s part of how I feel often, and I like that feeling.” He further attempted to describe this feeling:

> You hear this silence, but this silence somehow has content in it and so you are not listening with your ear – you are feeling this silence […] I don’t know how to describe it. But it’s just a feeling that you get sometimes when you actually know, without actually knowing, that this music is really touching someone.

**William Westney** made a brief reference to the power of the silence, explaining that in addition to its aural impact, “you feel” the silence as a “palpable connection.”

As evident in the above quotes, the pianists referred to less sonic and more embodied means in which they felt or sensed they were communicating with their audience. Echoing Dunsby’s observations (p. 132 above), several suggested that the communal nature of the performance environment ‘set the stage’ or the atmosphere for this more elusive type of connection. **Roy Howat** observed that the attraction of live performance was the sense of “anticipation,” and the potential of the “unexpected” for both performer and audience: “When you go to a concert you don’t know what’s going to happen. So of course the audience will come, and there is that electricity because it’s right in the present.” Similarly, he noted, the performer needs to be able to cope with many unknowns during performance, as the audience “changes the dynamic” and “the unexpected can happen.” **Stephen Savage** believed there was “something very precious” about the live performance environment that “causes people to gather together to experience it.” As he suggested, the concert experience can be a “ritual. It’s religious almost in that sense.”
Mark Kruger suggested that the reason people are drawn to a live concert is “just a connection, a life force – some people use that word – that bonds us all together.” Attempting to further describe this, he explained: “I think it’s to experience that – maybe the word is love, or that purity, that goodness […] that meaning – that connectedness between us all.”

A number of the pianists provided further insights into how they experienced this atmosphere during performance. Stephen Savage spoke of being “aware of different qualities of audience,” and how he could sense the type of audience he had:

You get an antenna for knowing when there’s an audience – even at the start – who is likely to be tuned into what you’re going to do, or another audience which is there, very polite, very much there, but a bit like a good school-room.

When asked to further explain how he senses this, he suggested: “I suppose it must be rather as if you’ve started to tell a story to somebody. If their attention is taken, then you can lead them on.” This he noted could occur without hearing or seeing someone in the room, but rather in sensing their presence:

I think you do become aware that you are being heard, that you are being listened to, that somehow something or some communication is happening. I mean for example – sometimes if you are rehearsing in a hall for example – playing, playing, playing – ‘there’s someone here’ – and yes there is.

In addition to his comments on the communicative power of silence, Matteo Napoli further described how he ‘feels’ he knows if an audience is “emotionally” connecting with him:

I have the illusion that I do sense it. I feel that I know, because if that happens, you are creating a huge energy inside a concert hall. If there is such a huge energy, you’re going to get this energy back. You feel you’re not playing for yourself.

Mark Kruger explained that the connection he feels with his audience is “definitely physical […] you can feel it inside yourself, you feel it in your heart.” Asked to clarify this feeling, he similarly spoke in terms of energy, using many hand gestures to the space around him to animate his discussion:

When you play, you feel what the music has created, the energy if you like. Or when the music is in the air, you know, they’re all sorts of things people say; ‘you could cut the air with a knife,’ you could ‘cut the atmosphere with a knife’ – or ‘there was something in the air.’ Well, damn right. There is something in the air. You can feel that in the room.

Gao Ping spoke of the intensity of the atmosphere, and echoing Napoli, suggested that he can sense when both he and the audience are emotionally moved:

Part of the reason I’m drawn to performing is that atmosphere, that presence or that kind of intensity that – when you get to a quiet moment you feel your audience is with you and
that kind of thrill is pretty intense, and it’s wonderful. And when you play something that moves you – and you feel that also – you don’t know, but sometimes you can feel that it also keeps the audience riveted and that’s a wonderful feeling.

Roy Howat described what he felt was an intuitive, two-way relationship between performer and audience, noting that “of course one’s intuitively picking up a lot from the audience” and as an audience member, “you’re watching the performer – you are intuitively picking up how the performer is feeling – what they’re conveying, whether they’re anxious or enjoying themselves.” To the question of whether he senses any feedback from his audience during performance, Howat explained how he can both “hear” and “feel that an audience is particularly sympathetic.” However, he noted that he could not always trust his perceptions: “There have been some occasions when I’ve heard the noisy coughers making such a din and I think ‘Oh dear where are they.’ And then somebody will say afterwards ‘Oh you could have heard a pin drop.’”

Freddy Kempf spoke of being able to ‘feel’ his audience’s reaction: “You can feel – sort of – how loud they’re breathing, how much you think they’re fidgeting; you can feel the amount of attention on you.” While possibly reflecting a particularly sensitive ear, he also spoke of sensing a more intangible form of communication, noting the difference between a jury and a concert audience: “I was always curious why I always felt so nervous or so affected when I was playing to a jury in a competition, because that should be essentially the same thing – but it’s not.” He expressed his desire to understand why the psychological impact could be so different. William Westney similarly spoke of his interest to understand why “you can play a 10 minute audition at the piano for judges, and you feel just exhausted from that experience, but you could play a recital that’s two hours long and not feel exhausted.” As he suggested, “it’s not the act of playing that’s exhausting, it something in the energy fields.” Whether this perceived difference in atmosphere or ‘energy’ is purely a psychological effect of extra pressure, or represents some difference in the quality of the presence of the audience, it is perceived as real by the performers (see Badura-Skoda, in Dubal, 1984, p. 53).

Implications for the Intangible
The communicative space between performer and audience, whether through sound, silence, or other less sonic means, proves to be very fertile in identifying intangible aspects of piano performance. The opportunity to communicate with the audience through music was described by the majority of the pianists as one of, if not the most powerful motivating forces in their choice of career. They spoke of performance as a chance to share a journey; to create and feel excitement, electricity, energy, or a special atmosphere; or to connect, bond, or achieve contact and oneness through music. This latter notion of ‘connecting’ with an audience was most
clearly articulated by Westney, who referred to it as a more powerful aspect and his ideal outcome in performance. This is discussed further in Chapter 6.4.

It was evident from several of the pianists’ comments that the integrity of their individual relationship with the music was also important to them, and maintained in performance. While Harvey was most opinionated in this regard, arguing that he has no interest in his audience, Howat and Viney also observed that their personal connection to the music could be compromised if they focused too much on how – or whether – they were communicating it successfully to their audience. As they noted, they could not afford to focus on, or think about this too much, either due to anxiety over audience expectations, or that the act of thinking itself could be problematic (a topic that returns in Chapter Seven). More implicit comments on the performer’s ‘aesthetic responsibility’ came from Sevilla, who highlighted that he will never sacrifice his musical ideals for the sake of an audience, yet believed the responsibility was his to effectively communicate these. Conversely, Savage suggested that in order for him to be a “conduit” for the music he expects his audience to be musically informed.

In attempting to communicate through music, only three pianists explicitly mentioned the role of sound. They highlighted the acoustics of the performance hall as significant and described a number of ways that they played with or projected the sound in this environment. Adding to the previous discussion on expression through sound in Chapter 5.2, they described how if a sound was of a particular quality or intensity, it could “draw the listener in” (Howat), or ‘speak’ to the audience (Savage). In qualifying what this was however, rather than speaking in terms of the mechanics of playing, their descriptions ranged from sound having a “core,” being “full” rather than “harsh” (Howat), or arising from a feeling of “intensity” in the fingers (Savage). In the sense that the creation of various types and timbres of sound can be explained in terms of mechanics, these aspects may be considered to verge more towards the tangible. However, these are also quite descriptive perceptions, reported and experienced subjectively, and without the aid of scientific equipment (and possibly for some without a conscious awareness of the mechanics involved at the time).

Much more prominent however were discussions on silence. Further to their comments on the expressive quality of the silences between sounds, the pianists spoke of silence as a highly valued aspect of the concert environment from the perspectives of both performer and audience. Silence was highlighted by several pianists as encouraging listening, as containing crucial yet ‘invisible’ content, and as a means of involving and activating the imagination of the audience (Gao Ping). Significantly, silence also featured as a means through which the pianists felt they received information back from the audience. While challenging to define or explain, several spoke of being able to distinguish between different qualities of silence returned to them from
the audience. As Napoli noted, “silence has a sound.” Gao Ping explained, in “feeling this silence” he can sense whether the “music is really touching someone,” or as Westney described, in the silence he feels a “palpable connection” with his audience.

As highlighted earlier, while the characteristics of particular sounds and acoustic environments can be precisely measured, from these comments, the way in which pianists hear, perceive and play with sound, silence, and the subtle transitions between them, during performance, involves a level of complexity that – at least currently – transcends the tangible. In explaining how they could gauge whether they were successfully communicating during performance, many spoke of feeling or sensing their audiences. They spoke of having “an antenna” (Savage) of sensing the “energy” (Napoli, Kruger and Westney) or “atmosphere” (Kruger and Ping), of physically and emotionally feeling their audience, or being “intuitively” informed and connected (Howat). As some noted, the audience – whether by their physical presence, focus and attention, or by other more intangible means – could affect both the pianists’ perceptions of the quality of the sound and the level of communication.

While, as Howat pointed out, the performer’s perceptions of the audience environment are not always reliable, the overall impression from the pianists’ comments above is that the presence of the audience, and the means through which they feel, sense, or hear they are communicating through music, add crucial intangible elements to performance. However, the question remains – on this ‘backdrop’ of sound, or silence charged with ‘meaning’ – what is being interpreted, expressed or communicated?
Chapter Six: The Intangible As

6.0 Introduction

As highlighted through the combined discussions thus far, there are many angles through which to approach intangible aspects in music. There are also many variables influencing if, when, and how they ‘exist’ or are evident in either the music or the musician; are potentially played out in the interpretative and expressive spaces between them; or in the communicative space between a musician and their audience. When considering the experience of music-making from the performer’s perspective, in its totality, all of these factors and variables will necessarily inform perspectives on what the intangible ‘is.’ In this chapter, the potential for it to ‘be’ many things is acknowledged by presenting a different angle on, and more inclusive consideration of the ‘Intangible As’.

The following four sections deal with this totality of experience through incorporating the pianists’ views on what they are expressing, communicating, engaging and/or connecting with in the act of performance, whether this is something inherent or perceived in the music, a personal expression or contribution, or a conceptual (or aesthetic) ideal to which they aspire. As noted in Chapter Four, the pianists jointly offered a range of possibilities, including ‘the dramatic, emotional, psychological, beautiful, spiritual or profound content in the music.’ They also highlighted that this content, inherent ‘meaning’, or potential of the music was contingent on the degree of understanding and perceptions of the performer: great performers were those who were sensitive to, aware of, awake to, in touch with, or engaged empathetically or imaginatively with these expressive possibilities.

In this chapter, these possibilities are discussed according to three clusters of themes that emerged: the emotions; the ‘trio’ of aesthetic and virtuous values – beauty, truth and goodness; and the spiritual. Following on from the pianists’ earlier insights into the communicative potential between performer and audience, the chapter concludes with a discussion of ‘Peak Experience,’ focusing on their descriptions of particularly powerful and intense performances where they felt an even greater connection with their audience. Representing perhaps the culmination of all intangible aspects contributing in one moment in time, it was during this phenomenon that some of the most striking aspects of intangibility were found.

As a more inclusive consideration of ‘The Intangible As’, the discussions below include at times the pianists’ reflections on the music, whether in terms of their perceptions of the composer’s intentions, or what can be found in the score; their personal feelings and beliefs
about – and beyond – music; and finally, their past experiences and aspirations when performing. While focused on their experience as performers, inevitably their perceptions are also informed by being listeners, and in some cases, composers. Similarly, while this group of musicians can be considered a sample of classical pianists within the Western classical tradition, each brings their own “subcultural identity” (Cook, 1998, p. 5) to their experiences (evident in the range of nationalities alone), as well as their individual personalities. While these respective differences will inevitably influence all aspects of their responses, they become particularly evident when approaching those perceptions of music more directly linked to non-musical attitudes and values.

6.1 The Intangible as Emotions

The capacity of music to express and elicit emotions appears to play a key role in how western societies attribute value to it. As Gardner observes: “Music can serve as a way of capturing feelings, knowledge about feelings or knowledge about the forms of feelings, communicating them from the performer or the creator to the attentive listener” (1983, p. 124). While the way in which it does so remains elusive and highly debated, as Sloboda (2012) reports in Grove Music Online, “it is one of the most inescapable and characteristic features of music that people report strong emotional reactions to it” and “more reliably and frequently than other art forms.” There are also widespread perceptions that being in contact with music provides emotional nourishment and can be beneficial in this regard: “The reason people actually expend enormous amounts of time and energy involved with music is because it feeds them, emotionally in some sense, that’s the prime deliverable for music” (Sloboda & Ball, 2008).

Music is also valued for its capacity to capture “the expression and feeling of the intangible” (Nickson, 1967, p. 17). The view that music can express or contain emotions too “deep” or “special” for words has been proposed many times and is widely accepted (Bernstein, 1993). As Scruton suggests, “all attempts to describe the emotional content of works of art seem to fall short of their target” (2011, p. 67), or as Jackendoff and Lerdahl argue, “music does not just express static emotions or affects […]. It moves from one state to another in kaleidoscopic patterns of tension and attraction that words cannot begin to describe adequately” (2006, p. 67). This dynamic yet ineffable quality, as highlighted in Chapter Two, presents one of the greatest challenges in talking about the meaning of musical experience.

However, the idea that music contains ineffable, or more profound emotions than can be experienced in daily life, is the subject of ongoing debate. Indeed, Juslin (2003a) suggests this is a myth, and moreover, one that has proved to be unhelpful in music education (p. 3). He argues
instead, that “musical emotions touch us deeply not because they are so different from everyday emotions, but because they are so similar” (p. 4). Sharing this perspective, Lindström et al. note that while “it may not be considered acceptable in the traditional conservatory culture to regard emotions in music as basically the same as those in everyday life,” their findings show that music students consider “everyday emotions” as those easiest to express in music. Additionally, they suggest, these basic emotions can “be measured, quantified or put into a computer” and the application of computer-based strategies could lead to a “vast improvement” of pedagogical practices dealing with expressivity (2003, pp. 37-39).

However, studies such as these do not account for what is arguably a significant gap between emotions that students find ‘easy’ to name and express, and those which professionals may spend many years aspiring to express. Indeed, Sloboda (2012) notes “there is considerable evidence of increasing sophistication with age in emotional response to music.” As discussed earlier in Chapter Two, diverging views on whether this is indeed intangible and ineffable constitute one aspect of the suggested cultural divide between scientists and practicing musicians and pedagogues, with very real implications for how the two cultures interact and potentially benefit from each other. The link between music and emotions was thus a key discussion point in these interviews. From the pianists’ comments, it was evident that not all shared the opinion that music represents simple or ‘everyday’ emotions, and while words could be found for certain emotions, the physical – or embodied – aspects of felt emotions were equally challenging to verbalise, and even locate.

**Simple and Profound**

The emotional aspects of music were a feature in conversation with Freddy Kempf. He spoke of how he was attracted to certain music on the basis of its emotional content, and specifically, those emotions difficult to experience in daily life: “The range of emotion we can feel throughout the day is not a lot, you know, and I think music is the only way we can trigger ourselves into experiencing much more intense emotions.” In a more informal setting over lunch, he noted the distinction between ‘simple’ and ‘extreme’ emotions:

I think classical music is something you can come to when you’re bored with all the pop songs you listened to when you were a teenager – you want something more challenging. [...] I think you’ve got to get bored with the simple instant emotions [...] what I feel music does, why we need it or why I respond to it, is that we can experience extremes of emotions which we wouldn’t get otherwise.

Matteo Napoli described a “master work” of classical music as one full of “big feelings” and eliciting “big emotions when you hear it the first time, and second time, and two thousand times.” This potential, he noted, included subtle layers of emotions, from those that might be ‘feelings’ and those that are more echoes of feelings:
Sad, happy, dramatic. I have not enough English words for that – epic, heroic. It’s you. It’s evolving, devolving. It’s going forward, it’s coming back. It’s a tear, it's a smile, it’s open, it’s flat … It’s everything … Some of those are just feelings. Some of those are, [or] could be quality of feelings.

As to whether music can contain or express emotions that are more complex than basic ones William Westney replied, “oh absolutely, yes. I think it’s much more sophisticated […] you can’t sum it up in a word.” Echoing Jackendoff and Lerdahl (p. 144 above), he spoke of the challenge of pinpointing emotions that are constantly shifting:

It’s this river flowing with all these different things. While I’m sitting here with you, each one of us has different shifting, flowing emotional states that never stop, and they’re not the same, they’re not one emotion. We understand this as human beings perfectly well, but music has the uncanny ability to be that way and to reflect it, and that’s what I love about it the most, because it enables us to connect with people without having to use words to do it, because words are so paltry, when it comes to this kind of thing.

Several pianists highlighted that while music was certainly a powerful medium for emotional expression, their experiences with it went beyond the emotions. Mark Kruger spoke of the “sheer gamut of emotions” music could express, and the “potential to really connect with yourself at a deep emotional level” through music, as both a performer and a listener. However, he also felt there was more involved: “I think it's certainly real that [emotion] is there, but I don't know if that's all there is to it.” Similarly, Gao Ping observed, “there is much more” than emotions involved in music, and “music doesn’t have to be emotional necessarily to move some people.” As he explained:

There is actually music which is not so emotional, but it moves us very deeply. Some of Bach’s music is like that. You can’t really call his fugues really, truly emotional. They are beautiful, and they are extremely well put together, and … they have a kind of purity which touches us.

Stephen Savage also described how as a listener he has become less focused on the emotional content of the music:

Increasingly I relate less to the passing emotional pattern, although as a performer you have to be totally aware of it, and be absolutely clear as to when something exactly changes in the music; that has to be conveyed. But I think on a level of how I respond, in a deeper way, it is by being taken on this more organic ride, if you like, rather than the ‘passing parade’, which of course is beguiling. But underneath it I feel I want to be drawn – I want to be taken.

As he further noted, “there is a sense of awe about it, certainly a sense of being taken out of
yourself.” As to whether feelings such as awe could be considered a deeper level of emotion, Savage responded: “Well I suppose they’re deeper in the sense that they don’t just depend on the passing pattern of emotions […] I suppose it is a deeper level, because I don’t necessarily weep with it, because it seems to me beyond that. It seems to be on a more epic scale or a more organic scale.”

Experiencing and Expressing
The question of whether emotional expressivity in music is related to lived emotional experience is often raised when attempting to account for talent, particularly in the case of child prodigies, and opinions on this feed into the discourse on how artistry is developed and nurtured. Several of the pianists shared their views on this, while also noting the challenges in accounting for experiences that may otherwise not yet have been acknowledged. Freddy Kempf felt that “if you’re in a field that’s dependent on emotion then you will want to experience as much variety of emotion as you can,” as it is only “once you’ve experienced something” that “you can put that into music.” As was evident however, not all the pianists agreed with him on this point. Stephen Savage refuted the idea that we need to have experienced emotions in our lives to express them musically. He suggested that through music we might be able to access feelings that we have not previously experienced, or identified as such:

[Music] can in fact give rise to certain feelings that one hasn’t actually felt through other means perhaps. It can happen in different ways, can’t it? I think for an emotionally sensitised child it can actually provide foretastes of things that he hasn’t experienced yet. Yet, as Savage suggested earlier, an awareness of the emotional content of the music is crucial to it being expressed in performance. Roy Howat similarly spoke of the importance of striving for emotional ‘clarity’ when interpreting a work. However, he observed, for many people who are “unable to be very expressively communicative, music is the one thing that can actually open the gates for them, in a way of finding some expression in their lives.” Such contrasting opinions highlight again the circular relationship discussed in Chapter Four between what we perceive to be in the music, and what we bring individually to our experience of it.

Several pianists also spoke of how music enabled them to access and purge emotions that were otherwise challenging to deal with. Freddy Kempf explained this was the case with depressive feelings: “If I feel depressed then I don’t want to put the TV on and watch some comedy. I’d rather actually play something really, really depressing on the piano and really kind of exhaust that emotion and then I feel better.” As Stephen Savage suggested, “it’s this ancient Greek idea isn’t it? That you go through something which intrinsically might be quite unpleasant,” yet, “in experiencing the essence of it through an artistic experience […] you feel purged of the feeling itself.” Others specifically highlighted that music was a powerful and safe means of expressing
William Westney explained that one of the aspects he “loved about being on stage” when he first started to perform, “was that it was okay to be sad,” something he had not previously experienced: “On stage, when you’re playing romantic music, it’s not only okay but everyone loves it […]. They’ll not only applaud you, they’ll accept it and unquestioningly.” He relayed an entertaining anecdote to point out how music can sublimate these emotions: You’re the young artist and you play the 1st Ballade of Chopin – and you play it – you know – you raise the roof with it. Well, let’s think about it. This music is hysterical, self-pitying, edgy, desperate, and everyone loves it. And the more you do that the more they love it, and the more beautiful it is for everyone, because art does sublimate these emotions – it really does – and thank god for it, it’s fantastic. If you showed up and didn’t play the Chopin but you acted that way, you acted neurotic, self-pitying, desperate, screaming, they’d kick you out! [laughter]

This concept had also surfaced in one of the focus groups with students, when one participant highlighted that music was a medium through which to express her anger, an emotion she felt wasn’t acceptable in her daily communication. Indeed, DeNora (2000) reports that “letting off steam” or “venting” through music is a key value of music for many, particularly in the case of “exceptional emotions” (pp. 56-57). As Roy Howat summed up, music is an expressive medium “where you don’t need to be afraid of what somebody else will think of what you’re feeling. Music’s there, it’s your companion, you talk to it and it talks to you.”

Embodied Emotions
Highlighting the challenge of finding words for the emotional power of music, a number of the pianists spoke of emotions in music by referring to a physical feeling, often by gesturing to parts of the body. It was notable that the conversations around this topic were often more imbued with emotion, either displayed as sensitivity in body language, a decrease in volume of speech, or with the addition of humour to lighten the discussion. The metaphor of music speaking to the heart is widely recognised, and many musicians will make explicit or implicit references to it. The comments by Rachmaninov (in Palmer, 1999), Pablo Casals (in Kahn, 1970, p. 106) and Benjamin Zander (in Zander & Zander, 2000, p. 31) are just a few among the many that could be cited. Perhaps not surprisingly, the ‘heart’ featured as the prime location of embodied emotions in these interviews.

When describing how he feels when he connects with his audience, Mark Kruger noted: “You can feel it inside in yourself, you feel it in your heart.” William Westney described with great enthusiasm and animation the potential of music to “open up that door,” while motioning to the heart. Jean-Paul Sevilla felt that “the heart is where the emotions are born,” and explained his
belief that the role of music, as with the focus of the performer, should be to touch the heart:

[When I perform] I don’t want to impress, I want to touch the audience. In a jury of an international competition some of my colleagues want to be impressed or astonished. I want to be touched […] not touched here [pointing to head]. For me the touch is here [pointing to heart]. For me the main organ is the heart. Heart speaks, and I always quote Beethoven. When he wrote his Mass in D Major he said, ‘born in my heart it has to reach the heart of people’. He did not say ‘born in my brain,’ he said ‘in my heart’.

Further highlighting this distinction, Sevilla relayed a story of a performance he gave of the Goldberg Variations for a “simple” and “peasant” Polish audience, explaining how a compliment from a young woman at the end of this recital stands out as most memorable and moving:

She embraced me and she said probably the only word she knew in French, she said, ‘Goldberg – Coeur’ [holding heart] and she left. That is the best compliment I ever had. Coming from somebody who had probably never heard the Goldberg in her life, but for me that meant everything. And I cried.

Michael Kieran Harvey did not discuss emotions in much detail during the interview. However, it was striking that when asked to describe a performance that had particularly inspired him, he spoke of how, despite the repertoire not being his favourite, a colleague’s cello performance had really moved him. Notably, he expressed this in quieter and softer tones:

It was a sort of twentieth century, hyper-late romantic thing. And it’s so slushy and it really worked. And I thought that was really beautiful, and he played it like his whole [pointing to chest] … you know – ‘Thanks’. I’d never ever listen to that music.

Asked to clarify whether his physical gesture was referring to a feeling in the ‘heart,’ Harvey responded by suggesting a feeling of love: “Yes I agree – you love it. You do love it.” In a comment that suggested he is far more emotionally affected by music than was reflected in this interview, he also confirmed that he is moved in this way “all the time […] it just happens randomly with any repertoire.”

The physicality of emotions was discussed in detail with Gao Ping. While acknowledging that everybody responds differently to music, he emphasised that in general “there are physical responses […] when you are moved, when you are excited, you feel.” Explaining exactly where this feeling was, however, was challenging: “I’ve never analysed myself in those things [but] there is music that makes me feel nothing, and music that makes me feel strongly, I don’t know which parts I’m feeling [gesturing generally to torso].” Asked to qualify if he ever feels something physically in the heart, he responded, with many gestures:

I don’t know why I’m pointing here [to the heart]. Tradition? […] It’s your whole being
– if it’s strong music you feel everywhere [sweeping motions across torso]. You know, but we traditionally point here [the heart]. I suppose there is a reason why it’s here – because when I hurt emotionally, I can actually feel physical pain here [solar plexus]. Yet, he qualified, the feeling of deep emotional pain was different from that of being touched by music: “[With music] you feel differently – you feel – you feel everywhere – this region mostly [gesturing to upper half of body and beyond], not so much down here [lower half of body]. You can feel also down here – but I don’t know how to describe it.” Gao Ping was certainly very patient in exploring this question with me.

When similarly asked to describe the details of his physical reactions to music, Stephen Savage humorously noted that he only really notices a physical effect in the heart “in cases of extreme nervousness – real anxiety!” while more seriously pointing out: “Definitely, these deepest things seem to come from lower down […] I think when it really kind of has a physical effect – for me – I feel it here in the gut.” When this happens, he added, the music “just takes you – so powerfully – I mean it just somehow is an engulfing experience.”

Implications for the Intangible
As can be seen from the discussions with pianists, the power of music to express emotions and as a means of experiencing emotions was certainly a key feature, though they noted the challenge of finding words to account for the full range of emotions. Somewhat surprisingly, the most descriptive examples were provided by Napoli, for whom English is a second language. In this case, however, he highlighted the subtlety of language necessary to capture the “big feelings” he experiences, many of which appear less emotional than metaphorical. Indeed the evolving, devolving, shifting and non-static nature of the emotions in both music and life featured as one of the greatest challenges in pinpointing them.

However, several of the pianists spoke of the expressive content of music going “beyond” or representing something “deeper” than emotions. The terminology used in these cases was increasingly less defined, ranging from “beauty” and “purity” (Gao Ping), to “epic,” “organic,” “engulfing” or “awe” inspiring (Savage). As noted by Savage and echoed by Howat, part of the challenge for pianists is to be ‘aware’ of the emotional subtleties of the music they are playing. While Kempf believed that this necessitated previous experience of the emotion, as Savage argued, this was not always the case. Similarly, the question of whether this awareness need necessarily be conscious in order to be expressed in music, or quantifiable in words remains debated (cf. Baker et al., 2012; and Scruton, 2011, p. 99).

It is evident that each of the pianists perceives and speaks about emotions from his own conceptual framework, and consequently the picture remains somewhat vague. Gabrielsson and
Juslin (1996) argue that more research is needed into “the developmental aspects of recognition of emotional expression in music” (p. 89), and Resnicow, Salovey, and Repp (2004) suggest that research into emotional intelligence may be useful for the recognition of emotions in music performance. Yet, rather than suggesting an absence of clarity that demands resolution, the vagueness of the comments above appears to constitute a key component of the power of music. As highlighted by the literature and the pianists, music is valued for its ability to reflect the complex and dynamic nature of emotions. Our emotions are both rich and mercurial, and the subtle ways in which they continually shift between shades and states are viewed as a fundamental requirement of the artistic experience.

As many also noted, the emotional power of music could be registered physically, which, while often described traditionally as being in the “heart,” could be as difficult to locate as it could be to find words to describe it. This more embodied form of engagement with music, and the challenges associated with feeling are discussed further in Chapter Seven. The noted sensitivity surrounding the body might be related to the other key finding to emerge from these discussions, that music enabled access to emotions less socially acceptable, or more difficult to acknowledge or express in daily life. This ranged from sadness, depression, or grief, to the “neurotic, self-pitying, desperate” or “hysterical”, darker, and less publicised, parts of our personalities. As Howat suggested, music could be a very valuable companion in this regard: “You don’t need to be afraid of what somebody else will think of what you’re feeling.”

6.2 The Intangible as the Aesthetic

The “Trio of Ultimate Values”

In the opening pages of A Very Short Introduction to Beauty, Scruton (2011) describes “the true, the good and the beautiful” as the “trio of ultimate values,” with each being “something that we pursue for its own sake, and for the pursuit of which no further reason need be given” (p. 2). In Performing Music: Shared Concerns, Dunsby (1996) similarly speaks of “the customary idealized search for perfection, beauty, truth, and all the good that undoubtedly is what we aim for when making and experiencing music” (p. 6). As he points out, these values have been the focus of “many writings in what may broadly be called the aesthetics of music” (p. 29). However, the relationship between such philosophical ideas and musical practice and appreciation has long been contentious (Goehr, 2012).

While outlining the expansive field of aesthetics per se is beyond the scope of this thesis, the following section explores the three ideals that Scruton and Dunsby have suggested are central to that field and of enduring relevance to the performing musician: beauty, truth and goodness.
Each of these has been the focus of independent inquiry at various times and by various philosophers, yet the connections between them appear strongly embedded in historical western discourse, albeit the subject of ongoing debate. Indeed, it is evident that the status, if not validity, of each is closely linked to that of the others, as the following sample of voices highlights.

Kant argued in 1790 that those who take an interest in beauty possess “at least a predisposition to a good moral attitude” (1987, p. 167). As Cooper (2008) observes, this “virtue-centric idea of beauty” has “recurred over the ages” from Plato, and Plotinus to Kant and Schiller, firmly planting the idea that the experience of beauty “not only reflects a conception of the human good, but may play a part in shaping it” (p. 259). Yet Cooper notes, while this relationship may help explain “why beauty matters to us,” it also underlines “why there should be tensions between attitudes towards beauty” (p. 256).

Scruton (2011) presents one perspective on this contention, observing that, while in the case of goodness and truth we might assume that “the pursuit of the one is always compatible with a proper respect for the other,” the links between beauty and virtue are more tenuous: “From Kierkegaard to Wilde the ‘aesthetic’ way of life, in which beauty is pursued as the supreme value, has been opposed to the life of virtue” (pp. 2-3). Further, he highlights, “many writers since Baudelaire and Nietzsche have suggested, that beauty and goodness may diverge, so that a thing can be beautiful precisely in respect of its immorality” (p. xi). However, he observes, the connection between beauty and goodness is one “to which we are instinctively drawn, hard though it is to mount an a priori argument in its favour” (p. 65).

It is evident that historical changes in perception play a significant role in how these values are viewed. While in the mid-eighteenth century aesthetics had been described as the “science which investigates the Beautiful” (Goehr, 2012a), universal claims of beauty, or aesthetic values more broadly have been largely discredited in recent years. As Cook points out, the influential ‘New’ musicology put forward by Kramer in 1990 strongly rejected “music's claim to be autonomous of the world around it, and in particular to provide direct, unmediated access to absolute values of truth and beauty” (1998, p. 113). Dissanayake (2000) further observes:

Under the pervasive influences of multiculturalism and poststructuralist theory, those in the art world or university have accepted that standards of beauty, taste, judgment, and aesthetic value are not real in themselves but are products of the norms and ideologies of individual societies. (p. 207)

Thus, while in 1819 Keats famously proposed, “Beauty is truth; truth, beauty--that is all Ye know on earth, and all ye need to know,” as Bowie (2012) points out, claims linking beauty and truth in music are increasingly viewed by western musicologists as untenable:
The problem is that music no longer can be regarded as true if it is beautiful in the manner of the tradition of Western classical music: that traditions’ means of extending the ability of the modern subject to express itself have, particularly since Wagner, become clichéd and ‘ideological’.

Scruton (2011) observes another factor potentially influencing modern perspectives, noting that this trio of values has a strong theological basis, one less widely accepted in contemporary society:

This particular path to the understanding of beauty is not easily available to the modern thinker. The confidence with which philosophers once trod it is due to an assumption, made explicit already in the *Enneads* of Plotinus, that truth, beauty and goodness are attributes of the deity, ways in which the divine unity makes itself known to the human soul. (p. 3)

Yet, as he also observes, the idea of a “beautiful soul” has been taken up by various Romantic writers and philosophers, including Hegel, Goethe, Schiller and Schlegel, and this “episode in intellectual history […] reminds us of the way in which the idea of beauty penetrates our judgement of people” (p. 42). As the following words of Yehudi Menuhin highlight, the connection between music, virtue and the divine are still relevant to some twentieth century musicians:

Ever since I can remember I have tried to relate the beauty of great music to the harmony of life. As a small child I even imagined that if I could play the chaconne of Bach inspiringly enough in the Sistine chapel, under the eyes of Michelangelo – all that is ignoble and vile would miraculously disappear from our world. (in Monsaingeon, 2001)

Dunsby observes that many writings in the field of the “aesthetics of music” focus on the “deep satisfaction to be found in music,” or, what he informally calls “the Ecstasy school of musical thought,” referring to the concept of *ecstasis* “familiar in the early 20th-c. work of Martin Heidegger, and in Nietzsche’s earlier discussion of platonic ‘rapture’” (1996, p. 29). As Dunsby notes:

It is something that most of us take for granted, having been taught that music is inherently good for us, which we find repeatedly confirmed in our experience of it, and confirmed intellectually for many on the grounds that it is extremely hard – perhaps impossible – to conjure up any substantial idea of a music that is in and of itself harming. (1996, p.29)

Thus, the notion of ‘good’, whether linked to the divine, or to a humanistic – and equally intangible belief or experience, appears to retain a place in contemporary consciousness and in our ideals about music. Indeed as Dunsby suggests, these “absolutes about the goodness of music are so familiar to us that they may go entirely unchallenged and lead to an impoverished
understanding of what making music is about” (1996, p. 30).

The importance – or otherwise – of the aesthetic ideals of beauty, truth and goodness was raised either directly with the pianists in these interviews, or came up more indirectly through a variety of terms and references with most of them during the course of the conversations. Admittedly the concepts were discussed, and contextualised in different and sometimes inconsistent ways, and the pianists employed them in various ways as they attempted to capture intangible concepts through words. The many layers of meaning associated with such words preclude any sort of neat definition. Though a coherent picture does not emerge from their responses, and certainly the pianists afforded each of these ideals with varying degrees of relevance, it was clear that they were relevant to their concerns, with their references to them overlapping with many other topics discussed in this study, particularly in relation to concepts of value, being ‘authentic’ and faithful, meaning, emotion and expressivity in music.

Additionally, and as with other themes presented within this chapter, while not always explicit, these ideals appeared in reflections about the music, the musician, or the interaction between the two. While this “trio of ultimate values” – beauty, truth and goodness – were sometimes presented to and discussed with the pianists in combination, highlighting the close ties between each, to assist in drawing comparisons and contrasts they are considered in turn below.

**Beauty**
The concept of beauty has a long history and has taken many forms, from the Pythagorean interest in the beauty of mathematical symmetry and proportions, various manifestations of these in architectural, human and natural forms, to the sublime form of beauty as discussed by Burke (1756) and Kant (1790/1987). As Synnott (1990) points out, while the “social discourse on beauty is ancient,” it is influenced by differences in individual perceptions, and “each age seems to construct the meaning and value of beauty differently” (pp. 67-68). Highlighting the potential variety, Synnott’s survey of the many perceptions posited over the course of western discourse includes beauty as a duty; as fun; as goodness; as good for the health and the psyche; as truth; as power; as a status symbol; as sexual excitation; as physical, psychological or metaphysical; as a gift from God; as cultural or genetic; or earned or learned (p. 68).

However, the distinctions between these categories of beauty, as with their relevance to modern philosophy and the concerns of contemporary society, has been and continues to be a topic of much debate (cf. Carritt, 1910; Budd, 1995; Graham, 1997; Levinson, 2003; Van der Leeuw, 2006; Carson, 2006; Lochhead, 2008; and Scruton, 1997, 2011). In addition to the academic trends noted earlier, there are those that suggest the status of beauty in Western society has been further diminished by an increasingly consumerist outlook. Thus, while Scruton (2011) suggests that “people associate beauty with their highest endeavours and aspirations, are disturbed by its
absence, and regard a measure of aesthetic agreement as essential for life in society” (p. 32), he also argues that “beauty is vanishing from our world because we live as though it did not matter” (p. 161). Dissanayake (2000) similarly suggests that, “in most if not all human groups, experiences of the beautiful and the excellent may lead to valued and desired heightened emotional states” (p. 208) while also observing a decreasing concern for such values in our contemporary commercial and materialistic world (p. 224).

Yet, as Scruton, Dunsby (and Menuhin) suggest above, beauty may still be a concept of significance to musicians and performers. However, even given the many possibilities offered above, attempting to further elucidate or define beauty in music can be a challenge. As Aaron Copland observes, “recognizing the beautiful in an abstract art like music partakes somewhat of a minor miracle; each time it happens I remain slightly incredulous” (1959, p. 19). Elsewhere, he notes the ineffable quality of beauty that makes it impossible to capture in words (2002, p. 12). It was with these perspectives and challenges in mind that beauty was raised with the pianists in these interviews.

Amongst the pianists interviewed, **Liam Viney** was the most outspoken on the importance of beauty, noting that whether “appreciating beauty” or “relating to the beautiful aspect of music,” beauty has become “the most important thing” in his music-making. He first raised the topic when speaking of his early attraction to music, explaining that while he would occasionally hear a piece of music he thought “was pretty,” he “didn’t understand the concept of beauty until much later.” Yet, when asked to explain how music can be beautiful, Viney acknowledged its “complex” and “elusive” nature, including the fact that beauty is not necessarily related to joy or happiness, and even “things which are actually negative are beautiful.” Generalising about beauty, he argued, is “way too complicated, because it’s always so personal.”

As Viney also highlighted, our appreciation of beauty could be both informed by and reflective of historical and cultural factors:

> Was it Adorno who said no poetry after Auschwitz? Basically [he’s] saying we can’t allow ourselves the luxury of indulging in artistic pursuits when horrors like this have happened, you know, how can we reconcile these things? […] Maybe Auschwitz created even more need and even more urgency for beauty in art.

Reflecting on how history and culture have influenced beauty in the music itself, he suggested that the “spiritual” beauty in the music of Bach or “sad beauty” in Schubert became distorted in the twentieth century into a “barbaric” beauty, noting the example of Stravinsky’s *Rite of Spring*.

While not explicitly noted, it is possible that this shift may have impacted on him as a musician.
As discussed in Chapter Four, Viney explained how after being predominantly focused on contemporary repertoire during his teenage years, he had come to appreciate beauty in music through the “older forms of music.” However, as he noted, he initially struggled to play this repertoire “beautifully” as he “didn’t really have a sense of it.” While adding that his wife has helped him in this regard, as to how his wife understands and appreciates beauty, he noted: “she would just say well ‘you know it when you hear it – it just is – that’s what it is – it’s beauty.’”

Echoing Viney, Matteo Napoli noted that beauty was not necessarily related to pretty or pleasant music or sounds, an observation that has also been made by other pianists such as Browning (in Noyle, 2000, p. 30). While Napoli’s reference to beauty was brief, his comments alluded to the trio of values discussed above, highlighting how these might be directly relevant in music-making:

There is nothing pretty in Prokofiev’s 7th. There's nothing pretty in Petrushka, but it's still a beauty, a total beauty. The beauty comes [...] from the point of view of the soul – the energy, the emotion is a rude one, a strong one or a harsh one. It's still emotions. You need a bad sound, or even harsh sound. No, I wouldn't combine beauty with pretty. Beauty is the faithful translation of the score, that’s the beauty.

Thus, in highlighting that beauty could be found in “bad” or “harsh” sounds, Napoli suggested that beauty in the music might be determined by the degree to which the composer’s “energy” or emotions reflect an expression of their “soul.” Similarly, in arguing that a beautiful performance depended primarily on being faithful to the score or the intentions of the composer, the notion of beauty becomes an ethical one, reflecting or representing a truthfulness or virtuous quality in the performer.

In contrast to Napoli, Gao Ping’s main criteria for beauty was structural rather than emotional. As noted in the previous section of this chapter, he raised the concept of beauty while suggesting there was much more to music than emotions, citing the beauty of Bach’s Fugues as an example, and in particular their “purity which touches us.” Gao Ping spoke further on the non-emotional aspect of beauty through a comparison between art and nature, and the beauty to be found in relationships we perceive to be approaching perfection:

You feel it … Nature is beautiful. When you go to a beautiful spot and you look at it, you are indeed touched by it. But you cannot say that nature is emotional – it doesn’t try to do anything to you – there is no human emotion in this thing, but you respond to that with emotion. And I think art does that too. Like a Bach Fugue, you see this architecture, so beautiful, so perfect. At the same time, it’s not just perfection of construction. It has feelings in it, and you savour those beautiful lines that converse with each other, and those beautiful suspensions which get resolved. Those are the beautiful things that you respond to, but are they truly emotional in meaning?
As Gao Ping points out, while he can “feel” beauty when he sees it in nature, the object in which we perceive beauty need not contain any emotion for us to have an emotional response to it. Nor need it have any intentions of being beautiful. If beauty can be linked to emotion, he suggests, it is in the way we respond with emotion to what we perceive. When translating this idea into music, it appeared that Gao Ping located beauty as residing in the work itself, which is then perceived by the listener, who may or may not respond with emotion.

Beauty was not a focus of the discussion with Stephen Savage, however in talking about the trio of truth, beauty and goodness, he suggested that as a “representation of these things,” music could be a means of accessing these ideals, noting also the “purity” referred to by Gao Ping. As he explained:

Music will lead us into a consciousness of what these things are I think … that you could probably say, and all the more powerfully through not being subject to the usual human frailties and problems that go with these things in real life. So in other words it’s more idealistic in a sense, so you sense it in a purer sort of form.

In speaking of performance as collaboration, as with Viney above, Savage also highlighted that a shared understanding of the music between the performer and audience was a key factor in “whether something very beautiful may be happening in the performance.” Yet, in his only reference to beauty, Jean-Paul Sevilla specifically highlighted his belief that “the power of communication with music […] has nothing to do with education,” relaying a story of the “beautiful” connection he experienced in the silence during a performance he once gave to prisoners – who “probably have never heard a note of classical music.”

While the concept of beauty was not directly discussed with Michael Kieran Harvey, he spoke of music being ‘beautiful’ several times in the interview. Significantly, each of these was amongst the most emotional of Harvey’s descriptions, noticeable in the ‘softening’ of his body language and voice, and use of gestures. Harvey spoke of being unexpectedly moved by the beauty of sounds while practising the Boulez second Sonata: “I hate that piece […] I was going through a bit of it the other day and there was this beautiful combination of pitches – you know – and suddenly… ‘you ol’ softy!’ Suddenly I almost liked him.” Harvey also referred to the impact that beautiful playing could have on him. As noted earlier in the previous section on emotions, he described how a “really beautiful” cello performance had moved him. Through his physical gestures, Harvey appeared to be suggesting it was not the musical content, but the manner or intention (“with his whole heart”) in which the cellist performed the piece that made it beautiful. Additionally, as noted in Chapter Four, Harvey relayed how listening to music being played beautifully by his colleagues in performance could bring him (uncontrollably) to tears while on stage.
Roy Howat agreed that concepts such as beauty were important in music, however as mentioned in Chapter Five, his only further comments highlighted his belief that “beauty of tone” itself could be over-valued. As he also observed from the perspective of the performer, focusing too heavily on the beauty of the music could be problematic: “Expression is not dwelling in a note and saying ‘isn’t it beautiful, isn’t it lovely stuff in here’ […] If one gets too involved in the emotion of giving the performance then it can be just internalised and not necessarily projected.” Indeed, as described by Harvey above, being too emotionally moved during performance can have a very real physical impact.

William Westney noted – as with others – that great art does not have to be pretty to be beautiful, “the way Guernica is a beautiful painting even though it’s not pretty.” While he agreed that music could be “beautiful,” he felt that contemplation on the concept of beauty had little to offer him as a performer, echoing Howat’s reservations on the practical relevance of such an ideal:

I never think to myself that I’d like to play beautifully. I think I would, but I don’t think that’s a fruitful goal for me. […] I guess I do think of [beauty] sometimes. If I think this piece is incredibly beautiful and that’s why I’m playing it, well then that’s the quality I want to channel […] That word, I don’t know if it’s helpful. I think beauty can be a by-product, if something is working well, people may say that sounded beautiful. As an intent – I don’t know personally if it works.

Westney did note however, that the idea that young pianists could be engaging in an activity that “most would agree is beautiful” and “have it in their own hands,” would be a potentially useful one for music advocacy, and one he would “buy into.” On a slightly pessimistic note however, he concluded: “The next question is – would anyone care, besides us, as musicians? I don’t know; I would hope so.”

Truth

In 1872, while relaying his experiences of the “great piano virtuosos” of the nineteenth-century, Lenz boldly stated: “Art is the ideal Truth of earthly life. She is the disembodied Truth and can exhibit herself in many ways” (in Lenz, 1971, p. 19). Just over a decade later, presenting a threat to such romantic claims, musicology was to emerge as a new academic discipline, closely aligning itself with the positivistic methods of the natural sciences. For most of the century to follow, the academic discourse on music focused on what could be proven – increasingly through analysis of the score – to be tangible, measurable, and objective (cf. Adler, 1885, Samson, 1999, p. 38; Cusick, 1999, pp. 478-80; and Schippers, 2007, p. 37).

As discussed in Chapter Two, the means and methodologies through which we identify and qualify ‘truth’ underlie much of the suggested epistemological divide between the “two
cultures” of art and science. Thus, as Dorter highlights, while philosophers have long recognised an “aesthetic truth” based on a “non-rational kind of knowing,” in more modern times “empirical science and therefore the rational, conceptual model of knowledge” has dominated (1990, p. 37). In support of the former, Dorter suggests that “aesthetic truth” caters more appropriately for the truths to be found in the experience of art: “those of 1) our emotions, 2) cultural values, 3) sensory experiences, and 4) the elusive significance of our experience” (p. 37). This perspective can be seen variously reflected in the voices of other philosophers and musicians.

Langer argued that “Artistic truth” is “the truth of a symbol to the forms of feeling” and must be distinguished from “propositional truth” (1957, p. 262). Agawu suggests that we might “think of the truth of a musical work as emerging from doing, from engaging with musical materiality, and not as a summary narrative that is produced after the doing (2009, p. 5).” Burnham observes that when we engage with music we are seeking a personal truth, as opposed to one about the music – a “poetic” rather than “positivistic” truth. (1999, p. 214). Through music, echoes Maus, we are taken into an imaginative though no less distinct world, which we perceive in terms of “fictional truths” rather than factual (1999, p. 182). As the composer Copland suggests, echoing Lenz above, truth in music “is many-sided and can be approached from many different angles” (1959, p. 21). Yet, as Graham points out, the ‘truth’ in art eludes us every time we try to explain it” (p. 61). Indeed, the French philosopher Jankélévitch goes so far as to argue that “the meaning of the meaning” of music is “ineffable truth” (2003, p. 73).

In more recent times, musicologists have also voiced their concerns about “the implicitly scientific basis of music analysis” and its claims to lead to an objective truth (Samson, 1999, p. 46). As the editors of Rethinking Music highlight, it is now widely acknowledged that analysis “can no longer plausibly claim to embody the whole truth” (Cook & Everist, 1999, p. 8). Indeed, Cook argues, a pluralist as opposed to scientific approach to truth is essential (1999, pp. 257-261). Highlighting this shift in perspective, Duckles and Pasler (2012) point out that postmodern musicologists now pay greater attention to “the truths embedded in the local, everyday, variable and contingent aspects of music and music-making” and “see truth as always relative and subjectivity as multi-layered, contradictory and performative.”

It is notable however, that the concept that musicians can access and express the truth of music in performance retains its presence in contemporary musical consciousness. As Sullivan highlights, a performer is still expected to be “true to the work […] that is, true to the intentions of the composer, true to scholarly edition, true to the authentic conditions of performance” (2005, p. 1541). As noted earlier in Chapter Five, while claims to historically ‘authentic’ performance have been largely debunked, “the idea of a right interpretation” remains
entrenched in performance culture (Bowie, 2009, p. 324). Indeed, this is reflected in Dunsby’s discussion on the “Role of the performer” in Grove Music Online. Noting his support for the views of C.P.E. Bach, he suggests it is an “enduring truth” that “good performance” is that which brings out the “true content and affect of a composition” (2012). Pianist Garrick Ohlsson observed that, while an elusive goal, the prospect of reaching “a ‘Truth’ when interpreting a great work,” is nonetheless an inspirational one (in Grindea, 2007, p. 265). Or, as Shura Cherkasski notes, pianists “are always searching for the ‘truth’ – whatever that may be […] as an interpreter, the artist must try to be true to himself and to the composer whose work he is interpreting” (in Grindea, 2007, p. 70).

In these interviews, the pianists approached the topic of truth from various angles, reflecting the variety of possibilities noted above. Echoing in many ways their views on striving for an ideal, being perfect and ‘authentic’ in Chapter 5.1, they variously spoke of truth as an abstract concept – both objective and subjective, as a personal belief, as an indicator of authenticity, as well as highlighting the challenge of identifying truth in music. While in most cases the pianists felt there was a form of truth to be found in music-making, they had varying views on where and what this was. Michael Kieran Harvey spoke on numerous occasions of the importance of scientific and objective truth: “I’m very interested in science for various reasons, I’m just hoping that science is not quashed because it’s after truth.” However, while passionate about the importance of scientific truths, he felt an open-minded approach was equally essential:

Curiosity and truth; these are good things […] we need a strong dose of rationality, and we need a strong dose of creativity. And in our teaching we need to instil as many different ways of thinking as possible so that we produce open young human beings. Indeed, as highlighted in Chapter Five, he argued passionately against the idea that there could be any one definitive, that is, true way of interpreting what was in the score. Thus, Harvey appeared to value both an objective truth in terms of science, and a more personal truth in the realm of artistic and creative expression.

To the question of whether art is about “some sort of truth,” Roy Howat agreed: “well yes, truth meaning perception – seeing what is.” He discussed this in terms of a process of discovery, suggesting it is “the sort of truth that science aims for” but “in the best sense of not saying ‘here’s a conclusion I want to reach’ [but] saying ‘what is going to be here – let’s see.’” While noting the importance of aiming for objectivity – in practise, performance, and research, he argued that subjectivity was unavoidable:

“Everything’s subjective; you can’t not be subjective. […] The only way to be objective is to say ‘yes it’s subjective, let’s be aware of how subjective we have to be here.’ So if you can take one step back and subjectively see your subjectivity there’s a sort of double negative that gives it some objectivity.
Thus, in highlighting the problematic nature of ‘objectivity’, by extension, Howat emphasises the relativity of the concept of truth, be it in music or more broadly.

Approaching the concept from another angle, William Westney suggested that one performance could be more ‘truthful’ than another, though, as with Howat, he emphasised the influence of the personal (and subjective) when attempting to qualify this. From a range of suggested aesthetic values, Westney highlighted truth as the one that resonated with him the most: “Truthfulness works for me in terms of music-making. I think it very important […] and I think we can detect an authentic, genuine performance, and one that’s somehow not quite that.” When asked however to qualify the word ‘authentic,’ Westney highlighted the intangibility of the concept:

But no, now we’re chasing our own tail – and we’re right back where we started trying to define the ineffable music thing in other terms. How do we know it’s authentic? We feel it in our bodies – that’s the only way. […] Truthfulness can be felt […] when you really want to know the truth about something you ask how it feels inside of you – ‘in my gut’ you would say, or you know it in your bones.

Obvious here is the absence of any reference to authenticity in terms of the score, and the inference is very much one of truthfulness as a personal integrity or sincerity. Pianist Janinia Fialkowska similarly advises pianists that in order to win over an audience, “you must convince them of the truth in yourself” (in Noyle, 2000, p. 67). In contrast, as noted earlier, Sevilla and Napoli were strongly focused on the importance of being faithful to the score and composer, a closely linked concept.

Gao Ping observed that truth was “a very large concept” and similarly emphasised the difficulty of talking about it: “Truths in music … what are they? Are they music or are they words? Yes there are [truths], but you cannot … it’s truth in sound if you like.” Again highlighting the various ways in which the concept of truth might be interpreted, Gao Ping spoke more directly about searching for a personal truth:

Art, basically, is about people who are searching for some kind of self-realisation; to search deeply for who you are and finding ways to channel that into an expression. That is truth – that is about truth isn’t it? I mean, if it’s fake then why do you go to all the trouble doing art

As noted in Chapter 5.1, Mark Kruger similarly referred to being ‘true’ to oneself when discussing what he strives for in performance: “We keep trying to get it – I was going to say better, maybe better is the word, truer to ourselves, or our authentic sort of expression, or our path.” As he further explained in an informal setting post-interview: “It’s about unleashing your potential and being at your most open, your freest, your most authentic, being your true self – knowing yourself – all these clichés that we have.” While not directly speaking about the
concept of truth, Freddy Kempf also made mention of the importance of musicians “being true to themselves” in “the emotion that they want to explore,” and that when approaching the composer and the score: “If it’s a true performance […] you’re pushing your own barriers, your own limits, for the sake of everyone’s enjoyment or excitement.”

Highlighting the ambiguity of the concept of truth, when asked whether he feels “closer to some kind of truth” through engaging with music, Stephen Savage paused before responding: “Ahh…I just feel in touch with something which derives from every element of what’s going on.” While in some ways side-stepping the topic, his considered response suggested that his views on this topic lay in a more philosophical if not metaphysical realm:

It’s this feeling of the narrative, of being really drawn into a kind of process which somehow has – I’m sure must have – some kind of link at the very deepest level with our perception of mortality […] somehow I think this is what it’s tuning into actually.

Speaking far more directly on topic, and perhaps summing up the challenge most had in talking about it, Liam Viney suggested that while truth in music-making is important to him, serious contemplation of the concept is overwhelming:

I gave up thinking about it basically because I felt like it was too bewildering. Every single philosophical and spiritual belief in the world has an element of truth. Every single application of those concepts to music has an element of truth. There’s no one-way of looking at it, I give up, I’ll just do my job – you know what I mean!

**Goodness**

The perception that music can inform and affect moral character has a long tradition stemming back to writings of the Greek and Roman philosophers. For Plato and Aristotle the power of music in this regard was a key argument for the importance and quality of music education: “Rhythm and harmony find their way to the inmost soul and take strongest hold upon it, bringing with them and imparting grace, if one is rightly trained, and otherwise the contrary” (Plato, *Republic*: III, in Mark, 2002, p. 6). Or, as Aristotle argued, “music has a power of forming the character” and “clearly there is a considerable difference made in the character by the actual practice of the art” (*Politica*, Book VIII, in Mark, 2002, p. 15-16). Lawson observes that “early Christian authorities,” were similarly well versed in the idea that music “could either ennoble or debase man’s moral fibre” (2002, p. 6). Supporting such views at the turn of the sixth century, Boethius (ca. 480–525 AD), argued “there can be no doubt” that “rhythms and modes” can “affect and remodel the mind into their own character,” and that “even the slightest change” will “cause a great difference” on “the soul itself” (in Mark 2002, p. 26). This perspective on virtue was to remain influential for many centuries (Mark, 2002, p. 25; Pugh & Pugh, 1998, p. 8).
In the mid-1950s Leonhard and House highlighted the persisting “notion that music has a transcendental ‘goodness’ about it which may rub off onto musical participants.” However, while being advocates of an “aesthetic education” based on intrinsic values of music, they warn against naïvety in this regard, given that links between music and virtue are unsubstantiated (1959, p. 112). Indeed, many have since highlighted this lack of evidence. Noting the prevalence of such views in contemporary society, and the efforts that are still made to censor music considered to be immoral, DeNora (2000, p. 160) points out:

Arguments such as those advanced by Aristotle or the Parent’s Music Resource Centre, that certain melodies are ‘conducive to virtue’ or destructive of well-being are non-explanatory; they do not offer any account for the mechanisms through which music comes to produce its alleged effects. On its own, music has no more power to make things happen than does kindling to produce combustion. In both cases, certain catalytic processes need to occur. Theorizing the catalyst that conjoins music and human being is, however, no easy task.

Budd (1995) similarly observes that while music might be beneficial in developing “moral insight, or an imaginative identification with a sympathetic form of life or point of view that is not one’s own” (p. 7), such affects will be dependent on the “character, attitude and will” of the individual:

There is only a personal answer to the question whether the appreciation of a work of art kindles or dampens a desire to enhance the lives of other people, whether it is a stimulus to, or a safety-valve which prevents, immoral action, or whether it infects with, or inoculates again, a mood of despair. (pp. 5-6)

Indeed, following the Nazi’s use of music (particularly that of Beethoven and Wagner) as a powerful propaganda tool, the idea that ‘great’ music can only be ennobling has been roundly discounted. Furthermore, the existence of an ultimate or intrinsic value that might be called ‘good’ is a highly contested one by contemporary philosophers (Zimmerman, 2010).

However, just as Viney suggested that the horrors of war might create more need for the appreciation of beauty in art (p. 155 above), in spite of much evidence to the contrary, the idea that music can be related to the good endures, as Mursell highlights, writing “under the shadow of stupendous and fateful happenings” of World War II:

[Music] is one of the most perfect of all expressions of what is best and purest in the human spirit. And now, in the midst of so much evil, we and our children supremely need its eloquent reminder that goodness also is mighty and enduring. In the midst of so much doubt, confusion, conflict, and hate we and our children need its testimony to eternal values (in Mark, 2002, p. 128).

This ideal connection can be found in the voices of contemporary pianists. For example, in
support of the idea that “art has moral value,” Badura-Skoda suggests “music has a special capacity to bring harmony to all nations. Good music has a truly positive effect on people” (in Dubal, 1984, p. 57).

The connection between virtue and art is also alluded to in reverse. Ruskin proposed in the late nineteenth century that “aesthetic achievement is based on morality” and that “only a good and well-intentioned man could create a true work of art” (in Mark, 2002, pp. 43-44). Morgan more broadly suggested in the mid twentieth century, the “development of integrity and ideals within the individual” are crucial for “activity in and understanding of the fine arts” (in Mark, 2002, p. 148). In discussing what qualities we might expect of those engaged in the arts, Lamarque notes that “perhaps it is practical knowledge or wisdom […] a marked sensitivity to others, or sympathy, or open-mindedness.” Yet, as he argues: “There is absolutely no empirical evidence that those with the closest exposure to the arts” including the “artists themselves – stand out as especially wise or clear-thinking individuals. More to the point no-one expects that they should” (1999, p. 96).

Yet, as cited earlier in Chapter 4.2, Kemp (1997, p. 42) suggested that “it may not be merely what [musicians] can do that separates them from others, it may well prove to be the kinds of people that they are.” Indeed, the inference that good or virtuous qualities are required of performers can be found in the views of many musicians, as particularly evident in references to integrity. For example, Pablo Casals provided the following warning: “Music is something to be approached with integrity, not something to be turned on or off like tap water” (in Kahn, 1970, p. 136). Westney, Jensen and Grund (2011) suggest that a particular type of commitment by the performer “infuses the performance with a kind of integrity,” and Schuller calls for more “artistic integrity,” “honesty” and “humility” in performers (1998, p. 543). Similar suggestions emerge with such concepts as sincerity (cf. Arrau in Dubal, 1984, p. 33; and Dichter in Noyle, 2000, p. 50); courage (Barenboim, 2009, p. 18); generosity (Ashkenazy, in Noyle, 2000, p. 12); purity (Perahia, in Grindea, 2007, p. 5; and Casals, in Kahn, 1970, p. 289).

In these interviews the question of whether the good and virtuous can be linked with music was posed directly, or came up indirectly with most of the pianists (it was not discussed with Harvey or Kempf). Several specifically highlighted the challenge of connecting these ideals to the composers whose music they play, even though they might “write from a moral standpoint” and be “expressing something beyond themselves” (Savage), or be “taking on the burden of humanity’s suffering and transcending it” (Viney). As Sevilla argued: “Sometimes the character of the composer matches his genius as a musician. Sometimes it doesn’t.”

In discussing how concepts associated with goodness, such as integrity, sincerity, humility,
morality, purity and courage played a role in great music-making, the pianists variously
highlighted some as more relevant than others, though their approach to and opinions on these
diverged. **Liam Viney** thought that ‘good’ qualities could ideally be inculcated in a student
through engaging with music, but “it’s not guaranteed” to happen. He felt that those “you help
the most already have seeds of this,” in contrast to those whose “hearts” or “minds” are “closed
to certain things.” He also believed that “it’s a small percentage of musicians who actually
achieve these things through music,” and that “unfortunately the great ones have a kind of
power which is susceptible to corruption, especially in the areas of humility.”

**William Westney** was not convinced by all of the offered virtuous character traits: “Some of
those words work for me, some of them not […] Integrity I don’t know. Morality – I don’t
know – I mean maybe you’re right, but I’ve never thought along those lines in terms of music.”
Westney did speak, however, in more detail about humility as important to the process of
music-making:

> Humility yes – because the process of mastering classical music in particular, or anything
> that’s developed and challenging is a humbling process. We try something it doesn’t
> work, we’ve got to find some other way, we’ve got to persevere, be resourceful, we can’t
> try to over control it, have to trust something. It’s humbling – we have to keep
> regrouping. I think that’s character building for want of a better word.

Westney also spoke briefly on honesty during this learning phase, noting: “To play great music
you have to relax your egoistic drive to control things and instead find a way to be honest with
your own process.” As Viney suggested however, for those who do become great musicians, the
ego presented an ongoing threat to humility.

**Matteo Napoli** similarly highlighted honesty, noting that “the music does – I wouldn’t say
improve, it creates a kind of honesty.” However, in contrast with Westney, he spoke of honesty
to the score:

> It’s an intellectual honesty. I’m not going to play without the octavus because I’m honest
> […] I’m not going to cut the octavus because I can’t do it. I’m not going to play the piece
> if I can’t. That’s a question of – you can call it honesty. […] It’s my integrity. It’s my
> respect of the community, the laws.

Morality was a word that Napoli strongly associated with music, and musicians. Indeed, he
suggested, “if you research the people in the tribunals and in the law field, you will discover
that the number of musicians involved in court cases is nothing.” Napoli qualified this by noting
that a magistrate had once reported to him that in her fifteen years of work she “never had to
judge a musician.” However, that is a point of view rarely articulated, and certainly none of the
other pianists shared such firm convictions that music promoted moral behaviour. Similarly
contentious, and highlighting a contrast in the concept and assignment of integrity, as cited
earlier in the discussion of ‘Striving for Perfection’, (Chapter 5.1), Gao Ping argued that while searching for perfection was important, “the integrity of the music” was not dependant on it, and indeed, in the right hands, wrong notes could “sound good.” Indeed, this is also reflected in the title of Westney’s 2003 publication *The Perfect Wrong Note*.

When asked whether the list of possible character traits above have a role to play in great music-making, **Stephen Savage** highlighted their appeal, while on closer inspection, pointing out the challenges of defining or assigning them:

Yes, well of course – one says of course … you see, sincerity can be in abundance and it can be totally muddle headed. So I sort of balk at that one a bit, because sincerity by itself, well maybe yes, but maybe no, it just depends. Integrity, even integrity is a bit loaded because again you can have a cockeyed idea of what that might be, what are your values for example? You may be living by your values with total integrity but they might not be appropriate values, but who am I to say that they’re not appropriate – so there you are. So those, with respect I would call sort of slightly motherhood sort of concepts.

Of these however, Savage did highlight courage: “I think courage is very important indeed. I think you’ve got to be very courageous to go out and do it, and to want to in a way.” As he further explained, emphasising the paradoxical nature of this subject area: “In other words courage is very important because it enables you to sustain the belief that your sincerity and integrity are important - and worth really fighting for.”

As noted earlier, in considering the overall concepts of truth, beauty and goodness, Savage suggested that music “will lead us into a consciousness of what these things are” by representing these ideals in a “more idealistic” or “purer sort of form.” The concept of the musician as being pure, or embodying a sense of purity, was also highlighted by several pianists. As **Mark Kruger** suggested, we go to see great performers to experience “that purity, that goodness.” He also spoke of the power of having “pure” intentions as a performer: “I think any task you do carries meaning if your intention is pure,” explaining how he has been working to improve himself in this regard: “I think the cleaner you can be – if that’s a way to put it, the better.”

**Matteo Napoli** similarly suggested that “a clean musician” with “pure” emotions would communicate most powerfully with their audience. Qualifying concepts such as clean and pure however are challenging, particularly in the realm of intention and emotion. **Roy Howat** observed of the latter, through anecdotal reference to Ravel, that while emotional sincerity may be considered crucial, it was not all that was needed, and indeed could be problematic:

[Ravel] was laying into composers who wrote woolly rambling pieces and saying ‘ahh but I’m feeling the expression sincerely’, and he’s saying ‘well if you’re sincere you’ve
got to be sincere enough to care to do a good job properly not leave a whole lot of notes around in the wrong place’.

As was noted earlier, Howat warned that the danger for performers in this regard was getting too caught up in the emotion of performance rather than communicating the musical message to the audience.

Implications for the Intangible

While noted as a complicated, complex, and elusive topic, it was evident that the idea of beauty was one to which the majority of pianists subscribed. Though philosophical discourse on this was limited, their broad references to beauty as perfection of structure, as a pure or more abstract ideal, as linked to nature, the emotions, and the soul, reflects the long legacy of social and philosophical constructs of beauty. In discussing these ideas in the context of music, while not always explicitly presented as such, the pianists located beauty both in the musical relationships embedded in the score, and as perceived by the listener in sound. Thus, beauty in the score was noted as perfection of construction, whether structural, melodic, harmonic or contrapuntal. Conversely, and more elusively, Napoli alluded to beauty as dependent on the composer’s “energy” or emotions being a direct expression of their “soul.” Beauty in sound was emphatically not restricted to the notion of what is pretty, and could be found in bad or harsh sounds, in an elusive quality of tone, a combination of pitches, or even in the silences.

The experience of beauty in music-making was evidently a personal and subjective one. The pianists described being touched by and feeling beauty, or simply knowing it when they heard it. While quite prominently provoking emotions in some, as Gao Ping suggested, beauty did not necessarily contain emotions, and could be experienced as a “purity,” which as Savage suggested, represented an ideal to which we might aspire. Historical and cultural factors were also noted as influential in whether, and how, beauty would be experienced. Viney explained that it was only through embracing older music that he came to appreciate and understand beauty, and observed that cultural influences have led to a progression from a “spiritual,” to “sad” and “barbaric” beauty in some twentieth century music. Inferring that his interest lay in these earlier forms, Viney suggested that beauty was noticeably absent in “modern music.” Yet, even where he wasn’t expecting it in intellectual modernist repertoire, Harvey was able to find beautiful moments in sound.

While several noted an interest in beautiful playing, and most considered beauty as a desired outcome or “by-product” of performance, little was said on how to achieve this. Savage and Sevilla presented contrasting opinions on whether the audience needed to be musically informed to appreciate a beautiful performance. While Harvey alluded to the performer’s intention as influential, Howat and Westney more specifically noted that an intent or a focus on beauty
while performing was not always beneficial for the performer, the music or the audience, thus supporting Dunsby’s suggestion that an idealistic approach is not always a useful one. Indeed, the only pianist to provide a practical suggestion on how beauty is to be manifested by the pianist in performance was Napoli. However, in describing beauty as the “faithful translation” of the score, his comments take us into the realms of the ideal, with expectations of truth and truthfulness.

The many different ways in which the pianists responded to the question of truth in music highlights that the notion itself is, as Copland suggested, “many sided” and as some specifically highlighted – beyond words. These many sides of truth were described variously as a philosophical or spiritual truth; as authentic or genuine; creative, personal or emotional; felt or embodied; or as the inescapable truth of our own subjectivity or mortality. Significantly, rather than focusing on the idea of truth as residing in the score, or in being true to the composer, many of the pianists responded in terms of finding their own personal truth, or ‘being true’ to oneself. This is in contrast, though evidently not in opposition, to the idea that a pianist must be faithful to the score or the composer, a view that was most strongly advocated by Napoli and Sevilla, yet also appears more implicitly in many of the pianists’ comments throughout these conversations. It is evident that the relationship between authenticity and ‘truth’ in music-making remains a complex and contentious one, both philosophically and practically.

The role of the audience also presents another challenge in identifying “truth in sound.” Howat suggested that the degree to which a pianist successfully balances the subjective and objective aspects of music-making will be determined by the clarity of communication achieved in performance. Similarly, Kempf noted his criteria for “true performance” as the level of excitement and enjoyment he is able to generate in his audience. Thus, a judgement of truth in performance must also take into account the perceptions of the audience. Westney highlighted however that defining or measuring how we perceive a performance to be true, or a performer as truthful, leads us directly into the ineffable. From these references to ‘truthfulness’ it is evident that the concept of truth as reflective of what the performer brings to their music-making is closely related to the character traits of faithfulness, integrity and sincerity, thus leading us into the equally elusive ‘good and virtuous’ aspects of music and music-making.

The range of views presented above highlights both the powerful appeal yet problematic nature of attempting to connect music to the good and the virtuous. While not all of the pianists spoke of this topic, many different forms of goodness were alluded to. Several pointed out that great music does not necessarily come from virtuous composers, and when considered individually, very few of the qualities associated with good character could be applied consistently or unequivocally in music-making. However, in various ways a number of the pianists still
appeared to hold on to a belief that certain positive character traits might be necessary, obtained or improved by engaging with music. While it is difficult to draw hard conclusions on this, the pianists’ views appeared to reflect a broader desire in society to associate music with the best human attributes, even if the evidence is meagre and ambiguous.

As they suggested, the challenge of mastering great (or difficult) music can be “character building” (Westney), encourage or even “create honesty” (Westney/Napoli), and promote “morality” (Napoli). For Kruger, great performers exude “purity” and “goodness,” and Napoli felt that the most communicative are “clean” with “pure” emotions. Highlighting the ambiguity however, as Savage observed, while we will want to say “yes, of course” to the notion that such traits are linked to music, on closer inspection, concepts such as sincerity and integrity are both subjective and relative. Yet, even here, perhaps reflecting his acknowledged desire to “sustain the belief that your sincerity and integrity are important,” in speaking broadly of the ‘trio of values’, he still suggested that perhaps “music will lead us into a consciousness of what these things are.”

The views between the pianists also suggested competing forces. Where Napoli focused on an “intellectual honesty” towards what is printed in the score, Westney felt it important to be “honest with your own process.” While Napoli linked his personal integrity to achieving technical mastery, for Gao Ping, “the integrity of the music” was more important than (and could exist without) note perfection. As Howat also suggested, an ‘emotional sincerity’ could be at the expense of a doing “a good job.” The challenge in resolving these contradictions, or indeed qualifying these concepts may be directly related to their subtlety – or fragility. As the combined comments of Viney and Westney highlighted, while the process of mastering great music can be “character building” in terms of humility, great mastery of music may lead to it’s “corruption.” These ambiguous and potentially conflicting perceptions of virtue and goodness in music-making further emphasise the challenges faced by the performer when negotiating the spaces between the composer, the score, the self, the process and the product.

Whether described as aesthetic ideals, or a trio of values, it would appear the more closely we examine the concepts of beauty, truth and goodness, the more elusive they become. Given the long history of discourse and debate surrounding each of these, beyond and as related to the arts, it is not surprising that they remained ambiguous and contentious in the reflections of the pianists interviewed. An additional factor, as observed by Scruton (p. 153 above), is that these ideals have historically been closely linked with the divine. Indeed, perhaps the most intangible and ineffable value often associated with music – across all cultures – is its capacity to mediate a connection to the divine, or foster spiritual experience. The following section considers these intangible aspects of music-making that can be broadly categorised as ‘the spiritual.’
6.3 The Intangible as the Spiritual

The connection between music and the soul, the spirit, the spiritual or the religious is an ancient one. Utukuru (2005) observes:

Whether through instrument or song, through chant or the beating of the drums, musical sounds have been used since time immemorial to facilitate the individual’s efforts to transcend his or her finite existence and achieve a sense of mystical union with the Great Spirit, the Universal or the Divine.

However, the extent to which this is still publicly or academically perceived as relevant to contemporary music and music-making is questionable, as Hammerstein observes in his survey of the idea of “Music as a Divine Art” (1973b):

The spiritual reference of music has experienced in the history of ideas a good many vicissitudes of consciousness from magic via cosmology, theology, philosophy of Nature, to aesthetics and sociology. Today the old ideas of music as a divine art have disappeared, and can at best be completely grasped in the course of an historical understanding of older music and musical perspectives. (p. 271)

Hammerstein highlights that following the Baroque era in Europe, the spiritual in music “increasingly becomes a victim of rationalistic skepticism and, after a brief revival in the romantic period, finally yields to a purely this-worldly concept of music” (p. 269).

This change in attitude is reflected in mainstream musicological literature, evident through a search for references to the spiritual and related terms in Grove Music Online. Throughout the entry on “Musicology” there are no references to the ‘divine’ or ‘soul.’ References to words such as ‘sacred,’ ‘spirit’ or ‘religion’ across the whole source are few and brief, and restricted to their historical roles rather than any admission or exploration of how these broad concepts relate to the human experience of music. In the entry on “Expression,” spiritual references appear briefly in connection with the emotional power of music, though highlighting an increasing focus on the inner spirit, rather than the divine from the eighteenth century onwards (Baker et al, 2012). Thus, it is evident that in this regard, this most authoritative contemporary reference source is in line with most modern readings of the aesthetics of music, reflecting what Goehr (2012a) refers to, as a “radical distrust of music's metaphysical” connections.

Cook (1998) points out that while during the nineteenth century music was seen by many as providing “an alternative route to spiritual consolation” (p. 36-37), “ideas of the spirit realm […] seem about as remote as they could be from musical culture at the turn of the twenty-first century” (p. 39). While Duckles and Pasler (2012) note that postmodern musicologists are beginning to acknowledge “spiritual concerns” as relevant to music-making, the dearth of recent academic discussion might suggest that spiritual ideas have been of little relevance to practicing
musicians. Indeed, the terms ‘spiritual,’ ‘spirit,’ ‘soul,’ ‘divine,’ ‘sacred,’ ‘religion’ and ‘metaphysics’ do not appear at all in the *Grove Music Online* entries on “Performance” or “Psychology of Performance.”

There is ample evidence however from a range of musicians’ voices to suggest that the connection between music and the spiritual is far more prominent than is reflected in musicological discourse. To cite but a few examples, Fischer-Dieskau refers to the “the pure spiritual expression” which underlies vocal technique (in Bardet, Klein, & Monsaingeon, 1998). Gernot describes the gifts of cellist Jacqueline du Pre as belonging to “the spirit” and promising “glimpses of another world” (1999). Violinist, Kondonassis speaks of the “sacred silence” and “spiritual atmosphere” of performance (in Green, 2005, p. 175). Specific references to the spiritual realm can also be found amongst the writings and accounts of classical pianists throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, as evident in the following selection taken from Brower (1915). Brower highlighted the “supreme spiritual mastery” of great pianists (chapter xv). Bauer described how velocity and power should be used “to bring out the higher, the spiritual meaning” of the content of the music (chapter xiii), and Roeder observed:

> Piano playing is the expression, through the medium of tone, of all that the poet, painter and philosopher are endeavoring to show through other means […] the wonders of the visible universe, the intellectual achievements of men and the deep things of spiritual discernment. (in Brower 1915, ch. ix)

The spiritual also appears in the voices of a range of late twentieth century pianists, as seen in the following examples taken from interviews conducted by Dubal (1984): Ashkenazy emphasises his belief that “music should have a spiritual dimension” (p. 42), and Arrau refers to the mystical and spiritual qualities of a range of different composers (p. 31). Both Fleisher (p. 176) and Horowitz (p. 195) speak of the spiritual experience possible with great music. Istomin observes that great music, as with art, “has to do with the mind and the spirit, the reaching beyond the physical and material, even the explicable. […] It proves the existence of a dimension that’s more dense, and yet simpler.” As he suggests: “If you have for even a moment experienced that reality, you have felt an aspect of God” (p. 215).

Similar sentiments can be found in accounts that are more recent. Rosen refers to the last three Sonatas of Beethoven as “exemplars of great spiritual experience” (2002b, p. 229), and his interest as a performer in the “spiritual” and “the different ways that body and spirit interact” (2002a, p. 27). Others find the spiritual in the playing of exceptional musicians. Menuhin noted that the “one supreme quality” he looks for in an artist is “that spiritual quality which is immediately communicated” (in Grindea, 2007, p. 10), and Barenboim describes his appreciation of the “great spirituality” in the playing of Fleisher (in Kidel, 2003). British pianist
Stephen Hough discusses and publishes regularly on the relationship between “a musical and spiritual life” (Hough, 2011a), and Vlassenko and Stepanov suggest that, “every generation of performers brings their own understanding of the spiritual message of music. This makes the art of music live (2011).”

Defining what this spiritual understanding is, however, can be challenging. Conductor Sir John Elliot Gardiner suggests that musicians have a sense of the spiritual, but one that is more “conceptual” than “literal” and not necessarily easy to categorise (in Morris & Waffender, 2001). Discussing the broader use of the term spiritual in modern western society, philosopher Daniel Dennett suggests this is a modern phenomenon that extends beyond purely musical circles:

It’s remarkably hard for most people to articulate that feeling and so we have the term ‘spirituality’ or ‘spiritual sense which many people see as really quite distinct and independent from any organised religion, any creed, any doctrine at all. It’s a sense of awe, a sense of humility in the face of the majesty of a great, wonderful universe that we’re living in. For most of the people in the world, their sense of spirituality is articulated through whatever religion they grow up in. (in Dennett & Mitchell, 2006)

Albert Einstein similarly referred and subscribed to a “cosmic religious feeling,” which senses and celebrates “the nobility and marvelous order which are revealed in nature and in the world of thought” (in Einstein, 2009, pp. 48-50). He also noted the challenge of explaining it:

How can this cosmic religious experience be communicated from man to man, if it cannot lead to a definite conception of God or to no theology? It seems to me that the most important function of art and of science is to arouse and keep alive this feeling in those who are receptive. (pp. 49-50)

It is with the above breadth of possible interpretations that the topic of the spiritual in music, and its many manifestations were raised in conversation with the pianists interviewed. From the discussions, it was evident that personal religious beliefs had a direct impact on their perceptions of the spiritual in relation to music, and in this regard several presented quite clear responses from opposing ends of a broad continuum of opinions.

**Religious Belief**

At one end of this spectrum, **Jean-Paul Sevilla** referred to his religious belief on numerous occasions through the interview, often deferring to God when attempting to explain the mysteries of music, artistry or talent. As he noted, “for me this is a gift, which God gave me. I am a believer.” While Sevilla felt his spiritual and musical lives were closely linked, his further comments on this were limited to his use of prayer in key moments during his musical career. As he explained of one of these: “I prayed to God: ‘I did my job, you have to do yours’. If I have to play once this Goldberg well it has to be now. I don’t care afterwards, but today it has to
be perfect so please do your job.’ For once he listened to me and I played well.” He noted however, that his prayers were not always answered. Indeed, the absence of any further insights from Sevilla on this specific issue appears to reflect this challenge of directly connecting religious faith to the practicalities of music-making, a point also made by pianist Stephen Hough, similarly of Christian faith: “Whether I play a good concert tomorrow night […] has nothing to do with whether I prayed before or during the process” (Hough, 2007).

At the opposite end of the continuum to Sevilla, three pianists expressed quite clearly that they did not have any form of religious belief: Kempf, Harvey and Napoli. However, in their respective comments they increasingly embraced aspects of music-making that might be conceived as reflecting the broad descriptions of the spiritual noted above. While the question was not broached directly in the interview with Freddy Kempf, it was quite clear that he was not religious and, of all the pianists interviewed, he was the least inclined towards any kind of spirituality. During our conversation Kempf made a reference that alluded to a familiarity with spiritual ideas, noting: “My father was always quoting Lao Tzu, he was always sort of saying it’s easier to change the mind than the circumstances, so I’ve always had this sort of drummed into me.” However, when asked whether any kind of spiritual ideas played a role in his life as a musician he responded (after a considerable pause): “If you’re talking about playing I would say no. I mean for me – I guess – at least the music I tend to specialise in, it’s a direct output from the composer.” Qualifying what he meant by ‘direct,’ he noted, “it’s them trying to express themselves rather than them trying to express some concept, you know, that is outside of what they’re doing.” As he explained, the word ‘spiritual’ is not one he would typically use: “For me, it’s very clear, there’s the physical input and the emotional input and that’s pretty much it.”

While Kempf noted that the religious works of “Bach might be different,” (and we did not discuss how he approaches or deals with this repertoire), when questioned about the possibility of connecting Beethoven’s music with the spiritual realm, he responded: “He’s very selfish I think. Any secular music tends to be I think. It’s expressing people’s own humanity through their own eyes.” However, as is evident from Rosen’s reference (p. 171 above), there are many who would disagree that Beethoven’s music or aims were purely secular. Indeed, as Beethoven himself is quoted as saying: “Music is the mediator between the spiritual and the sensual life” (in Sullivan, 1960, p. 4). Thus, Kempf’s lack of interest in the spiritual, and music overtly connected to it, highlights how individual perceptions, particularly in this realm, can have a direct impact on music-making, from the repertoire played, to the expressive content that is perceived to be in it. Perhaps reflective of the primarily cognitive reading of Lao Tzu during his upbringing, Kempf considers all that is conceivably irrational about music under the banner of the emotional. As he later noted: “I think that’s what inspiration is – it’s being given a taste of an emotion which you want to feel again.”
Matteo Napoli outlined his views on religion when asked to further explain his concept of inspiration, which, as noted in Chapter 4.2, he felt was crucial in music-making:

There is no such religious context to me; never. There is not a third world in it, no. Maybe because I'm not religious at all, so I never felt this kind of mystic, mystical feeling – never felt it and don't trust it.

However, while he did not use the word ‘spiritual,’ he referred on numerous occasions to ‘the soul.’ There was significant discussion on his interpretation of it what this might be. While he noted the difficulty he found in expressing his ideas in English, Napoli’s comments drew together many other concepts and terms considered in this study (such as emotion, rational thought, and the body), underlining the complex interrelationships and also the difficulties (and perhaps artificialities) in separating them. Napoli explained that, for him, the soul is “whatever is not determined by the brain,” and while he initially referred to the soul as “deep emotion” he then clarified that “the soul contains the emotion. The emotion is part of the soul.” When asked whether he considered the soul to be a rational or emotional entity, he responded: “It does not belong [to either]. What I call soul; it’s a kind of first element. It’s a kind of primary element. I don’t ask myself why I feel it. I feel it, and then I organise it.”

Napoli explained the process through which he deals with all three components as follows: “I have a vision of the piece which is done with lots of emotion. This vision is the vision of my soul […] the soul is dictating the emotion. The brain is organising the emotions […] and then you have the physical job.” Thus, while Napoli clearly felt there was something other than the rational, emotional, or physical involved in music-making, and he was happy to use the words ‘inspiration’ and ‘soul,’ he was still keen to distance himself from formalised religion. His perspective might be considered from another angle, however. As noted earlier, he suggested that great performers were able to “cultivate [their] own soul,” which he aligned with being able to access the individuality inherent in “being human.” In this sense, Napoli’s interest in the soul could be viewed in the context of the inner spirit referred to above (p. 170).

Michael Kieran Harvey was the most outspoken against religion, expressing his views quite early on in the interview and at various points throughout our conversation. He spoke candidly about his parents’ strong religious beliefs and how he had rejected Catholicism at the age of twelve, on the basis that it was “fundamentally hypocritical.” Interestingly, he noted it was particularly during his struggles with his religious upbringing that he turned to the piano: “It has been the only constant in my life […] and it was actually rather consoling to me during several periods.” He pointed out of his views now: “I’m a scientific materialist […] I’m a Darwinian.” Harvey did not refer to the concept or use the word spiritual at any other time during the interview, and on the basis of his strongly expressed feelings about religion, I found it challenging to discuss this topic further.
However, while Harvey has a passion for science and is equally dispassionate about any system that encourages irrational belief, he did speak of his sense of awe toward those aspects of nature and music beyond his comprehension:

You can be a scientist and still be absolutely amazed at the pictures of the speck that is the earth in the picture of Saturn in the solar system. You can understand everything about how that works and still be gob-smacked at that picture [...] you can look at Bryce Canon in Utah, where Messiaen wrote *From the Canyons to the Stars*. You can look at that landscape and you can say this is a really amazing natural formation, without God coming into it at all. It’s just an amazing thing. It’s a sense of awe – you can have a sense of awe but it’s not a religious sense of awe. And I have that with music.

The similarities to Einstein’s reference to a ‘cosmic religious experience’ are notable. As suggested by Dennett (p. 172 above), this sense of awe is a common feature in generic references to the spiritual, ‘articulated’ here by Harvey through his personal belief system, which he identified as scientific materialism.

**Exploring Spirituality**

While none of the remaining pianists identified themselves as religious, they expressed varying degrees of affinity with spiritual beliefs, opinions on how this related to music, and willingness to discuss their perceptions. The topic of spirituality was not directly discussed with Mark Kruger in the formal interview, though he expressed his openness to metaphysical ideas, and his affinity with a wide range of spiritual literature. He did, however, discuss his spiritual interest in more detail in a post interview lunch (recorded on audio). To my question of whether he considered himself ‘spiritual,’ he immediately responded “Yes,” though found it challenging to pinpoint what that meant: “I’ve never really tried to explain it to myself … well I believe in the intangible being very real.” While he noted that he had briefly explored Christianity, and has a particular interest in Buddhism, he does not consider himself religious or subscribe to formal religion. To my question of how the ideas and practices encompassed under the broad banner of spirituality relate to his music-making, after some thought, he responded: “Look I don’t know if they’re that different. I think the feeling you get out of them is essentially the same.”

In contrast, Liam Viney explained in detail his views on religion and the spiritual, noting his early interest in the former when younger: “I was brought up in a semi-agnostic, semi-atheistic household, and I was interested in becoming religious when I was young – for a long time. But it didn’t happen and I don’t think it’s going to happen.” In discussing his current view of religion, Viney observed both its negative and positive aspects:

Despite the intellectual absurdity of religion and the fact that it’s past its use-by date in a lot of ways, it gave Western civilisation – all civilisations – great things, like moral codes, even though it didn’t necessarily live up to them in terms of its own behaviour, for
instance the crusades. It gave us a lot of things and I think it probably is important. I don’t have it at this point in my life, but I do have a feeling that some sense of spirituality should be definitely important.

On the question of why he did not follow a religious path, he highlighted the sustenance he receives through music: “I have a sense of beauty and I have a sense of value beyond the material for music, which is probably ultimately one of the things that religion gives you.”

Speaking more directly about spirituality in music, Viney further emphasised the relationship between personal belief and what we perceive to be in the music itself. As with Kempf, he referred also to Bach, though in contrast, suggested there was something spiritually relevant in the music to be found. As he noted, “when you’re listening to Bach, I think that he is directly tapping into our notions of spirituality and his music reflects that.” In contrast to Kempf, this was repertoire that Viney noted now as being amongst his preferred. Yet, as mentioned in Chapter 4.1, Viney went further by suggesting that all music has something in common, despite the era in which it was written, or particular function it was written for: “I think you can call it different things, and people have approached it in different ways.” He highlighted however the challenge of defining it:

You can look at it as tapping into something like time – which is a manifestation of God – or – it’s so … I guess I think of it as something which is transcendent and therefore incomprehensible. You know like in Christianity they talk about God having rationality [whereas] in Islam, God transcends all human categories. That’s kind of how I think about what we’re talking about.

Significantly, he considered this spiritual element in the music “as being separate” to what a performer brings to it. Rather, he suggested, great performers “connected to it.” Yet, it would appear that he believes a sense of the spiritual is an important factor in whether this will occur. As noted earlier, Viney “gave up thinking about” religious or spiritual truth, as it was “too bewildering.” When asked whether his musical vocation might be a replacement for religion or a way to avoid dealing with the intellectual dilemmas of the spiritual, Viney responded: “It could be, you know, it really could be.”

Gao Ping referred to spirituality in both word and concept on several occasions during our discussion, alluding to the spiritual in both the music itself, and in what the performer brings to music-making. In considering what ideas or extra-musical content might be embedded in music, he pointed out that “you can hear whatever you like in a piece of music” and highlighted that this is often unrelated to the composer’s intentions. However, he added, “it’s important that these intentions are there because it gives birth to the piece of music and perhaps it also carries some weight spiritually.” He also suggested, as noted in Chapter 4.2, that great artists were those able to “embrace a lot of things,” whether “spiritual, emotional or technical.” Gao Ping
referred again to spirituality in terms of transcendence, highlighting the words of Elliot Carter that had appealed to him: “He said – this was very interesting – you concentrate so much on this problem that it becomes a spiritual thing – it becomes a transcendence, because you concentrate so hard on doing this thing you forget about yourself.” Gao Ping also spoke of his affinity with Taoism and Confucianism, noting that they were part of his “backbone as a Chinese person” and his belief that “a lot of cultures share these wisdoms.” However, while observing that “of course that goes into my music-making,” when asked directly whether spiritual ideas informed his music-making he responded “No.” Given his numerous references to spirituality before and after this point in the interview, this response was difficult to interpret. It may suggest that while the ‘spiritual’ has relevance for him, he felt some resistance to being publicly associated with it, or particularly in relation to a formalised or denominated belief system. Alternatively, conceptualising the spiritual any further in musical terms was either not possible, or something he considered unnecessary.

When asked whether he lives his life according to a certain religious or spiritual belief, Stephen Savage responded: “No, not really, well – I hope I lead a decent sort of life, but by that I would mean, I think … really trying to be sensitive to the people who I’m dealing with.” Yet, he was far more inclined to align himself with the concepts in relation to music and music-making, and many of the comments he made pointed to metaphysical ideas, or the possibility of transcending the human realm through music. As with Gao Ping, Savage spoke of talent as “a kind of combination of certain co-ordinations between mind and body and spirit,” as potentially a “so-called ‘God-given thing,’” and explained his concept of an artist as someone who is “in touch with” something “profound.” He also suggested that while potentially accessible by child prodigies, this could be lost once they get “in touch with their humanness.”

Savage also felt that many composers were “very aware they were expressing something beyond themselves,” and on the topic of communicating with the audience, spoke of the concert as comparable to a ritual – as being “religious almost in that sense.” In a similar way to Viney, he qualified his views through highlighting that music gives us something beyond that which is most obviously of quantifiable value:

I think the arts and music bring us closer, potentially, to the idea of a Godhead. I’m sure of that. You know, if someone is going to be out and out atheistic and you wanted to persuade them otherwise, one of the things you would have to do would be to point to that extraordinary legacy, and the continuing legacy of something which is there in huge abundance, but which has no outward value at all really, apparently.

When the topics of spirit and spirituality in music were first raised with Roy Howat, he highlighted the challenges of defining and talking about such concepts in general:
We’re trying to define something that we can’t literally see, so the words are fishing around. I would say vision comes into it […] Vision literally is what you see through the eyes, but of course there’s the inner vision. And I’ve said the inner vision – so what’s inner – they’re just words you communicate with. But there’s something there.

Howat explained his understanding of the word ‘spirit’ as being connected to breath, and also noted: “The word spiritual often means witty in French and witty comes from knowledge and wisdom, so it’s something that breathes and has intelligence – somehow […] that’s the spirit, what we’d call the spiritual essence.” While acknowledging that it may be our imagination or personal projection, he suggested we relate to music and art as if it was “alive […] I don’t mean something that’s going to get up and walk down and talk to us. But there’s something that communicates. I don’t know how on earth you find words for that.”

Like Viney above, Howat expressed his interest in engaging with the concepts through music rather than attempting to define them:

I don’t like to try – if you start to define then you just start putting chains round the ankles of things […] there are people who devote their whole lives trying to define what the spirituality of something is in words, and I’d rather just play it. I’m aware that there’s something there that I’ll never quite be able to define, that delights me and it lights up my insides. That’s why I do it.

Yet, as he also noted, there were other reasons why he avoided defining this sense through using the word spiritual:

I’m slightly wary of it, because of the connotations that people may impose on it. And then somebody will quote you as saying that means that such and such, and that’s not what you mean. They’re just slightly risky words because they mean so many different things to people and because they will sometimes be connected with religious ideas, then constructs get put on them. Then there’s always the danger of then putting paraphernalia on something that it wasn’t intended for.

However, he added: “If I’m in the right context and I know people understand what I’m about then I’m not unhappy with the word.”

William Westney confirmed at the end of the interview that spirituality (rather than religion) was an influence in his life and music, noting in particular his interest in Buddhism. However, spiritual concepts were not discussed in any detail during our conversation. The following excerpt contains Westney’s only direct reference to spiritual ideas in relation to music, and perhaps explains why he chooses not to talk about it:

No one’s ever been able to describe successfully in words the meaning of music. Some of the best writing I ever came across was by Aldous Huxley […] He’s a brilliant writer and craftsman of words, but he knows exactly where to stop. So he talks about the Missa
Solemnis […] at one point there’s this moment where this very, very high violin solo comes in when he’s singing about Benedictus. So he says, Beethoven is saying things about blessedness – Benedictus – in his music. He’s saying things about it, informative things about what blessedness is about. But what exactly he’s saying, we have to just shut up and listen – because the information is in the vibrato and the way the violin … I mean I love it because he tries to go there but he’s respectful enough and perceptive enough to know that there are no words to talk about that.

In addition to highlighting the sacred (unspeakable) aspect of the spiritual – alluded to by several pianists above – Westney also implicitly locates the spiritual as both embedded in the music – by the composer – and as expressed and conveyed in how the performer approaches and plays the music, in this case, in the subtle way the violinist deals with the vibrato. Thus, highlighting what others above have also inferred, that a sense of the spiritual in the music may very well impact on whether and how it is expressed in performance.

**Implications for the Intangible**

In spite of a virtual absence of reference to the spiritual in mainstream musicological literature, virtually all of the pianists presented some sense of spirituality as important in their music-making. However, while expressing an awareness that ‘something is there,’ as several pointed out, whatever it was that performers, musicians or audiences were tapping into was too challenging to define or even locate. Indeed, several noted their reluctance to even discuss it. It was clear that much of this resistance stemmed from a desire not to be associated with organised (or dogmatic) religion. Only one pianist confirmed a strong Christian religious belief (Sevilla). Though one pianist expressed some empathy with the underlying aims of Christianity (Viney), and another acknowledged the links between music, God and religion (Savage), both were still keen to highlight they were not religious. Similarly, while throughout the interviews several expressed their interest in eastern philosophies, only one referred to Buddhism as a serious practice (Westney). Interestingly, those less inclined to formally associate themselves with religion provided the most discussion and detail on how the spiritual might be conceived of or experienced in music-making. Thus, while three of the pianists stated outright that they had no spiritual beliefs, two of these, in particular, highlighted crucial aspects of their approach to and engagement with music that could be considered under the broad banner of the spiritual; a sense of awe (Harvey), and the importance and role of the soul (Napoli). In each case, however, these were articulated in terminology reflective of their respective scientific and cognitive (or psychological) perspectives and values beyond music.

While not always immediately obvious in the comments above, it was evident that aspects of the spiritual were perceived as being both located in the composition, in what the pianist
contributes when interpreting the score in performance, and in the communal act of music-making. As both Viney and Gao Ping observed, spiritual aspects might reside in the composition irrespective of the function for which it was composed, or the intentions of the composer. Though, there was some ambiguity over whether this was dependent on the conscious intentions of the composer to express “something beyond themselves” (Savage). Some specific composers were mentioned in this regard. Bach was acknowledged by Viney (and Kempf) as “directly tapping into our notions of spirituality,” however, highlighting the role of individual perceptions, while Beethoven was noted as explicitly “saying things” about the spiritual in his music (Westney), Kempf believed his music to be “secular.”

Several pianists alluded to the idea that great performers “connected” with (Viney), were “in touch with” (Savage) or able to “embrace” (Gao Ping) the spiritual or profound ‘essence’ in the music – however elusive this was to locate. Alternatively, the spiritual was described in terms of the pianist having an “inner vision” (Howat), or the ability to access or “cultivate [their] own soul” (Napoli). The experience of music-making was also referred to as potentially spiritual, whether in the transcendence that occurs through intense concentration (Gao Ping), the communal gathering in the “ritual” of the concert (Savage), or interacting with what is perceived as something “alive” that “communicates” (Howat). This prompts the question of whether a performer’s perception or awareness of something spiritual, either in the music (composition), their own “inner spirit,” or in the act of performing, might impact on the spiritual ‘potential’ of the musical experience (for both performer and audience).

However, many highlighted the ineffability of spiritual concepts. As both Westney and Howat suggested, even if it could be spoken about, there were reasons why it shouldn’t. Additionally, as Savage suggested, the more conscious the spiritual becomes, the less accessible it is. As the example provided by Sevilla (supported by Hough) highlighted, even directly ‘speaking’ to God does not guarantee a great performance. However, we may need to find ways to speak about the spiritual in music if, as discussed in Chapter Two, there is a close relationship between intrinsic value and the sacred aspects of music-making. This was further supported here by Savage and Viney, who, in justifying their interest in the spiritual, and as evidence to support the broader spiritual relevance of music, both directly pointed to what they perceived as obvious: that the value of music lies beyond the material or the measurable. Several pianists suggested, some more explicitly than others, music might reflect or indeed replace the spiritual for those engaging with it. This concept was most prominently highlighted by the pianists’ descriptions of rare or peak moments in performance when they experienced a sense of transcending the self. This key aspect of the intangible in music-making is discussed further in the following section dedicated to these ‘peak experiences.’
6.4 The Intangible as Peak Experience

In 1872, Lenz reported the following of certain rare performances by the nineteenth-century pianist Adolf von Henselt:

There were moments of supreme ecstasy, of entire isolation from the outside world – moments in which a man is no longer master of himself, moments when the artistic soul alone is active. These were moments when the artist approaches nearer to his ideal, which he longs with such passionate yearning to reach the outer world, that his own self, and the impression made upon his audience is quite forgotten. (in Lenz, 1971, p. 74)

While it is possible to view this particularly romantic description as reflective of its era, or its author, this is not an isolated impression. As the following selection from interviews conducted by Grindea (2007) indicate, pianists from more recent times will report similar experiences: John Lill spoke of “an extraordinary state of consciousness” and a sense of “being in tune with the universe” (p. viii); Aldo Ciccolini described “the strange sensation that I am at the piano but I am also somewhere else in the hall, I am everywhere. It is an almost schizoid state, transcending the normal experience” (p. 184); and Andras Schiff referred to these experiences as “very mysterious, they are truly spiritual phenomena,” further noting, “perhaps this is what one calls inspiration, but there is much more to it. I find these experiences so powerful so intense that I would be even afraid to analyse them” (p. 221).

This phenomenon is one also reported by other musicians. The head of percussion at the Queensland Conservatorium spoke of “out of body experiences” during performance, poetically describing them as “major and minor epiphanies.” These “peak experiences” she explained, while rare, are what she aims for, and attempts to increase in length (V. Tomlinson, personal communication, August 24, 2005). Boyd (1992) dedicates a chapter to the numerous reports of such “peak experiences” amongst contemporary popular musicians. Echoing Schiff, she observes that, “for some artists the intense connection to and unity with the audience and/or other musicians results in the peak becoming a spiritual experience” (p. 184). Given that such descriptions place this phenomenon at the very heart of the intangible in music-making, it deserves a slightly more extensive introduction.

Peak Experience and Flow in Performance

There have been thousands of reports documenting such experiences, in many guises, and across a wide range of activities and disciplines (Lowis, 2002). Attracting increasing academic interest, primarily from psychologists, there have been various classifications of this phenomenon under labels such as ‘peak experience,’ ‘flow’ or ‘peak performance.’ While sharing common features, there are noticeable differences and research foci for each. The term ‘peak experience’ was popularised four decades ago by transpersonal psychologist Maslow, who broadly defined it as a moment of “highest happiness and fulfillment” (1962/1998, p. 42).
Following an analysis of over 80 interviews and 190 written responses, Maslow found that “in various cultures and in various eras, it takes on somewhat different coloration – and yet its essence is always recognizable” (1964 /1994, p. 65). For Maslow, the importance of this experience was intricately connected to his earlier theories on self-actualization. As he proposed, “upon prior satisfaction of the physiological, safety, love and esteem needs” an individual experiences a “desire for self-fulfillment […] to become actualized […] to become everything that one is capable of becoming” (1943, pp. 382-383). Maslow suggested that peak experiences are “transient moments of self-actualization” (1971/1993, p. 46).

Across various published findings on this phenomenon in the 1960s and 70s, Maslow assembled nineteen phenomenological characteristics of the peak experience (Panzarella, 1980, p. 70). These included: a validation of self combined with a loss of ego; transcendence of self, including a “fusion” or “integration” with the external environment; an altered sense of time and space; an awareness or “revelation” of a “formerly hidden truth”; and an overall feeling of “bliss, ecstasy, rapture, exaltation” (Maslow, 1998, pp. 87-97; 1993, pp. 59-60). Echoing the references above, he also noted frequent reports of “such emotions as wonder, awe, reverence, humility, surrender, and even worship before the greatness of the experience” (1994, p. 65).

Csikszentmihályi further explored such experiences across a range of different activities, exploring the common criteria. From his research he proposed a new description of ‘Flow’ to best “describe the sense of effortless action” people reported feeling “in moments that stand out as the best in their lives” (1998, p. 29). Csikszentmihályi categorised nine features of the ‘flow’ experience: (i) Challenge-skill balance (ii) Action-awareness merging (iii) Clear goals; (iv) Unambiguous feedback; (v) High concentration; (vi) Sense of control; (vii) Loss of self-consciousness; (viii) Transformation of time; and (ix) Autotelic experience – a term he introduced to describe the enjoyment and positive nature of the experience that makes it intrinsically rewarding (1990). His detailed observations of flow included many characteristics noted earlier by Maslow, however, his research focused on the “intrinsically rewarding” nature of these experiences and the potentially broader impact of this for the “understanding of human motivation.” (1975, pp. 60-61). As he further reported of the characteristics of this positive state:

A person in flow is completely focused. There is no space in consciousness for distracting thoughts, irrelevant feelings. Self-consciousness disappears, yet one feels stronger than usual. The sense of time is distorted: hours seem to pass by in minutes. When a person’s entire being is stretched in the full functioning of body and mind, whatever one does becomes worth doing for its own sake. (1998, p. 31-32)

As Bernard (2009) suggests, “where Maslow sees peak experiences as the means to self-actualization and individual transcendence, Csikszentmihályi extends these concepts to a
broader arena by asserting their social and evolutionary implications” (p. 8).

Given the similarities in descriptions, however, it is perhaps not surprising to find that the terms ‘flow’ and ‘peak experience’ are often used interchangeably in both discussion and research. Noting this, Privette and Bundrick (1991) compared the concepts, while also adding ‘peak performance,’ a term adopted by to resolve “the mistaken identity with ‘transcendentalism.’” (p. 171). They found the three experiences to be very similar in some respects, but quite divergent in others:

Peak experience is intense joy, a moment of highest happiness that stands out perceptually and cognitively amongst other experiences. Peak performance is superior functioning, releasing latent powers to behave effectively in athletic prowess, artistic expression, intellectual endeavors, interpersonal relationships, moral courage, or any activity. Flow is an intrinsically rewarding experience chosen for its own sake and often, but not necessarily, characterized by optimal performance or feeling responses. (p. 171)

Summarising the distinctions, they observe that while “flow is fun,” and peak performance is “transactive, clearly focusing on the self,” peak experience “is mystic and transpersonal” (p. 171). Additionally setting it apart, peak experience involves a sense of fulfilment combined with ecstasy; is often recognised as deeply significant in terms of “personal understanding, expression, values” and “meaning”; and spiritual, or “ineffable” (pp. 178-179). Thus, as defined, the peak experience is evidently a far more intangible phenomenon than flow or the closely related category of peak performance.

Of these three variations in phenomenon, flow appears to have attracted the most research and interest across a wide range of disciplines (Freer, 2009, p. 144; Seifert & Hedderon, 2009; Lanier, 1996; Thornton, Privette, & Bundrick, 1999). However, as Diaz (2010) observes, while there has been extensive and multi-disciplinary research on flow over the past few decades, “no established operational definition has been agreed upon among researchers” (p. 30). The challenge is enhanced he notes, given that “as with many intense subjective experiences, language is an insufficient medium for the purposes of accurately portraying the variety of phenomena inherent in such states” (p. 19). Fritz and Avsec (2007) highlight that little research has been published on the links between flow and music despite the fact that “music is mentioned in flow literature as one of the activities which provoke flow most often” (p. 8). It is possible however to note a variety of studies into the links between flow and creativity in music (Sheridan & Byrne, 2002; MacDonald, Byrne, & Carlton, 2006); subjective well-being in music students (Fritz & Avsec, 2007); as it occurs in vocal and choral music performance (Gangi, 1998; Matthews, 2003; Freer, 2009); wind ensemble rehearsals (Kraus, 2003); and in listening to music (Diaz, 2010). The broader influence of flow and its relevance to general music education is also increasingly acknowledged (Maslow, 1968; Csikszentmihályi, 1991; O’Neill,
There are, however, very few studies that focus on the experience of high-level professional musicians or more specifically, piano performance. De Manzano et al. (2010) more recently investigated the “relationship between subjective flow reports and psychophysiological measures” (p. 301) with a sample group of professional classical pianists, confirming that flow experience “is linked to an increase in arousal, at least in the context of piano playing” (p. 309). However, they highlight a number of potentially influential variables that were not directly measured (p. 307), and while not mentioned, it is notable that these studies were conducted in laboratory settings, devoid of an audience. Focusing on piano performance students, Marin and Bhattacharya (2011a) investigated the links between flow, personality, peak performances and high achievement. They also acknowledged that, “superior performance in any activity is a multifaceted phenomenon that is conceptually complex and difficult to model” (2011b). Both of these piano-specific studies highlight the need for more research into phenomenon, particularly given its potential links to motivation, well-being, and improved health (Manzano, Theorell, Harmat, & Ullen, 2010, p. 309).

As with flow, while a number of studies on peak experience related broadly to, or including music can be found, those specifically focusing on performers are scarce: Maslow (1968) highlighted the importance of peak experience for music education; Panzarella (1980) investigated peak experience in response in music and visual art; and Lowis (1998, 2002) focused on music as a trigger for such experiences. Several studies into high-level performance include musicians as part of much larger sample groups (Harung, Heaton, Graff, & Alexander, 1996; Yeagle, Privette, & Dunham, 1989; and Lanier, 1996), and Sutton (2004) examined peak performance in ensemble playing. However, very few focus on pianists. While Hong (2006) studied peak experience amongst twelve primarily undergraduate piano students, none reported experiencing peak moments of “happiness” during the experiments, and his results were restricted to where the pianists felt the strong and weak emotional climaxes within phrases and across a piece. Similarly, while Alberici (2004) studied transcendent music performance in higher education, sampling a range of advanced musicians (both classical and jazz), only one participant was a pianist. Echoing Diaz (2010) on flow, Alberici suggests the paucity of relevant research on transcendent experience in music performance is not surprising, given “the intangible nature of the subject” (p. 26), and “one that many participants were hard-pressed to find a language to express” (p. 62).

The most direct, though by no means exhaustive reference to peak experience as it relates to pianists could be found in Grindea’s 2007 collection of interviews with “great pianists and pedagogues,” from which the opening quotes were sourced. However, while Grindea highlights
the peak experience as a prominent finding from her forty-nine interviews, she only discussed the topic directly with eleven of the pianists, albeit a prestigious selection (Harper; Olson; Tirimo; Schiff; Lympy; Douglas; True; Parry; Ciccolini; Ts’Ong; Smith and Menuhin).

Grindea does not provide a final analysis of these voices, though notes a number of similarities in the pianists’ descriptions, echoing those of the peak experience above:

There is a feeling of transcendence of the self and altered perception of space and time. Most comments refer to a ‘high level of mental awareness’ [...] many spoke of the unforgettable state of utter fulfilment, a total integration of the being with their instrument and the music. Some experienced inner peace, other immense joy and excitement, yet each one pointed out the transient nature of the experience, not knowing when and why it happened, nor when it vanished. (p. viii.ix)

It is evident from surveying a range of the above literature that many questions remain, including the influence of factors relating to the person and those to the activity and environment (Fritz & Avsec, 2007, p. 15; Kramer 2007, pp. 8-9) and the distinctions between – and the roles of – cognition and emotion in accessing, experiencing and self-reporting on the phenomenon, however named (cf. Panzarella, 1980; and De Manzano et al., 2010).

Additionally, there are contradictory findings on how such intangible aspects as perception of time and self are reported. As Privette and Bundrick (1991) highlight in their study of a generalised sample of the population, “contrary to prediction, a strong sense of self was endorsed,” opposing “Maslow’s description of loss of self in peak experience.” They suggest this might reflect diverging understanding of the terms, or alternatively, that “this dimension of peak experience may not be experienced by ordinary people as Maslow conceived it” (p. 180).

Fritz and Avsec (2007) similarly note a lack of “loss of self-consciousness and time transformation” in their reports from music students (p. 11). Noting this may be “due to the rare experience of these components of flow” more naively they hypothesise that “a different experience of time might be particularly problematic, since controlling the time is a very important component of quality music performance” (p. 14). Conversely, Gangi (1998) and Sutton (2004) report loss, submergence or transcendence of ego as common features, respectively, in choral and ensemble music-making.

Both flow and peak experience are noticeably absent in such mainstream academic sources as Grove Music Online, with only one brief mention of the latter appearing in the entry for ‘Music Therapy’ as one of several possible “client-centred” approaches (Bunt, 2012). This is perhaps not surprising given the lack of focus on performers or performance already noted in this resource. As Palmer (1995) highlights, the important question remains: “What is that sense of transcendence that arises among people when exceptional musical performance occurs? What are the intangible but very real qualities that tell us we touched something beyond our present
perceptions of reality?” (p. 91). While challenging to study, given its subjective and ‘ineffable’ nature, the voices, experiences and perceptions of the musician are obviously paramount in gaining a further understanding of this phenomenon. As Alberici affirms, “listening to the stories of professional performers and educators who have actually experienced transcendent performance may bring light to this rather intangible subject” (2004, p. 13).

**Pianists on Peak Experience**

In these interviews, the concepts above were discussed either through introducing the term ‘peak experience,’ through providing quotes from other musicians, or by asking the pianists to describe their most memorable or powerful experiences while performing. While a number of the pianists also spoke about their perceptions as a member of the audience, the focus in these conversations was primarily on their experience as performers.

**William Westney** described a peak experience he had while performing the cadenza in a Rimsky Korsakov concerto at the age of seventeen. As he explained, this had a major influence on his decision to pursue a career in piano performance:

> I love this cadenza; it’s very warm music that I felt I understood very well. But a great revelation happened to me at that moment, which I’ll never forget. It’s very quiet, because 2000 people are listening to me and I’m playing it to them, and I realised at that moment this piece has taken on a different meaning than I ever knew because of them – out there – because we are now in a transpersonal circuit of meaning. Their listening is telling me what this music meant in a way I never understood practising it or being by myself. And it’s not about what I’m telling them, it’s about a circuit of give and take. I found that so intoxicating, so amazing, this sense of communication and oneness, that I thought this is something I need to do, and that set me on the path.

He later spoke of this peak experience as informative:

> It felt like an electric charge, but it also was informative – I mean I had learning from it – in the sense of the human meaning – like the telling of a story that suddenly has new meaning you never knew about, because instead of rehearsing it in front of the mirror, when you’re now telling it to people, suddenly you realise what it has to say because they are there.

Westney clarified that the meaning he experienced from it was “intelligence but not cognition ... you know in a Howard Gardener sense of multiple intelligences – I mean – it seems very discerning and meaningful.” This aspect of his experience concurs with the distinct feature of ‘significance of meaning’ noted of peak experiences by Privette and Bundrick (1991). Westney also described this experience and his interest in performance in terms of energy: “that’s what locked me into the performing thing – because of this uncanny energy. And it wasn’t my energy
it was energy that I was somehow finding or hooking into.” When asked whether this energy might be similar to the concept of “universal consciousness,” Westney responded: “It’s along those lines, I don’t love that phrase […] it seems pompous to me, I don’t know, I don’t see why, actually it’s quite descriptive. I think the word transpersonal experience – maybe that sounds pompous too.”

Stephen Savage first brought up the notion of a peak experience while talking about the value of live performance in comparison to the use of music as an accompaniment to other activities. As he noted, a live performance situation “certainly offers the possibility of a peak experience, as opposed to just drifting in and out of a work.” Savage spoke further about peak experiences from both his perspective as a listener and a performer, with his comments covering many physical, psychological and perceived or intangible factors. As a listener he described his most powerful experiences with music as “compelling,” “engulfing,” and having a “tremendous physical effect” (“in the gut”). He also spoke of music “as a kind of vehicle in a way, through which you can be transported,” highlighting that peak experiences with music give him the sense of being “taken on a journey” or “taken somewhere” by the “momentum of the performance.” As DeNora (2000) notes “one of the most common metaphors for musical experience in post-nineteenth-century Western culture is the metaphor of ‘transport’, in the sense of being carried from one (emotional) place to another” (p. 7).

Continuing with this analogy, Savage also spoke of the experience in more physical terms:

Very often if you hear a performance that doesn’t quite make it – I have this image of the performer running after a bus he’s not quite on, but if you’re in the bus it takes you – there’s a feeling of being transported and yet you’re still as well. So something is happening to you … I think that can be one of the ingredients of a peak experience, that there’s a kind of feeling of stillness, and yet at the same time being encased in movement.

Savage explained that his peak experiences as a performer mirrored his descriptions from the listener’s perspective, but noted they were harder to achieve as “you don’t always get in to the situation where you’ve got enough lead in performances of the material to really feel as free as you’d like.” He described that when they do occur you are “really feeling that something’s happening. That you’re right inside it and yet right outside it as well, that it’s more a kind of transcendental state; that the music is going through you.” He noted also “a sense of being taken out of yourself – but willingly” and in a way that was “irresistible.”

The concept of peak experience was something familiar to Gao Ping. He explained that these experiences could sometimes be “very short – a few minutes,” or more rarely “sometimes the length of the whole piece,” and were easier to achieve with music “you really, really love.” He described these as very happy experiences: “It’s kind of a state where it’s just – it’s happy – it’s
very happy. It’s kind of almost interim state of trance – or something – not quite – but I think something close to that.” Gao Ping spoke about being in a different mode of consciousness: “It’s a kind of transcendence in a way. It’s like getting in touch with something out there that you don’t know about […] you are kind of outside of yourself.” As he explained, “when you are conscious it’s very hard” to have these experiences: “I think this happens when you forget about yourself in a way. You are not as conscious, you are not thinking about what’s going on […] you are not trying […] you are not doing anything.” When these moments were over, he noted, he becomes “conscious again, thinking about all kinds of things.”

Gao Ping felt that these moments were more likely to happen when he is “perfectly in balance”: You are in and out at the same time – just perfect. Things are happening the way they should be […] you are in it performing and you are feeling the music, at the same time you are out, you are listening – is this what I want, is it what actually is.

Speaking in more detail, he referred to “being three different persons at one time” – the “worker” who is “following orders” and “executing” the playing; the “artistic director” who is “the brain” giving the orders; and then “another person” who takes a “very high” perspective, considering the larger process “from the audience’s point of view.” However, as he pointed out, it’s only “once you break them down [that] you can talk about them,” whereas during performance “it’s one process” and particularly in peak moments, not a conscious one.

While Mark Kruger was not familiar with the term ‘peak experience’ he offered instead “being in the zone,” noting his belief that it was the opportunity of “witnessing great sportspeople” or artists in this state that draws in the audience. Having spoken at length about a “special atmosphere” and “connection” that he could feel sometimes with an audience, he spoke in more detail about being these “intense” experiences:

There are usually moments within a performance, I don’t know if it ever lasts for a whole forty-minute recital. […] There are certain performances which I remember being great, like the very first time I played the Ives was one of those – because it was so intense. I’d given myself three months to learn it and it was just every day I was playing it and I’d finish practising it and I'd read Emerson, I’d read Thoreau, then I’d meditate. Then I’d practise again, it was a wonderful time, so everything just felt really great. But then there are performances where you’ll go in and out of it at different times. But ultimately, of course you want every moment to be like that, you want to have epiphany every moment. […] I don't know if it is unrealistic, I think it’s possible, I think we certainly work towards it.

Kruger explained that it has only been since starting “to forget about technique in the last year or so for the first time in my life” that he can see himself “entering this whole area of
possibility.” He highlighted his belief that these types of experience were very much influenced by the attitude and approach of the individual: “I think it comes into more of your – well – who you are as a person.” As he suggested:

I think when we’re open […] it’s lots of things – being at ease with yourself and being in tune with what’s around you, and giving and receiving and all that […] So, I think that music in some ways is a catalyst to open up that connection, but I don’t think that the music itself is doing that. I think you do have to work on your personality and be aware of these intentions and this flow.

Liam Viney’s initial response when asked about peak experiences, prompted with the comment from Tomlinson (see p. 181 above) was “no, I have nothing like that, I have nothing like that […] I wish I did.” Viney’s further comments were significant in highlighting a range of potential influencing factors:

I have a feeling that I thought I was having them when I was younger, that was what attracted me to a lot of the fast and loud music, this idea that it was possible for me to experience some form of ecstatic moment in performance. … But this is I think something to do with my training, which some would say is probably a deadening thing. But I kind of feel like I shouldn’t be the one having that experience. […] I think that when I was younger I thought I was experiencing these things and the audience might have felt – noticed some burst of energy perhaps, or they might have noticed that I was enjoying myself. But I definitely feel like that’s not the role of the performer, that you need to be much more of a conduit. […] It’s a fine balance, because you can’t play without any kind of passion or fire, but you can’t let it be the master of you. And I feel like if I let go to something like that, it will be a letting go and the music will suffer ultimately.

In continuing to discuss this concept, and prompted with several of his earlier comments about enjoying what he does, Viney did however describe “rare” moments when a performance goes well and he feels “connected with time itself.” These moments were ones he didn’t struggle with and “allowed to happen” and was both in control, yet not:

When a performance goes well, I feel like from the moment it begins to the moment it ends, that there’s been a line of musical discourse which is connected with time itself, which I’ve allowed to happen, which I’ve been in connection with the whole time, and which I didn’t struggle with; I wasn’t in control of it necessarily but I somehow was at the same time, but that is incredibly rare. […] I guess that’s maybe what people mean by ‘outside of their body’ because it was a feeling of letting something happen.

Prompted to talk more about this, Viney felt that “it’s probably analogous to the feeling that surfers have on a wave, they say they’re part of something which is bigger than them, and that
Roy Howat was quite familiar with the notion of peak experiences. He felt that they were possible for both the performer and audience, and spoke of his experiences from both perspectives.

I think they’re less rare for audiences. An alert audience will notice – and I’ve sat in and listened to concerts and suddenly been aware that something extraordinary is happening and I think is it just me? But then I’ll talk to people after the concert – ‘oh that was something wasn’t it’ or ‘I’ve never heard that piece sound like that’.

He explained however that for the performer it is very difficult to rely on perceptions about the success of a performance, or trust feelings of being in a ‘peak experience.’ Additionally, echoing his earlier comments on communication, he felt that too much focus on the experience could be problematic:

I think sometimes a performance can go very dangerously if something unusual happens. And it may be a peak experience, but if you start thinking this is a peak experience that’s the point where you’re likely to fall off and it’ll stop.

Echoing Howat’s comments on the challenge in identifying and dealing with such moments, Freddy Kempf’s discussion on peak experience focused on his paradoxical experience with two different concertos played in the same recital as part of a competition (Tchaikovsky no. 1 and Rachmaninov no. 3). He described the peak experience he had while performing the Tchaikovsky:

I was so charged […] I’d already performed that piece with orchestra at least twenty or thirty times by the time I did the competition, so I was very comfortable, I loved that piece. I remember reaching some kind of emotional high playing it […] whatever I did, I was responding to myself, as in I was almost part of the audience with the performance.

In contrast, he explained, following a ten-minute break he returned to play the Rachmaninov, and while knowing what he “wanted to feel,” he “could not get into it” emotionally:

I was just playing it, it was just d minor – just playing the notes with my fingers – doing nothing – thinking ‘God this is easy.’ And then I felt frustrated that I couldn’t get into it, and the whole piece was like that […] I was thinking ‘okay I’m going to build up something here, so I’ll slow down,’ but not actually responding myself [and doing] that, so not really knowing whether it was working or not.

However, while an unpleasant experience, to his surprise when listening back to both performances, “the Rachmaninov was probably one of the best things I’ve ever done in my life, and the Tchaikovsky was a bit manic, a bit too driven. It didn’t have that kind of – space.”

Underlining the challenges of making judgements in this realm, he concluded: ”After that I’ve
stopped thinking that I can actually tell how well it’s going based on [my perceptions].”

When asked whether he would describe his best performances as peak experiences, prompted by several quotes on this by others, Matteo Napoli explained that he preferred to think of this in terms of inspiration:

I don't feel the energy as a kind of ‘third world’ around you. I don't like the idea. I think we should think of it in another way. Think about the composers, the painters, the writers, they call it inspiration […] because they feel inspired, they find the words, they find the colours, the shapes, whatever. The composers finds the harmony, the melody, he feels the fire … You, as a performer, you have another kind of inspiration but it’s still an inspiration […] If that inspiration is there, that is a magic moment which we experience from time to time. Musicians do experience it from time to time. It is what keeps me coming back every day on my instrument. I look for that every day.

In attempting to provide tangible explanations for these magical moments, Napoli suggested several external factors that might play a role, such as “the quality the piano, the quality of the venue, the quality of the organisation.” However, on a more personal level, it could also be “the feeling you have around you,” being “in a great mood,” or having “a special practice” prior to performance. Ultimately, whether you “have an extra something” and a “magic moment” might simply be “good luck for you, good luck for [the audience].”

Michael Kieran Harvey agreed that he has experienced what he referred to as ‘transcendental moments’ during performance, but was keen to point out their non-mystical nature:

You can go through thinking you’re being inspired to reach a higher plane. I mean I’ve experienced these transcendental moments if you like. But they are moments where the brain goes somewhere it’s designed to go in moments of duress, or in moments of titillation of certain centres.

He preferred to explain these moments from a cognitive perspective:

I think it’s where the sluice gates sort of open and you’re communicating on a very smooth level and your ideas are working like in real time, so your mind’s actually run ahead of you, sped up and you’re ‘dare I try this I’ve never done this before – wow it worked!’

Ultimately however he felt this aspect of the brain’s functioning was, like “consciousness,” one of many “things we don’t quite understand.” There was only one interview in which the concept of ‘peak experience’ did not come up in conversation – that of Jean-Paul Sevilla. However, as discussed in the Chapter Five, he did speak of particularly powerful performances where he could feel a connection with his audience in the quality of the silence returned to him. As he concluded however, “I cannot define it – I don’t know – it’s difficult to explain. You just feel it!”
Implications for the Intangible

The descriptions above confirm reports from the literature that high-level pianists do experience attributes of peak experience (and flow). While noted as rare, all but one of the pianists described having peak experiences during performance and considered them as definitive and significant moments. Amongst the various descriptions and terminology of these experiences provided, a number of common aspects could be observed. Significantly, these were described as positive experiences, from a “great feeling” (Viney); an “emotional high” (Kempf); a “very happy” or “perfect” experience (Gao Ping); to a “magical moment” (Napoli). They were additionally motivating and sought after: “we certainly work towards it” (Kruger); it “set me on the path” (Westney); it “keeps me coming back every day on my instrument” (Napoli).

As described by several of pianists, it was apparent they perceived something important was happening, whether conceptually or physically: “aware that something extraordinary is happening” (Howat); “you know when it's really happening” (Kruger); “really feeling that something’s happening,” having a “tremendous physical effect – in the gut” and “feeling of stillness, and yet at the same time being encased in movement” (Savage); “a great revelation […] which I’ll never forget” (Westney). They also noted increased abilities: “communicating on a very smooth level […] your mind’s actually run ahead of you, sped up” (Harvey); “whatever I [thought], I was responding to” (Kempf). Others described a sense of energy: “I was so charged” (Kempf); noticed a “burst of energy” (Viney); felt an “electric charge,” and “uncanny energy” that wasn’t his (Westney). Two pianists observed an altered sense of time: “connected with time itself” (Viney); your “ideas are working in real time” (Harvey).

A significant feeling reported by the pianists, also highlighted by various others in the published literature, was an altered sense of awareness and self. This ranged from a loss of self-consciousness: “you forget about yourself” (Gao Ping); to an expanded sense of self, described variously as feeling of “oneness” with the audience (Westney), feeling “part of something which is bigger” (Viney), “part of the audience” (Kempf), “in and out at the same time” (Gao Ping), or “right inside it and yet right outside it” (Savage); and transcendence of self: being “outside” of the body (Viney); experiencing an “interim state of trance,” (Gao Ping); a “sense of being taken out of yourself,” or “on a journey,” a “being transported” and as “a kind of transcendentental state” (Savage).

While Maslow suggests that peak experiences are “moments of ecstasy which cannot be bought, cannot be guaranteed, cannot even be sought,” as he also points out, “one can set up the conditions so that peak experiences are more likely, or one can perversely set up the conditions so that they are less likely” (1971/ 1993, p. 46). Echoing Maslow, while the pianists felt these experiences were unpredictable, a number of factors could be noted from their comments as
potentially influential, some less controllable than others. These included tangible and less tangible aspects of the environment (notably the audience); the musical content; the musician’s relationship to the music and prior preparation; and the musician’s approach and state of mind during performance.

In addition to personally being in a good physical state and mood, Napoli highlighted several quite tangible and external factors, from the quality of the instrument, to the venue and the organisation, all of which, he noted, could affect his mood. Westney and Kruger however highlighted the less-tangible influence of the audience. Westney spoke of a “transpersonal circuit of meaning” or a “give and take” between performer and audiences. While Kruger spoke of similar experiences alone, he suggested it might be influenced by an attitude of “giving and receiving” (cf. Marotto, Roos, & Victor, 2007, who similarly note this as a key factor of orchestral peak performance). Interestingly, little was said on the influence of the musical content itself. The most prominent reference came from Savage, who felt that the narrative power of the structure embedded in the music itself played an important role.

Most pianists emphasised their relationship to the music as influential, primarily in terms of prior preparation. As several highlighted (Savage, Kempf, Westney), being technically and musically well-prepared, well-rehearsed, knowing, understanding and feeling comfortable with the work was important in order to “really feel free.” Gao Ping and Westney also noted having a strong emotional connection to the repertoire. However, while Kruger felt the music could be a catalyst for such experiences, he believed the approach and state of mind of the musician was the main factor. Indeed, in various ways this was the primary theme to emerge from these discussions.

As many observed, these moments occurred during performance when they were not trying, thinking or controlling the process. Kempf felt he was “doing nothing – thinking ‘God this is easy.’” Viney described these moments as ones he “didn’t struggle with,” and the “feeling of letting something happen” and “not guiding it.” As he noted, “I wasn’t in control of [it] necessarily but I somehow was at the same time.” Savage spoke of being “willingly” and “irresistibly” taken on a journey (Savage). Gao Ping explained his is “not trying […] not doing anything” and “not thinking about what’s going on […] when you are conscious it’s very hard.” Or as Howat pointed out, “if you start thinking this is a peak experience, that’s the point where you’re likely to fall off and it’ll stop.”

Given that conscious thought and control were aspects associated with peak experiences, judging, studying, measuring or even predicting this phenomenon is understandably challenging for those experiencing it. Indeed, both Howat and Kempf noted that their perceptions during
performance were not necessarily reliable. As Howat explained, “it’s hard to tell when you’re performing – you don’t know” how the performance is really going. From his ambiguous experiences, Kempf felt that he is no longer sure “which mind set gives the best performance.” Worth noting however is that in describing those performers that do inspire him, he suggested they were not “trying” or “thinking.”

The distinction between the felt experience of the performer and the success of the performance, particularly when taking into account the perceptions of the audience, is clearly an area of interest. This is particularly relevant when considering the degree to which performers might be self-absorbed, with little or no concern for how others are receiving/perceiving their performance (implied in the intrinsic rewards aspect of flow). Or, conversely, whether they are primarily focused on communicating the music to their audience, suggesting a far less egocentric approach and one more aligned with an expansion, or transcendence of self.

Individual perceptions may also be more subtly influential in whether a pianist experiences such peak or transcendent moments in performance. As Kapchan observes from an anthropological perspective, “if one is predisposed to have these experiences then one will.” While she suggests belief in the potential for transcendence is important, as she highlights: “I don’t think it’s really a doctrinal belief. I think it’s a belief in the promise of the sonic: in the promise of a kind of transcendent experience” (CBC Radio, 2010). Kruger suggested that the peak experience might have more to do with the individual’s openness, awareness and intentions than the actual music itself. Viney presented a striking example of how perceptions of what is, or might be possible, will impact on this potential. His reflective yet conflicted comments, particularly of the ‘deadening’ experience of his education, and his perception of what he should be feeling (or not), suggest that further consideration of the impact and influence of our pedagogy practices and educational attitudes is needed.

In her Phenomenological Study of Transcendent Music Performance in Higher Education, Alberici (2004) suggests that a significant revision of current teaching methodologies is necessary to understand and foster this phenomenon, and calls for a more “non-linear, chaotic, open systems approach to music performance” (pp. 124-125). As she argues:

For too long music performance in higher education has used a linear, reductionist frame that focuses on technique and memorization, on form instead of content. This analytic, mechanistic approach has not resulted in a higher incidence of transcendent performance; on the contrary, it is clear that flawless technique and perfect form do not guarantee those peak moments that are the essence of music. (p. 13)

While the pianists highlighted that technical proficiency, sufficient learning, understanding and rehearsal of the music were key factors, none spoke of being trained in how to access, manage
or maintain peak experiences in performance. These discussions prompt further consideration of how pianists might optimally engage with and balance the emotions, intellect and body during performance. This includes the extent to which felt emotions and conscious thought are beneficial or detrimental to peak performance, and whether an awareness of – or focus on – the self might be related to experiencing a transcendence of self. The role and influence of such considerations in accessing the intangible in performance, from the personal to the pedagogical and institutional are discussed further in the following and final section of this thesis: Accessing and Operationalising the Intangible.
Chapter Seven: Accessing Intangibles

7.0 Introduction

After sketching the contours of intangibles as an important aspect of professional piano performance in the previous chapter, a consideration of how pianists access intangibles is crucial. Beginning with an introductory consideration of the aspirations expressed by the pianists towards a balanced approach to music-making, this chapter considers a range of potential factors involved, presented here according to three prominent themes that arose during the interviews: Feeling, Thinking, and the Self.

‘Feeling’ is discussed below primarily from the perspective of how performers negotiate the emotions they are experiencing and trying to express. ‘Thinking’ has been approached with a consideration of the issues related to conscious thought as well as less cognitive ways of engaging and knowing during performance. Lastly, aspirations of expressing and transcending the ‘Self’ through engaging with music were notable themes to emerge from these discussions. In each of these three areas, the pianists highlighted what appear to be contradictory aspects in both their ideals and the means through which they achieve these in performance. These seeming paradoxes reflect the delicate balance between tangible and intangible elements in pianists’ perceptions of their art as performers. This provides an important key to not only understanding intangibles in piano performance, but also some of the factors that are conducive and obstructive to allowing intangibles to play a role in performance, with direct consequences for communicating and teaching intangibles, which will be addressed in the following chapter.

Many pianists seem to feel the need for a balanced approach to music-making as a prerequisite for access to this realm. Alfred Brendel highlights two oft-cited factors:

In all good music, feeling and intellect have to go together, even if the feeling is the origin and the goal, there is the intellect as the controlling and the filtering factor and it is the intellect that makes the work of art possible. (in Kidel, 2000)

Daniel Barenboim similarly observes: “Intellect and emotion go hand in hand […]. Rational and emotional perception are not only in conflict with one another; rather, each guides the other in order to achieve an equilibrium of understanding” (2009, p. 47), or, using alternative terminology:

A ‘feeling for music’ can be defined as an instinctive or intuitive affect for sound as a means of expression. A feeling for music is insufficient, however, unless it is also combined with thought. It is impossible to be emotional without understanding in music, just as it is impossible to be rational without feeling. (Barenboim, 2009, p. 16)
The distinction and interaction between feeling and thinking, emotion and cognition, or various other terms used to refer to this perceived duality have been a source of much historical debate. It continues to be the focus of enquiry and contention across a variety of disciplines, including philosophy, psychology, the neurosciences, and those exploring the vast topic of consciousness. While the precise neurological or biological distinctions between these states is contentious, the use of these terms in daily and musical discourse is evidence that they are, at least subjectively, considered as discrete aspects of the human experience (see Gardner, 1983, p. 124; Scruton, 2011, p. 19; Sloboda, 2012).

The challenge of balancing feeling, thinking, and other aspects of the mind and body in performance was evidently an important consideration for the pianists interviewed. In the discussions to follow, a variety of opinions is presented on how this balance is ideally achieved, in both the learning stages and in performance, highlighting that the factors involved may change according to individual learning patterns, feelings, thoughts, and approaches to the physicality of playing.

7.1 Feeling and Emoting

While the more obvious tangible challenges for the pianist lie in the realms of the technical demands of the instrument, as Eugene Heffley observes, the greater and less tangible challenge facing the pianist lies in the emotionally expressive demands:

> The musical interpreter has a most difficult, exacting and far-reaching task to perform. An actor plays one part night after night; a painter is occupied for days and weeks with a single picture; a composer is absorbed for the time being on one work only. The pianist, on the other hand, must, during a recital, sweep over the whole gamut of expression: the simple, the pastoral, the pathetic, the passionate, the spiritual – he is called upon to portray every phase of emotion. This seems to me a bigger task than is set before any other class of art-workers. (in Brower, 1915, ch. XXVI)

Claudio Arrau also talks of the challenges, highlighting in particular the importance of being able to act a multitude of roles:

> Interpreters must be able to transform themselves, to feel their way into a world that might be foreign to them. A good interpreter must be able to develop the capacity to play many styles. A good actor doesn’t only act parts that are compatible with him. Unless you can transform yourself you are not an interpreter, but a player of certain works that suit you. (in Dubal, 1984, p. 20)

The necessity to act, or portray a persona on stage is highlighted by various voices in relation to music performance (MacDonald, Hargreaves, & Miell, 2002, p. 10; Davidson, 2002b, pp. 105-
Yet, in contrast, many musicians will argue that a performer has to truly feel the emotions they aim to express. One of the most often cited quotes on this issue is that of C.P.E Bach from his 1753 Essay on the True Art of Playing Keyboard Instrument: “A musician cannot move others unless he too is moved. He must of necessity feel all of the affects that he hopes to arouse in his audience” (1949, p. 152). Similarly, in his Clavierschule of 1789, Daniel Gottlob Türk argued: “The final and most indispensible requirement for a good performance is without a doubt one's own proper feeling for all the passions and sentiments in the music” (in Bilson, 1992, p. 237).

The idea that the performer must be emotionally moved is not just an eighteenth century notion. In fact, it was even more widely expressed during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. As Franz Liszt advises:

[The performer] is not a passive tool that reproduces feelings and thought without adding himself. He is called upon to let these speak, weep, sing – to render these to his own consciousness […] he must embrace in himself those passions which he, in their complete brilliancy, has to bring to light. (in Dubal, 1984, p. 15)

Bilson suggests that such views “would, for the most part, be readily accepted by most leading performers and pedagogues today” (1992, p. 237). Indeed, as Lindström et al. (2003) report from their study of music students’ perspectives on expressivity, 60% of their sample considered it “necessary to feel the emotion in order to communicate it successfully to a listener” (p. 33). Confirming this in a similar study over ten years later, Van Zijl and Sloboda (2011) also note however that this view is not without debate:

Performing musicians have to face the question of how to best achieve an expressive performance. Should the performance be based on their own emotional experience of the music being played? Or should they rather rely on the technical use of appropriate musical means – such as tempo, volume, articulation, timbre? The opinions concerning these questions differ considerably. Some musicians and researchers adhere to the vision that ‘A musician cannot move others unless he too is moved’ […]. Other musicians and researchers argue that performing is more a matter of deliberate conscious awareness and planned expressiveness. (2011, pp. 196-197)

Juslin (2003a), a proponent of the latter view, includes the belief that “you must feel the emotion in order to convey it to your listeners” as one of his five myths about expressivity in music performance. He argues that the opinion of C.P.E. Bach cited above is a romantic notion and considers its enduring prevalence today to be unfortunate (p. 3). While he admits that, “focusing on felt emotions may help a performer to naturally translate emotions into appropriate sound properties,” he provocatively argues:

Felt emotion is no guarantee that the emotion will be conveyed to listeners, neither is it
necessary to feel the emotion in order to convey it successfully. After all, it is the acoustic features of the performance (not the performer’s emotions as such) that reach the listener. (Juslin, 2003a, p. 3)

However, addressing this point from the perspective of the audiences, Sloboda (2012) highlights that the distinction between recognising and feeling an emotion “will depend on many factors not yet understood.” Additionally, as Van Zijl and Sloboda (2011) point out, “not much is known about the relationship between felt and performed emotions in performing musicians” (p. 196).

While the topic remains one of ongoing discourse and debate, as Parncutt (2007) observes, many sources continue to “emphasize that musicians’ strong, personal experiences of the emotions that they express is the basis of their ability to move an audience” (p. 10). On a practical level however, Parncutt points out:

> While authentic emotional involvement is clearly important, performers are also aware of the pitfalls of getting too involved. In order to remain technically in control, it is often necessary to maintain an appropriate distance from the emotions that one is communicating. (p. 10)

Diaz (2010) similarly observes that, “being ‘washed away’ by intense emotional experiences might actually be counterproductive when focused engagement is required” (p. 65). Yet, as Van Zijl and Sloboda (2011) conclude, while “emotional engagement seems to be central during the process of constructing an expressive performance,” this is “an under-studied phenomenon that deserves more attention if we are to gain a fuller understanding of music performance as a creative practice” (p. 214).

In the interviews conducted for this study, the pianists reflected the range of opinions and considerations noted above when approaching the broad topic of ‘feeling.’ Many spoke of the necessity of feeling the emotions prior to and during performance, though there appeared to be various opinions on the degree to which ‘acting’ was necessary. They also noted the challenges of accessing and managing the more embodied and felt aspects of expressivity.

**Mark Kruger** believed it was important for pianists to feel the emotion they are trying to express:

> Thinking [and] visualizing it isn't going to get you there. It's the feeling that that visualisation conjures in you or elicits in you. So, you've got to play that feeling and actually feel it, don't just think the feeling, feel that feeling, and then there's a greater chance of it happening.

He described how a pianist could “almost program the feelings, ‘I'm going to feel this here, I'm going to feel that here’. Not just play it and hope it comes out.” To this end, he recommended
“practising with emotion,” to “create that special atmosphere.” Kruger also spoke of the importance of feeling from a more physical perspective: “There’s vibration in the key, you play a piano key and you feel the sound, physically.” Through reference to Claudio Arrau’s comments on this subject, he highlighted that a pianist needs to be physically “completely relaxed” in order to feel this “current” or “energy, whatever word you want to use” that is “a very real thing that physically flows through” the instrument and the body. However, “if you're emotionally tense and psychologically tense” this will also “impede the current.”

Gao Ping suggested that feeling for the music is “just a kind of given thing, if you don’t feel music then why are doing it?” As he observed, however, while “you can analyse a piece of music with your brain without ever feeling anything for it […] feeling is a very complex thing, it’s not just a physical sensation, it’s also informed by an understanding of a lot of things.” He discussed the challenges of accessing ‘feelings’ by referring to the notion that “certain chords” can “feel like they’re bleeding”:

How do you teach people to feel that some chords are bleeding? You can’t really. It comes from a deeper thing, not only your senses […]. How do you teach that? I don’t know. How do you communicate that with language, with words?

As noted earlier in Chapter 4.1, Gao Ping explained that during his upbringing in China nobody taught him how to “feel” western music, yet he connected “intensely” with it, suggesting that there was some form of embodied knowledge he was born with. Savage and Viney similarly suggested that a felt affinity or understanding of music could be in the “bones” and the “blood.”

Liam Viney also noted the challenge of dealing with felt emotions in performance: “It’s a fine balance, because you can’t play without any kind of passion or fire, but you can’t let it be the master of you.” While the pianist’s “fundamental nature” was something he considered crucial, in discussing how he approaches a student’s personality in his role as a pedagogue he also suggested this was not all that is needed, echoing Arrau (p. 197 above):

What I try to do is try to figure out what that personality is, and how I can strengthen it by challenging their – by finding a complement to it […] like the idea that you’re only as strong as your weakest link. So, if somebody’s a beautifully intimate player I will suggest they learn, say, a Liszt Rhapsody and develop the ability to act different roles.

Similarly, Stephen Savage made numerous references to acting: “Always you have to act, and you have to act in the character of the various personae that are indicated by the pieces […]. The piano is like a character actor; it can be all sorts of things. I think a listener can sense this if something is sort of going on.”

Matteo Napoli also noted the link between performing and acting: “What you want to do is to be able, just like an actor, to cry on the stage and smile on the stage and you want them to cry
and smile with you.” However, perhaps in seeming contradiction to that, he also explained his desire to have his audience match his emotions: “My emotion has to be their emotion. They have to feel what I feel which doesn't always happen.” He was keen to point out that a “pure” emotion will most successfully move an audience: “If your emotion is pure, they're going to follow it. They're going to come with you.” In qualifying the concept of a ‘pure’ emotion Napoli explained: “You are not acting. You're not looking like suffering […] the only way to make that phrase work is not to imitate emotions but to have emotions in that moment.” Napoli also noted the challenge of controlling the emotions:

I feel I do have hugely big emotions, which some days I am not able to control at all. When I know I am not able to control [them], I have to reduce [them] a little bit in order not to get confused with the score and fingers and the fingering, whatever, the technical part of it.

Freddy Kempf placed great value on the emotional aspects of music-making, suggesting, “if you’re in a field that’s dependent on emotion then you will want to experience as much variety of emotion as you can.” However, he also spoke of the challenges of controlling the emotions during performance, noting that “to an extent you can’t,” and “there’s a fine balance of when things are going to sound as they should, and when they don’t.” As he explained:

In the same way everyone goes through emotional ups and down throughout the day […] when you walk out on stage you are in at a certain emotional state, and I think what’s important is to learn to be aware of that. And I hope now, through experience, I go out on stage and I know roughly what state I’m in. So I know if I’m feeling very emotional and I’m going to play in an emotional way I push my brain in much more, and I start being much more calculating because I know that needs to compensate.

Yet, as was noted in Chapter 6.4, Kempf highlighted that both his emotions and his perceptions of them during performance could be elusive and unreliable. Relaying his experience of performing the Tchaikovsky Piano Concerto no. 1, he explained that while his emotional high felt like a peak experience, on later listening, it did not sound as good as it had felt. He also described his unsuccessful efforts to think himself into feeling the emotion while performing Rachmaninov’s Piano Concerto no. 3. However, even though he could not emotionally engage at the time, he considers it now one of the best performances he has ever done. He also noted of another performance of the same concerto “I was very prepared, didn’t get nervous, enjoyed it, but it really didn’t sound good when I listened back. I don’t know why, but it didn’t have any real emotional affect or depth.” As he concluded, “I don’t know anymore which mind-set gives the best performance.”

Roy Howat similarly spoke of the importance of emotional engagement, noting that striving for
perfection in performance is not just about technical accuracy, but more importantly, avoiding any “emotional inclarity.” However, he also advocated a balanced approach: “You have to be feeling it intensely to know what you’re doing, at the same time you have to be incredibly objective and calculating to make sure you don’t, in your own way, just emote and muddy the waters.” As he further explained:

If one gets too involved in the emotion of giving the performance then it can be just internalised and not necessarily projected […]. We can feel it here [motioning to his head and heart] but if we’re not listening, what’s coming out of the instrument, or the fiddle, or whatever, isn’t necessarily what we are hearing in our minds, and we have to concentrate on getting it out and making it happen.

As noted in Chapter 4.2, he suggested that negotiating this fine balance between “passion and concentration” during performance was essential to achieving “clarity of communication” with the audience. When asked whether he feels strong emotions during performance Michael Kieran Harvey noted that he did, but “I don’t think I can afford to really.” As mentioned in Chapter 4.2, his experience of being moved to tears such that he “couldn’t see the keys” while performing presented a powerful example of the dangers of over-emoting suggested by Howat.

William Westney explained that initially he thought that in order to be an “artiste” he needed to fully immerse himself in the emotions of the music. However, his views have now changed: “I used to feel much more caught up in it, seized by it as a performer, and if it was grief stricken music I’d feel grief – which was costly. I no longer see that as my role.” As he described of his current approach: “I won’t play it impassively – I’ll participate and in what I hope is a full way, but it’s less costly to me, it’s less upsetting […] aesthetically much less exhausting.” While Westney believes himself to be a “very communicative player,” and that he does “connect with people” he noted: “It’s not about me, that’s rather narcissistic, it’s not about me. I enjoy opening up to the exchange of energy, being a part of it.” While he highlighted the difficulty of expressing this concept, he went on to explain:

I think of myself now more as a kind of channel – without defining it – I participate in it as it passes through me. It’s a more humble idea, like okay, it’s meaning this to me, but that’s not the meaning. That’s the best way to put it.

Making a similar point, pianist Bernard Roberts suggests that rather than “imposing your own, probably inadequate, ideas and personality” on the music, “if you want to be a true interpreter you must allow the work to speak through you, while you, the performer become almost transparent” (in Grindea, 2009, p. 88). This is in complete contrast however, to the views of Michael Kieran Harvey who spoke passionately against suggestions that “it should be about the music speaking for itself.” In his opinion, he should have the right to “get excited about wanting to be involved,” an approach that would seem to directly contradict this idea. However,
the concept of being a ‘channel’ or a ‘conduit’ for the sentiments in the music or of the composer appeared across many of these interviews, with a number of the pianists expressing similar sentiments in respect to both aspects of Roberts’ recommendation.

Stephen Savage noted that “it seems to be important to actually be there as a conduit through which something passes which you can then offer” also observing that “the music is going through you.” As was mentioned earlier in the discussion on peak experiences, Liam Viney explained that he felt he “shouldn’t be the one having that experience” as his role should be “much more of a conduit.” Similarly, Mark Kruger felt that ideally as a pianist you aim to “open yourself up as a channel” to the “energy” that “physically flows through” the body from “the vibration in the key.” In speaking of great pianists he admired, he also observed that there is “no acting. They’re channelled, but it doesn’t mean they’re empty. They are still projecting something of themselves into the performance, so you feel both simultaneously.” This last comment highlights the complexity, if not paradox, in these various statements concerning the performer’s engagement.

In his comments, Gao Ping also expressed the tension between these two apparently contradictory points of view. He explained that his ideal intention as a performer was to “let the music speak,” and his belief that “we are a kind of medium through which music can be at its best.” Yet as he pointed out:

But how do we do that? I don’t know. There are so many contradictions … because also at the same time we are individuals … it’s not possible that you have no influence on the music […]. But I think that the aim should be to let the music do the thing. That’s why I always prefer the pianists or performers who seem like they are not doing anything, but they did everything. They are just there and music happens. They are not trying.

Gao Ping later clarified his observations on this contradiction between getting ‘out of the way’ and bringing one’s personality to the music-making: “The problem is they might get out of the way but there will be no music. It sounds terribly passive but it’s not […]. Getting out of the way doesn't simply mean that you put yourself aside, rather, you internalise the music so that you become the music.”

Implications for the Intangible

The discussion above highlights that while feeling plays a central role in the pianists’ experience of music, the exact nature of their emotional engagement was an area of some contention and ambiguity. Several pianists argued strongly for the importance of feeling the ‘actual’ emotions of the music during performance, while others highlighted the dangers of doing so. There were also several who spoke of the performer as an actor, suggesting that real emotions were not necessary. The complexity and seeming contradictions inherent in these
responses were also highlighted in their previous descriptions of peak experiences during performance. Three pianists noted that having some form of positive emotional connection to the music was a potentially influencing factor. Gao Ping argued that peak experiences are easier to achieve “with music you really, really love,” and both Westney and Kempf described how much they loved the music they were performing. However, references to consciously feeling or expressing the emotions in the music were noticeably absent. Ironically, the only direct reference to emotions was from Kempf, who observed – in retrospect – that those performances during which he felt emotionally disconnected were his best.

This would suggest that while an understanding and conscious engagement with the emotions and feelings may be a prerequisite during the preparation stages, in performance, they can be a hindrance to accessing the ideal experience. In this context, several pianists spoke of being a “channel” or “conduit” for the music (Westney, Kruger, and earlier, Savage), a concept that suggests that performer’s emotional, and indeed personal, contribution is less crucial than commonly assumed or reported. However, what appears to be a contradiction in this regard may be deceptive, as the pianists suggested that they could be both engaged and acting as a channel simultaneously. Several explicitly pointed out that resolving this tension between different degrees of emotional or personal involvement involved finding a balance between them. While feeling is referred to frequently in informal discussions about music, the pianists’ reflections in this study support the recommendations of Van Zijl and Sloboda (2011) in order to come to a greater understanding of this crucial aspect of music performance, further research is needed.

7.2 Thinking and Knowing

According to Cone, “the interpreter, in order to produce more than just an idiosyncratic response, must rely on a combination of sound technical analysis and relevant musicological scholarship” (1995, p. 242). Echoing this, many of the pianists noted the importance of informed pianism and knowledge on historical, theoretical, stylistic and structural matters. Interestingly, however, when given the opportunity to speak of the key criteria of great musicianship or artistry – and in contrast to the popular notion that “music makes you smarter” – the pianists did not highlight the intellect as a common theme. What did emerge were the problems that arise for the professional pianist when consciously thinking too much during performance.

While thinking and related concepts of cognition and consciousness have historically been the realm of philosophers, these areas are increasingly attracting interest and renewed debate from many scientific subdisciplines empowered through advances in technology. Psychologists and
neuroscientists, in particular, are now able to explore our minds and those of musicians in ways previously impossible, generating findings that both support yet challenge the experiences and perceptions of the musicians themselves. While this research covers an area well beyond the scope of this thesis, one particular ‘finding’ is particularly relevant when considering how pianists both perceive and access the intangible: the relationship between consciously acquired knowledge and applied thought in the learning stages, and subconscious or ‘intuitive’ processes that occur during performance.

Highlighting findings from cognitive psychologists, Davidson notes the following in *Musical Performance: A Guide to Understanding*:

Research has shown that musical expertise involves high-level refinement of both mental and physical activity to such a degree that the relationship between the information stored in memory, the mental plans and schemes which organise these memories, and associated thoughts and physical actions become completely automatic and fluent. (2002a, p. 144)

As she points out, these findings effectively mean, “with large amounts of practice and experience, a musician can play without conscious attention to the thoughts and actions used in the production of the performance” (p. 144). Or, as Reid (2002) similarly points out in the same publication, “an activity initially requiring conscious thought is rehearsed until it becomes automatic” or “subconscious” (p. 104). However, negotiating the balance between the conscious and subconscious in performance is challenging, as Davidson (2002a) notes: “Several curious phenomena characterise the interplay of automaticity, conscious thought and action.” The presence of an audience she explains, can “disrupt attention and the balance between automatic versus conscious mental systems used in playing,” leading to the situation where “many performers suddenly direct conscious thought to the automatic process of playing and become aware that they are in the middle of a piece but have no idea where” (p. 144).

Recent findings from neuroscience confirm these insights, as the following, widely publicised report highlighted in 2006:

During performance, there is almost no activity in the frontal lobe, where conscious thought takes place. When Yo-Yo Ma is playing his cello in concert he's not thinking […] All the thought took place earlier and if he were to think now it would impede his playing. He is simply performing, much like a highly trained athlete. (KRT, 2006)

Such findings are certainly not new to musicians. As Barenboim suggests, in order to become “truly free and spontaneous as a performer […] the structure of a work must become so internalised in the mind of the musician that intellectual thought during the performance is no longer necessary (2009, p. 57). In a similar, yet subtly different way, Charles Rosen observes: “It is not the dogmatic application of knowledge or of rules of style that deepens an
interpretation but the years of experience that transmit themselves unconsciously to performance” (2002, p. 98).

However, there are other musicians who present less tangible perspectives on the origins of this subconscious – or unconscious – knowledge. Claudio Arrau describes what he calls “a little miracle” in performance:

> It has to do with a sense of communion between you and the composer that springs from the unconscious. You have to be in touch with your unconscious to stay creative. Sometimes in a performance something suddenly comes forth that is completely new to you. You can’t push it aside. It can scare you but it’s a most marvelous thing when it happens. (in Dubal, 1984, p. 20)

As he suggests, this is something that has not been consciously learned. Many musicians will refer to this as intuition, alluding to a distinction between this and intellectually or consciously acquired knowledge. Pablo Casals presents a view that is not uncommon:

> It has always been my viewpoint that intuition is the decisive element in both the composing and the performance of music. Of course technique and intelligence have vital functions – one must master the technique of an instrument in order to exact its full potentialities and one must apply one’s intelligence in exploring every facet of the music – but, ultimately, the paramount role is that of intuition. For me the determining factor in creativity, in bringing a work to life, is that of musical instinct. (in Kahn, 1970, pp. 96-97)

Many other musicians could be cited in support of such a view. To give but a few, conductor David Epstein suggested that, “lying behind all judgements which pertain to performance, to the shaping of artistic concepts, are criteria of ‘rightness’ whose roots are intuitive, essentially affective – seemingly, though not definitively, beyond the grasp of discourse and reason” (1995, p. 127). Pianist John Browning suggests that a performer’s success will be largely determined by successfulness of his/her intuition (in Noyle, 2000, p. 34). Even a pianist as articulate as Alfred Brendel claims that he tries to build his interpretations “as instinctively as possible,” engaging his conscious intellect at a later stage to understand where intuition guided it (in Dubal, 1984, p. 91). As Hastings (2011) points out, there are a number of musical experts who similarly “recommend trusting one’s own musical instincts” rather than “engaging in extensive analysis” (p. 372). Chan (2005) goes further to highlight the blocks than can arise for pianists if the analytical predominates over the intuitive approach, in both the learning stages, and during performance.

The concept of intuition is one that has attracted a great deal of interest from various disciplines (Claxton, 2000, 2003; Schulz, 2006; and Plessner, Betsch, & Betsch, 2006). Claxton observes:

> Intuition is precisely interesting because it’s not explicit. It’s not verbal. It has a mystery.
It is felt. It manifests in a feeling, in an impulse, in an aesthetic attraction, in all varieties of ways. In fact we use the word intuition I think, as a kind of proving [sic] way of talking about all the different ways of knowing, learning and developing […] all defined negatively; that is, they’re all not conscious, not deliberate, not explicit, not articulate, not the kinds of things that are so celebrated by schools for example. (2003, p. 2)

Indeed, as noted in Chapter Two, Dorter (1990) highlights that the belief in “a non-rational kind of knowing that rivals or even surpasses rational knowledge is as old as philosophy itself.” He further notes however, while various terminologies have been used by philosophers and artists to “distinguish aesthetic cognition” or “nonrational thinking” from the “rational, conceptual model of knowledge,” the latter has increasingly dominated with the rise of scientific empiricism (pp. 37-42).

As the examples of Davidson and Reid highlight (p. 205 above), scientific insights into conscious and subconscious engagement during performance are increasingly making their way into musical discourse. Additionally, there are a number of researchers, particularly psychologists, using such findings to challenge musicians’ perceptions of intuition and how it informs pedagogical practice. Juslin (2003a) provides one example. He suggests the perception that technical skills are “learnable” while “expressive aspects” of playing are “instinctive” has informed the myth that “explicit understanding is not beneficial to learning expressivity” (pp. 3-4). As he argues:

Because expert performers do not consciously think about how to apply expressive cues, we may wrongly conclude that students do not benefit from consciously thinking about expressive cues, even in the learning stages. The notion that the learning of musical expressivity is best left untouched by conscious thought reflects a misunderstanding that pervades commonsense teaching based on tradition and folklore. (2003a, p. 3)

Lindström et al. (2003) similarly argue, if “one views expressivity as reflecting ‘talent’ or ‘intuition’, one might wrongly come to believe that understanding – or explicit knowledge – is not necessary or beneficial” (p. 39). Sloboda (2005) also suggests “it is a commonly held folk belief that the emotional power and freshness of music performance is in its intuitive spontaneity which cannot be captured in words or specific moments consciously planned by performers” (p. 239).

Presenting a contrasting perspective, pianist Claudio Arrau notes the danger of becoming conscious, drawing attention to the dangerous period of transition so many child prodigies face when they move from intuitive to conscious playing (in Dubal, 1984, p. 19). However highlighting the impact of what appears to be an increasing trend to demystify, or even deny, intuition, in a 2006 issue of “Performance Research” the word is struck though, with the authors noting that it has been effectively negated or relegated “to second place in university-dominant
models of intelligibility, where ‘analysis’ and the ‘critical-theoretical’ are the preferred focus” (see *Intuition* in “G-O”, 2006, p. 75). Thus, while the literature acknowledges both conscious and subconscious processes as keys to music performance, there are a range of views of the relative importance and interplay between intuition and intellect. As stated in the opening, in these interviews the pianists tended to emphasise the former. They primarily spoke of a variety of ways in which thinking could be problematic in performance, and conscious thought could impede access to a more successful or rewarding engagement with the music, although the terminology was not always consistent.

**Jean-Paul Sevilla** explained that, for him, thinking during performance led to piano playing being “a perpetual torture”:

Contrary to some other pianists whom I know, when they sit at the piano they become happy, and I am not happy, because I think. It’s a bad habit – ‘what am I going to get wrong, where am I going to make a wrong note?’ … stupid things I agree, if a student told me that I would say you’re stupid, but I cannot tell myself.

Sevilla described his worst experience during a performance of the *Goldberg Variations*. As an example of the many ways in which these terms are used, this scenario reflects that described by Davidson (p. 205 above), where automatic processes are interrupted by conscious thought, however Sevilla evidently uses the term ‘subconscious’ to refer to the latter. As he explained, while he had “played the Goldberg many, many times” and “by memory of course,” on this particular occasion the problems occurred when his “subconscious started talking” to him:

You know what that stupid subconscious told me? It told me, ‘which is the next variation?’ I have never asked myself which is the next variation because each variation came automatically. So I kept playing and in myself I said, ‘well is this this variation? No, that I played already, no it’s much later.’ […] I said ‘shut up’ - I told my subconscious, ‘shut up.’ But when I finished the variation, I had a complete blank, nothing.

As he explained, while he began walking backstage to check his score, his memory returned without prompting, but for the “other 22 variations” he played on “automatic pilot.” This led him to conclude that the mind is “very, very dangerous […] how can you convince your subconscious to stop? It’s impossible and the more I stop and say ‘don’t think of it,’ I can’t.”

**Liam Viney** noted several ways in which conscious thought could interfere with his playing. Firstly, that thinking could lead to physical tension and a loss of concentration:

If you’re thinking, inevitably there’ll be judgements, and good or bad ones are both bad […] When something’s going badly you’re [thinking] ‘this is going badly’: you tense up and it goes worse. Just as bad is, ‘this is going well’, because the next minute you’ve lost your concentration.
Viney highlighted on numerous occasions the importance of listening, advocating that pianists should be “always seeking deeper listening.” His most prominent concern over thinking was that “thoughts or verbalizations” take away from his ability to “truly listen.”

**Mark Kruger** spoke of how the best moments in either rehearsal or performance occur when “we’ve lost that judging part, that inner voice criticising us.” When able to put aside these thoughts, he explained, the playing has “that freedom, that energy, that spontaneity, the music starts to live.” While **Gao Ping** spoke in detail of how his intellectual engagement during ideal performances was perfectly and subtly balanced across “three different persons” or perspectives, he also noted that he is not consciously “thinking about what’s going on.” Additionally, he explained, peak experiences could be very hard to achieve “when you are conscious,” and that when they were over he becomes “conscious again, thinking about all kinds of things.”

**Roy Howat** spoke on many occasions about the need for informed pianism, advocating careful study of the score, consideration of historical performance practice issues, and particularly an awareness of structure. He agreed that conscious thought was necessary in the early stages of learning, noting that “without all that conscious thought you can’t start. You have to garner your materials, you have to learn your trade; you need your toolbox.” However, he also provided the most detailed response on the problems associated with thinking too much, or being overly conscious during performance. Echoing Viney, in discussing how he communicates with his audience during performance, Howat noted that thinking about “whether they’re enjoying it or not” can “lead to anxiety.” In talking about peak experience, as with Gao Ping, he also pointed out: “It may be a peak experience, but if you start thinking this is a peak experience that’s the point where you’re likely to fall off and it’ll stop,” as “conscious thought narrows how the brain works.” He spoke of the need to let go of control when performing, referring to conductor Thomas Beecham:

> He said the great thing about music is that it frees us from the tyranny of conscious thought. […] You use conscious thought to become aware and get all the knowledge you can, and then at some point you’ve not to let it be a tyrant, you just have to let it go and allow an element of the unknown.

In speaking of the challenges of dealing with conscious thought during performance, the pianists made a variety of references to less conscious ways of engaging with the music, highlighting the role of intuition. A number of their comments challenge perceptions of a linear progression from consciously acquired knowledge to subconscious or autonomous processes suggested above. **Gao Ping** explained his belief that engaging with music in performance involved more than just “the head”: 
People always ask musicians this question: Music is very mathematical therefore musicians are probably good mathematicians. Ridiculous! Some are, but some aren’t. It’s like the same as asking mathematicians to be good musicians, because they know the numbers, so it’s connected to music, they must be good musicians. It’s a ridiculous assumption. I don’t think you can do it just from the head. If there is such a thing you can do anything with just the head, I don’t think so. Because we are intuitive animals and it’s a kind of informed intuition that keeps us going. You cannot live your life from your head, I don’t think so. You have to make thousands of judgments through intuition every day, every moment, every single second. As a musician it’s the same – and certainly there are irrational parts of music.

While highlighting the importance of ‘informed intuition’, Gao Ping’s final words suggested there was something more ‘irrational’ involved – or to be intuited – in the musical process.

William Westney similarly spoke of a less cognitive form of knowing: “We shouldn’t think in terms of there’s thought, rational thought, up here on this higher plane, then there’s sort of feeling down here […]. What we call feeling is a way of knowing, perhaps the most important way of knowing.” As he further suggested: “I think people can relate to the fact that in their lives, whether they are musicians or not, that we’re not as rational as we think; that’s not the ‘be all and end all’ of understanding.” As Westney observed, “some people call it intuition,” and, echoing Claxton (p. 207 above), “many school environments are not set up for you to develop your intuition or use that in any way. People have a lot of intuition but it’s not something we work with.”

As mentioned in Chapter 5.3, Roy Howat spoke of an intuitive, two-way relationship between performer and audience. He also noted that beyond knowing all the notes “there’s something intuitive” needed in how the performer interacts with the music, and suggested that “at that level the unexpected can sometimes take over and nudge something in a different direction, even though on the small level you’re still playing exactly the same notes.” This element of surprise, he suggested, could lead to new interpretative ideas and a sense of wonder, though as he warned: “you can’t have that if you’ve shut all the boxes and think ‘I know that now.’” While Howat advocated for the conscious acquisition of knowledge in the learning stages, he also pointed out the “chicken and egg” scenario applies when considering whether it is conscious or more intuitive processes that fuel an interest in or passion for music. As he argued, it is not always a case of one coming before the other, “one’s going in and out of these phases.” He observed that some pianists will focus more on conscious aspects, while others learn primarily through intuitive means:

For some people it’s the conscious processes that are interesting, and they say ‘I don’t like all this emotional stuff,’ but it doesn’t mean it’s not there, it’s just they’re not
conscious of it. Or someone else will say, ‘I can’t stand all this intellectualising about it; I just like the feeling of it’ […] There are the very instinctive performers, who really don’t want to know how the piece is put together, but you put the notes in front of them and they feel the shape of it and go with it. And if you say how did you grasp the structure of that, they’ll say ‘what structure? I just played the notes’. Everybody’s different.

Stephen Savage referred to the potential danger of transitioning from an intuitive to conscious mode of music-making. As noted earlier, he described great talent as that where “everything is wired up totally naturally and can be done without conscious thought, straight away.” However, he suggested: “There’s a certain point where generally it cuts off as someone gets in touch with their humanness, as human beings, usually around adolescence or early adulthood, and then it all has to be re-learned in those terms.” Agreeing with Arrau (p. 207 above), he noted, “there is this transition which Arrau was talking about, which has to be gone through. And many prodigies just fall away at that point.” As he further observed, this transition may also be relevant for discussion at all levels of talent and not only from “the angle of the child prodigy.”

While Mark Kruger does not consider himself to have been a child prodigy, he also described the significantly negative influence that moving from an intuitive, enjoyable and communicative approach to a conscious focus on technique had on his motivation for playing and success in performance. Reflecting fondly on his playing as a young teenager he noted: “I don’t know if it was technically refined or anything, probably wasn't, but I know it was musical, I know it was communicative.” As he explained however, he felt this changed after spending a significant period of time consciously focusing on his technique in his twenties:

> It was actually technically quite polished and well done, respectful applause kind of thing but there was something missing, something really missing […] I wasn’t allowing myself to engage or feel all this intuitive kind of stuff and get back to the reason that you do music in the first place. It is just because it moves you like nothing else and you have to play.

As he pointed out, he has only begun “to forget about technique in the last year or so” and started feeling comfortable with his own playing.

Implications for the Intangible

While some of the pianists were more outspoken than others on the importance of being intellectually ‘informed’ when preparing a work, many emphasised how engaging consciously with the intellect could be an impediment during performance. Both Viney and Howat noted the dangers of thinking too much about how they were communicating with their audiences. Viney spoke of how it compromised his ability to listen, leading to unwanted tension in the body, and paradoxically a loss of concentration and control. Howat noted that thinking could lead to
anxiety, and suggested that conscious thought “narrows how the brain works.” Similarly, Kruger and Sevilla highlighted the potential dangers of unwanted mental critique, and the potential impact of these on their performances and the quality of the music.

As can be seen from the quoted literature and pianists’ voices, both the theory and practice seem to support the importance of subconscious processes during performance. However, when considering the disruptions that can be caused by conscious thought during performance, it is worth considering how pianists can best deal with this. Davidson (2002a) suggests that performers need to “develop and learn to coordinate automatic and conscious thought […] and to train conscious mechanisms to stay focused on the task” (p. 145). Yet, having earlier noted that conscious thought can disrupt the performer, and evident from the voices above, rather than focusing conscious thought on the task, the challenge for the performer appears to be the opposite; one of keeping the conscious thought at bay and the subconscious engaged. Diaz highlights that while “a great deal of research has focused upon mindfulness in both clinical and psychological settings, there do not appear to be any studies involving mindfulness and its relationship to musical experiences” (2010, p. 65). The pianists’ voices suggest that this area needs further investigation and attention in performance practice studies. Indeed, the question remains as to what the conscious mind should be doing during performance, if anything at all.

While conscious thought was highlighted as problematic, the pianists spoke of less conscious means of being informed, often referred to as intuition. This type of knowledge was linked to great talent; described as more akin to feeling as distinct from rational or conscious thought; as located in the body rather than “in the head”; and as leading to a more fulfilling engagement and experience, surprising new ideas, and a sense of wonder. As several pointed out, accessing this more ‘intuitive’ mode required an open attitude, a willingness to accept the unknown, and a preparedness to let go of control. Intuition was also noted as susceptible to the more dominant and controlling conscious mind, and in this sense could be challenging to recover if too much emphasis was given to the latter.

The linear view that intuition can be rationally explained as consciously acquired knowledge that has become subconscious is influencing current views of music education, including how both technical and expressive skills in musicians are acquired and can (or should) be taught. In light of the pianists’ comments on both their conscious and subconscious engagement during performance, the impact this may be having on our pedagogical practices is worth further consideration. While Juslin (2003a) highlights that recent studies have found “that explicit instruction is very beneficial to learning expressive skills” (p. 3), views on this however are not without debate. Slezak (2007) argues that much knowledge is acquired through “automatic mechanisms - the ‘osmosis’ of apprenticeship and practice rather than explicit instruction.”
Furthermore, he suggests, “neither the teacher or learner will benefit from explicit theoretical understanding of what they do, just as the bicycle trainee is unlikely to benefit from the differential equations which describe the mental representations required for mastering the skill” (pp. 24-25).

The complexity of the debate arguably increases once conscious acquisition of skills is directly linked to emotional expressivity, as in the case of Juslin above. Lindström et al. (2003) provide one simple example of how the relationship between ‘conscious’ thought and emotions is ambiguous. In their study into “music students’ perspectives on expressivity,” they report: “Students consciously try to express emotions rather often (Always 39%, Often 44%, Seldom 10%, Never 7%).” Yet, they also find that “almost all (92%) believed that they express emotions without consciously thinking about it” (p. 33). There are obvious tensions between views.

As Bowie points out however, perceptions on intuition are “unlikely to be surrendered merely on the basis of specific arguments, because they are connected to a whole web of connected convictions, feelings, investments, etc.” (2009, p. 383). Highlighting the complexity of the topic, Claxton suggests: “Intuition dances with the more deliberate forms of thinking. It’s not that it’s in opposition. It’s not that intuition is good, logic bad. It’s somehow that there’s a delicate dance between different rhythms going on” (2003, p. 4). Further, he suggests, “the state of ‘knowinglessness’” experienced by artists is “not just a cognitive thing or emotional thing. It’s to do with a kind of blessed escape from your own identity” (p. 11). As will be discussed in the following section, the question of identity in music-making raises pertinent questions for how pianists perceive and negotiate the ‘Self’ in performance.

**7.3 Negotiating the ‘Self’**

Music is often regarded as a means of accessing, expressing, or knowing the self. To cite a few examples, MacDonald, Hargreaves and Miell (2002) suggest that one of the primary social functions of music lies in establishing and developing an individual’s sense of self-identity (p. 5). DeNora (2000) similarly observes from a sociological perspective that music functions as a “‘mirror’ that allows one to ‘see one’s self’” (p. 70), as a means to “find one’s self,” and for “articulating and stabilizing self-identity” (p. 158). Similarly, Johnson (2002) argues that music is “one of the most sophisticated forms of human discourse by which we represent and negotiate our understanding of ourselves and the world” (p. 85), and Cook (1998) claims, music “is less a ‘something’ than a way of knowing the world, a way of being ourselves” (Foreword).

Such statements were certainly echoed in the voices of the pianists interviewed, and the
importance of the ‘self’ featured in many aspects of these discussions, from the factors necessary for great artistry, to the way in which the pianists experienced intangibles in performance. However, in light of the variety of comments made by the pianists, their relationship to ‘self’ and the role it played in their music-making can be regarded as complex and in many ways paradoxical. This is discussed below, across a range of sub-themes, including expressing, knowing, embodying, and transcending the self.

As was seen in the discussions in Chapters 4.2 and 5.1, many of the pianists spoke of the importance of personality and the value of individual differences amongst performers, whether in terms of “fundamental nature” or “soul.” Additionally, they spoke of their desire to express themselves through their music-making. Strongly opposed to any notion of a definitive way of playing the works of the classical canon, Michael Kieran Harvey argued for his right to seek and present his individual interpretation in performance. Mark Kruger felt that the “wonderful” aspect of engaging with music in performance was in working to become “truer to ourselves.” As Gao Ping similarly noted: “Art, basically, is about people who are searching for some kind of self-realisation – to search deeply for who you are.”

However, this emphasis on the self appears to be at odds with another theme that arose in these interviews, that of “being a channel” or “conduit” for the music or the composer, getting “out of the way” in order to “let the music speak.” Furthermore, and adding even greater complexity to their noted interest in self-expression, in discussing their peak experiences while performing, and in various other points during the interviews, the pianists reported feelings of transcending the self, describing these moments as both sources of inspiration and experiences that were highly sought after. Gao Ping described peak moments in performance as a “kind of transcendence,” with the feeling that “you are kind of outside of yourself.” Additionally, he suggested, the effort musicians put in challenging tasks may be similarly motivated: “Through that process of working hard you actually forget about yourself. You transcend yourself to a different place.”

Stephen Savage spoke of his desire to experience a “sense of being taken out of yourself,” and the power of music to act as “a kind of vehicle […] through which you can be transported.” He also described rare “transcendental” states during performance where “you’re right inside it and yet right outside it as well.” Similarly, Freddy Kempf spoke of being on a “high” when he was in touch with and “responding” to himself, yet “part of the audience” at the same time, and Liam Viney reported the feeling of being “outside” of the body and “being part of something bigger” as the ultimate goal in performance. William Westney described his motivation as a musician as the potential to achieve “contact and oneness through music – the transcendent,” and Mark Kruger explained his desire to experience that “connection, the epiphany every time
I play.” As he observed: “I guess we’re talking about enlightenment once we get to that level – and I want that.”

This paradoxical relationship to self presents a challenge when attempting to locate the pianist’s sense of self, and the role it might play in accessing intangibles in music-making. There appears to be an inherent dichotomy between a focus on self, and an attitude that transcends self-interest. Indeed, this dichotomy is evident in reports from many other musicians and scholars.

For Pianist Charles Rosen, “the ecstasy provided by music arrives above all through the kind of unselfconscious attention to listening and playing that makes us, for a moment, lose ourselves in the work” (Rosen, 2002a, p. xi). Pianist Stephen Hough suggests, however:

To reach beyond ourselves in achievement is an ambition which can best be achieved by looking beyond our ‘selves’. That is after all what ‘ecstasy’ means, to stand outside: not as an ‘outsider’ but as one passionately involved, with a perspective that’s as large as the reality it aims to contemplate. (Hough, 2011b)

As noted in the discussion in Chapter 6.4, peak experiences have also been defined in psychological terms as moments of self-actualization (Maslow, 1993, p. 46). Privette and Bundrick (1991) similarly reported that “peak performance, and flow portray key dimensions of self actualization” (p. 184). Following on from Csikszentmihalyi’s suggestion that some individuals are more likely to experience positive flow states than others, Fritz and Avsec (2007) note that while relatively little research has been conducted on this topic, several shared characteristics have since been documented. Paradoxically however, these include being more intrinsically motivated and having high self-esteem (pp. 7-8), while also exhibiting “low self-centredness” (p. 15). Indeed, for Maslow, this paradox is an integral part of the peak experience and moments of self-actualization. As he suggests, when a person “reaches the ultimate of strength, of self-esteem, of individuality, so also does he simultaneously […] lose self-consciousness and more or less transcend the self and selfishness” (1971/1993, p. 158). Or as psychiatrist Viktor Frankl proposed in *Man’s Search for Meaning* (1946), “the more one forgets himself […] the more he actualizes himself” (Frankl, 2006, pp. 110-111).

Similarly, Dissanayake (2000) reports that “in their more elevated forms, aesthetic experiences transcend simple short-term self interest, making us aware of our embeddedness or participation in an expanded from of reference that is larger than ourselves” (p. 208). She also points out that while proponents of “Darwinian aesthetics” have offered insights into “unconscious or reflexive emotional responses” to art (p. 210) “with regard to understanding the most heightened of transcendent states, evolutionists are largely silent” (p. 235). As she notes, “experiences like this cannot easily be ‘explained’ or ‘analyzed’” (in Steury, 2009). Palmer (1995) suggests the lack of discussion around this transcendent realm of music-making may relate to it being closely
aligned to the spiritual, a topic “suspect in academic circles” and likely to cause “raised eyebrows at the very least and at worst derision and condemnation” (p. 94).

Thus, the challenges in identifying or tackling the concept of the self, and particularly the relationship between the actualized or the transcended self are not new. In addition to the disciplines noted above, they have been debated in depth by a variety of philosophical, contemplative and spiritual disciplines across many cultures. While this extends far beyond the scope of this research, the pianists highlighted two key factors that appeared to play a role in expressing and transcending the self through music: the importance of self-esteem in order to feel free to express the self, and at the opposite end of the spectrum, the need to let go of the ego in order to transcend the self. A third, and crucial factor, with relevance for both, was the need for self-awareness, particularly in the less conscious, and physical – or embodied – aspects of self.

**Self-esteem**

Several pianists spoke of the direct link between playing the piano and their self-esteem or self-concept. As **Liam Viney** explained: “When I was young I wanted to be a concert pianist. I had this notion of what a concert pianist was, it seemed very glamorous, it tied in to I guess natural childhood egocentricity.” As he admitted of his current concerns: “I still crave some kind of public recognition, which is not a very ‘Zen’ kind of thing to say but it’s kind of true.” When asked why, he observed: “I guess because my whole life, part of my self-esteem has been tied into how well I play the piano. And to have that confirmed by a good review gives my life’s work meaning, even though it’s an extrinsic meaning.” **Freddy Kempf** also admitted to being influenced by how others viewed him as a pianist: “I try to please people, I kind of try to impress people, and I think I’ve tried to do that throughout my life.” This echoes the ideas of MacDonald, Hargreaves and Miell (2002), who point out that while there are many influences that can play a role in the development of self-esteem, “the influence that other people can have on an individual’s sense of worth” is significant (p. 8).

**Mark Kruger** spoke on a number of occasions about the importance of self-esteem and belief. Speaking from his experience as a student, he observed that “at every university there are three or four hotshots at the top and they get the gigs, they get the concerts, they get the best teacher […] and everyone else feels worthless.” He acknowledged that “of course you need a high level of virtuosity,” though argued that it was lack of self-esteem and self-worth that could be the biggest obstructions to engaging with the intangibles in music: “If you’ve got those views of ‘I’m not worthy’ then of course you're not going to be worthy.” The challenge he felt for all musicians was one of “being yourself, being centred, and knowing that what you have to give is worthwhile and that the person will receive it and respect it.”
William Westney spoke passionately about the need to feel respected and “honoured” in order to access and express the self in music, as well as the dangers of being overly self-critical. By way of example, he relayed a story of one musician who had been an “inner critic for years and it just about destroyed him. He crawled out of the building, got his degree but was such a mess from being nothing but self-critical all the time. That’s the way he learned.” Westney noted that what he calls his ‘Unmasterclass’ workshops are primarily focused on facilitating a sense of “empowerment and self-trust” in the musicians he works with.

It is worth highlighting that even the greatest pianists will acknowledge the importance of self-esteem and dangers of self-doubt (cf. Arrau in Dubal, 1984, p. 20). Davidson also highlights the strong link between self-belief and motivation amongst performing musicians (2002b, p. 101). However, self-esteem is not only musically relevant, as Rosevear (2002) points out, there are a number of studies that suggest that “having a positive view of one’s self appears to have a major role in psychological well-being and ultimately to success in life” (p. 149; cf. VanderArk, 1989, p. 113; and Walsh & Banaji, 1997, p. 196).

Ego

While self-esteem is considered necessary to accessing the self, the ego – or an over-inflated sense of self – is problematic. As Stephen Hough (2011b) observes, the ego has a significant role to play in the high incidence of psychological problems encountered by pianists:

Psychological problems probably account for the vast majority of difficulties or discouragements for a musician at every stage of their careers, and most of these should be avoidable. So often it boils down to inflated or distorted egos: the excessive desire to be admired, successful, or praised. […] The great pianist, Egon Petri, once said that we would never be nervous if we were humble. It's not a matter of not caring, or of being a shrinking violet, but of practical mental health. This is a battle with the self which is never completely won.

Several pianists discussed the influence of ego, and the challenges in knowing how to deal with it. Echoing the comments of Petri above, Liam Viney noted that nervousness could be a sign of ego, and that clinging to the ego could be problematic for both successful and less successful performers. As he suggested, unfortunately great artists “have a kind of power which is susceptible to corruption, especially in the areas of humility.” Yet, he also spoke of the paradoxical and contradictory views he has come across on the value of ego:

I know two great musicians who have completely contradictory views on this. One says there is room for ego, in Western culture we must have a sense of ego, because you are out there to conquer the aesthetic realm and you can’t go and play a concerto without having some sense of showmanship and extrovert egotistical nature. I have another friend...
who is a practicing Buddhist […] and [his view] is completely at odds with the first position.

These contrasting views were reflected in the voices of the other pianists. **Michael Kieran Harvey** argued that what others considered as a negative display of ‘ego’ and ‘arrogance’ was simply his right to engage in the creative act of music-making. He rejected the notion that music should be egoless. When asked if he ever feels humility towards the music or the composer, he responded: “No, but … the attitude is that people perceive that as arrogance, but it’s a way I get to the experimental nub of where the music came from in the first place.” By contrast, as noted earlier, **William Westney** felt that humility was a significant factor in attaining a mastery of classical music, and suggested that in order “to play great music you have to relax your egoistic drive to control things and instead find a way to be honest with your own process. And then you really become, in a way, part of something bigger than you.”

**Mark Kruger** observed that the initial impetus for starting out in piano could be a “selfish” one:

> You play and you hear it and it feels good. So ‘let's do that again, let's keep doing that.’
> So yes there's that, and ‘I can express myself through music.’ I don't think there's anything wrong with that; I think that's wonderful, that's ultimately what everyone wants to do.

However, he felt that the ultimate reason for engaging with music was a “selfless” one, though found this more difficult to put into words:

> Then there is the broader [question] of what we're getting to; what's the actual reason then once you get past that? The bigger reason, for spreading the … stream of energy, the love or the connectedness, or whatever [it is].

As he further observed: “I think we get hints of it when we're younger; we get hints that there's something good going on here. It's not just the applause; it feels good to connect with people this way or to make people happy.”

**Gao Ping** spoke of his attempts to be free of his ego, specifically in terms of how his playing is being judged by his audience. He suggested the ‘true’ self could be masked if one is overly self-conscious:

> That’s one thing I try to get rid of but not very successfully, yet I don’t think I can ever quite get rid of that, otherwise I would just become a Buddha […]. It doesn’t matter what people think. So you are aware of it, but you try to reach the state where you can forget about that, forget about yourself and do the music. And ironically, that’s when your true personality can come and influence the music, the way it should, because when you are actually very conscious about yourself, you are not yourself.
Echoing this desire to be less self-conscious, Freddy Kempf observed that he finds it difficult to play for people who know him on a personal level, as this brings “an element of self-consciousness.” He explained that he prefers to play for large and “anonymous” audiences:

I guess with an audience you kind of forget that. You think ‘well, it’s two thousand anonymous faces and you’re not going to have to meet them and they don’t know what you’re normally like and they won’t make assumptions’, and so I guess for me the most important thing is it actually allows me to give everything and not worry about any consequences.

Kempf’s comments highlight on the one hand the sensitive and vulnerable act of revealing the self, yet also the challenge in distinguishing the true self from the public persona. Roy Howat noted that part of the performer’s art is to hide certain things, specifically in terms of nerves, suggesting that there is some acting involved: “Part of the art of playing of course, is if you’re really nervous, part of the technique is for it not to show and not to affect the performance adversely.” This comment further emphasises that, particularly when dealing with performance anxiety, some sort of confident public persona may be needed in performance, at the expense of being completely true to the – in this case – nervous self.

**Embodied Awareness**

Davidson (2002a) points out that, performance “seems to be a rare opportunity for performers to share with others who and what they are precisely at that moment” (p. 150). On this basis, she argues, “performance assumes a profound knowledge of music, the instrument and the self” (p. 150). In particular, she highlights the critical importance of having an awareness and understanding of the body given that musical performance “emanates from a grounded bodily origin” and the body plays a vital role in communicating the performer’s expressive intentions (pp. 146 - 150). DeNora (2000) also refers to “the ‘tacit’ or non-propositional, non-discursive forms of awareness and action,” which she highlights constitute an “area within the human sciences that is as promising as it is somewhat sketchy” (p. 83). This “embodied awareness,” she qualifies, is “non-cognitive” and, crucially, “need not involve any reflection or articulation as propositional ‘knowledge’” (p. 84). Chan (2005) similarly highlights the importance of an embodied awareness and connection when dealing with performance blocks in pianists.

Throughout the interviews, the pianists made various references to the body, both verbal and through gestures, when discussing their attraction to music, its emotional impact, and the way in which they felt or expressed musical feeling in performance (see Chapters 5.2, 6.1 and 7.1). Reflecting this, a number of the pianists described their efforts to achieve a more embodied engagement with their instrument and the music, while highlighting the challenges of achieving this.
Liam Viney spoke of his desire to ‘be grounded’ during performance, explaining that he is often tempted to sing in order to achieve this: “If I’m really nervous in a concerto, like really nervous, [singing] somehow grounds me a little bit.” Yet, he noted, this could also be problematic as it takes away from his ability to focus on listening: “I’m not doing justice to the music if I’m singing while I’m playing because I’m not listening to it objectively; it’s a kind of funny thing.”

Gao Ping spoke of the importance of breath, and “that the breathing is not artificially put there. It’s internalised, it’s part of you.” As he noted however, a key issue that firstly needed to be addressed was that “so many people play with a very tense body – an extremely blocked body”:

A lot of people actually need to physically open up first, because playing an instrument sometimes is a very scary thing and your whole body starts to become a block rather than a vessel. And that’s one of the first things technically, is to make people feel relaxed and comfortable in front of their instruments.

Gao Ping explained that he had experienced this problem in his early twenties: “I played very well but it was very tense, very rigid, and I didn’t know how to help that, and I had a lot of things I wanted to express but they were blocked.” He described how he had to learn to “get rid of all that stuff” on his own, through a “self-imposed kind of training to be more one with the instrument” and trying to “feel differently about the instrument.”

As noted earlier, Mark Kruger spoke of the physical, emotional and psychological blocks that could impede access to feeling in performance. He explained how he has been working to remove these blockages in himself:

I think the cleaner you can be – if that's a way to put it – the better, to get rid of all these blockages you know […]. You've got to look at yourself and what's going on; look at your personal stuff, your issues. Everyone accumulates their baggage […]. You start to dismantle things like that, and then the music kind of takes care of itself. So for me, it's been a tremendous barometer, if you like, of what's going on inside.

Several pianists spoke of how this type of work very often needed to take place away from the instrument. As Mark Kruger pointed out, while “of course we need to spend hours, depending on the person, learning the craft,” music-making “is such a physical thing” and in sitting at the piano we often ignore this fact. He recommended the use of drama, dance, singing and physical movement in general to help pianists connect with their “emotions and intentions.” Stephen Savage similarly observed that piano playing was not always the best medium to foster self-expression. He noted from his own childrens’ experiences with instrumental lessons, that although the teacher was thorough and well intentioned, they got much more from attending ‘theatre sport’ sessions: “That’s when they really started to express themselves, because they
were being encouraged by the activities to get in touch with all kinds of emotions, and all kinds of feelings, and to act them through text or mime.” Gao Ping also noted he often encourages his students to “go dancing” in order to get in touch with the physicality of expression.

William Westney highlighted that getting in touch with what he referred to as the “vitality” of the self “almost always involves getting away from the instrument in some way. Because at the instrument there’s so much to take care of and be specific about.” He described how more embodied forms of activity with music could open up “that door” [pointing to the heart], and “activate” and “awaken” other ways of knowing: “Moving to music, drawing pictures when you hear it, it doesn’t matter what you draw, something where it passes through you, and you allow yourself to trust your body – other parts of you to know something.” As he noted of exercises he conducts in visualisation and drawing to music: “Most people go into a kind of a trance, a semi-trance doing this […]. I don’t care what they draw, no one cares what they draw, but it’s just opening yourself to these forces that can’t be named.” He observed, however, that embracing this more embodied form of feeling or knowing could be difficult without “the benefit of early experiences that are so freeing.”

Alternative ‘mind and body’ approaches to accessing the self also featured in the conversation with several pianists. Speaking more about his efforts to explore the ‘self’ in a more informal setting over lunch Mark Kruger explained: “It’s hard … who knows if you ever fully get there. There are all these levels and layers that you continually strip away, if you can. It takes a lot of guts. And you learn not-so-pleasant things about yourself […]. It’s so subtle and so subconscious, it’s hard to find all those things.” In this regard, he suggested that meditation could help in finding “glimpses of what is really you.” While initially using meditation to increase his concentration during performance, he spoke of coming back to it more recently to go “deeper into myself, to know more about myself […] in a much more profound way.” In addition to self-awareness and concentration, he suggested that “you can get a greater intensity of connection with an audience, first of all just be being much more present.” It could also help to “go deeper” into “the quality of each emotion” during performance, increasing “the potency of what you’re sending through the music into the audience […] I’d definitely advocate it.”

Kruger also spoke of how he has “dabbled in” a range of other ‘alternative’ activities, including Alexander Technique, kinesthesiology, and working with the energy centres known in Indian philosophy as chakras. He noted that he had sent one student to a kinesthesiologist, because he “was having difficulty accessing anything; he was so wooden.” When asked if any of these more alternative approaches had impacted at all on his practice, Kruger responded:

I think it all impacts upon you. I think it’s all so related. It’s hard to dissociate [them] – ‘chakras did this, meditation did this, and kinesthesiology did this.’ They’re all kind of about the same thing in a lot of ways: It’s about unleashing your potential and being at
your most open, your freest, your most authentic, being your true self, knowing yourself—
all these clichés that we have.

As he observed, while he does not understand how such approaches work, “the results are there so I believe it,” and “I think that as a society and a generation we are only just coming to accept and appreciate” their value.

**Gao Ping** also noted that meditation could be helpful and was something he was interested in. Additionally, he expressed his interest in ayurvedic medicine, and “finding this balance between the three ‘doshas’” [in ayurvedic medicine these are “the three main psycho-physiological functional principles of the body” that “determine each individual’s particular somatic, mental, and emotional character” (Rower, 2011, p. 70)]. **William Westney** spoke of the “emptiness” that he seeks through “mindfulness practice” (specifically through a Buddhist practice). He explained that his approach to performance, and indeed much of his communication could be described as trying to “reach an emptiness” in order “to be a channel.” He also noted having sought and received useful advice from a kinestheologist on how to remain positive and empowered during performance.

**Liam Viney** observed that some of his best performances had been during periods of his life when he was engaging in meditation: “I went through a phase where I did try and develop my skills in meditation, which involved – I guess – a lessening of thought and the acquisition of a silent place which then is filled with something when you started playing.” Viney noted the increasing popularity of meditation, and his sense that “a lot of pianists” use it. Yet, he explained, while he encourages his own students to meditate, he found it challenging to “lead by example” due to lack of time. While not directly referring to meditation, **Roy Howat** noted the benefits of silence for both pianists and non-musicians, linking it to solitude and stillness, all three key features of meditation: “Silence is the stuff we can think in. Solitude is the same thing […] Solitude is a form of silence.” As he further explained: “We have to be on our own some of the time. So we can collect our thoughts, be a bit still. Otherwise it’s like a battery running the whole time without charging. It’s like the equivalent of being asleep.”

Other pianists have observed the benefits of meditation and silence on the physical and mental aspects of piano playing. Pianist Stephen Hough writes:

> We play our instruments better when limbs are free and loose, and people regularly report an increase in physical and mental energy when they start to pray or meditate. In addition, prayer can form in us an inner silence which is an essential part of concentration. (Hough, 2007)

Similarly, the suggestion that the self can be found in the silence that lies beyond thought, or sounds, or in solitude has been made by many in contemplative and spiritual traditions. As Ram
Dass suggests, if we are able to “see the space between two thoughts, we see eternity […] and there we are at the edge of perceiving who we are” (in Vardey, 1995, p. 402). Merton advocates solitude for its potential to bring about the “recovery of one’s deep self” and “the renewal of an authenticity […] twisted out of shape by the pretentious routines of a disordered togetherness” (in Vardey, 1995, p. 392). As Parncutt (2007) observes however, while alternative practices such as noted by the pianists above are increasingly being considered as potentially useful for musicians in the realm of performance anxiety, “the empirical literature is only beginning to systematically investigate the effectiveness of such therapies and interventions” (p. 13).

**Implications for the Intangible**

Appearing as something to be nurtured, realised or even transcended, the performer’s self is evidently important to the pianists, and presented as a crucial component in their descriptions of intangibles in music-making. There were two key, seemingly paradoxical, areas in which the self appeared in these interviews: A focus on self-expression, ranging from the importance of the pianist’s personality, to a desire to explore or find oneself through engaging with music, or the need to be ‘true’ to the self while doing so. Conversely, reports of being a channel, a conduit or experiencing and desiring feelings of transcendence of self suggesting that the self either disappears completely, or expands to become part of something bigger in such a way that the divisions between self and others is removed. Considered together, the pianists’ comments serve to highlight the complexity of their relationship to the self in music-making.

From the pianists’ comments on how they accessed these aspects of the self, there appeared to be a delicate balancing act between self-esteem and ego. While self-esteem was highlighted as necessary to accessing the self, an over-inflated sense of self, or ego, was suggested as a barrier to reaching a ‘true’ self, or transcendence of self. There is some tension between these two ideas, and arguably it is this delicate balance that is part of the challenge for elite performing musicians. Self-esteem and self-concept can both be considered as positive attributes, however there are arguably a range of subtleties between a healthy confidence and a disruptive ego, or true self-confidence and superficial masks (cf. Twenge, 2006). As Kempf and Howat highlighted, a confident external persona may not necessarily reflect how the performer is feeling. Humility is also a character trait considered a positive one to have in many areas of life, yet this too can be a delicate and sometimes deceptive quality. While several noted the importance of humility for great music-making, it is worth considering the impact of the views such as the performer is a “servant” or “nothing compared to the genius of a composer” (Napoli and Sevilla) on the pianist’s self-esteem.

Both the literature and the pianists’ voices above point to the possibility that a connection to self – whether described as self-actualization, being true to, or realising the self – and a
transcendence of self may be intricately linked. Stephen Hough’s suggestion above that we need to look “beyond our ‘selves’” raises the question of whether in order to do so we need to have first looked into ourselves. The process of transcending the ego may require first becoming aware of its existence, and arriving at this awareness arguably requires a significant amount of self-awareness. In these discussions, the pianists highlighted their efforts to access, connect to, be aware and know the self in both body and mind. This included connecting with the breath (Gao Ping); being “grounded” (Viney); being relaxed; removing physical, emotional and psychological tension or “blocks” (Gao Ping and Kruger); and freeing or opening up the body through movement, dance, drama, singing or other embodied activities to music in order to access the emotions, beauty, or “forces which can’t be named” (Kruger, Savage, Ping, Westney). Several also spoke of other, more alternative, approaches to assist in self-awareness and knowledge, particularly highlighting the value of meditation (Kruger, Ping, Viney).
Chapter Eight: Communicating Intangibles

8.0 Introduction

Having sketched the contours of the intangible in the previous discussions, this chapter deals with the challenges of communicating and operationalising intangible aspects of music-making, through an exploration of talking, teaching, and valuing the intangibles. These three aspects, although in the periphery rather than at the core of performance practice, all rely heavily on communication through words rather than, or in addition to, musical sound. Firstly, returning to the title of this thesis, and the underlying challenge of ‘finding the words,’ the questions of how, and whether it is possible to talk about the intangible – and reasons why we might not – are addressed. A further consideration of the pianists’ perceptions on this topic highlights the links between unspeakable and unknowable that can be seen to play a role throughout the discussions in the preceding chapters.

As discussed in Chapter Two, this thesis does not focus on pedagogical practice, or the vast body of literature, discourse and debate on theories and best practice in education. However, as with the concept of ‘meaning’ in music, questions related to the realm of piano pedagogy were a useful avenue to elicit discussions on intangibles in music-making. Thus, taking as a starting point Schippers’ assertion that, “teaching music is artistic practice in slow motion” (Schippers & Flenady, 2009, p. 82), the next section presents the pianists’ opinions on whether, and how, the intangible aspects of music can be taught. This includes discussion of the pianists’ mixed views on the degree to which pedagogical and institutional approaches within the culture of Western classical music are conducive to this goal. Finally, returning to and addressing the area that initially prompted this research, the pianists’ reflections on music’s value to the individual and society, current music advocacy trends, and how the intangible aspects of music-making might be best communicated in the public realm are presented.

8.1 Talking the Intangible

Music, suggested Edward Macdowell, is “a language, but a language of the intangible, a kind of soul-language” (in Pesce, 2012). Yet, to recall Stephen Savage’s observation: “It’s this old question, is music a language? You know – well it is and it isn’t.” While linguists, semioticians, and (increasingly) cognitive scientists have proposed a number of theories for how music may be related to the transmission of information or knowledge in words, the very fact that music per se is a wordless phenomenon may have a significant influence on how we currently value it.
Paddison (2012) states in *Grove Music Online* that, while for much of the eighteenth century, purely instrumental music was widely considered as “mere divertissement of no serious importance,” this was to shift radically during the nineteenth century:

> [Music] came to be regarded as the most elevated of the arts, capable of expressing feelings and ideas beyond the limits of rational knowledge […] What had previously been seen as a disadvantage – that music without words could not convey definite meanings – now came to be perceived as its greatest advantage over all other forms of art.

This increasing interest in absolute music developed to such a point in the latter half of the nineteenth century, that, as Cook observes, “like some fly in the ointment, words were seen as sullying music, or as diluting its spiritual powers” (1998, p. 37). Presenting one extreme example of this view, Nietzsche was to write in 1887: “Compared with music all communication by words is shameless; words dilute and brutalize; words depersonalize; words make the uncommon common” (1968, p. 446).

However, as Cook (1998) observes:

> The victory of music against the word was a flawed one. For as the word was eliminated from music, it began to fill the space around music. It penetrated the inner sanctum of the concert hall in the form of the programme-note (another nineteenth-century invention), not to mention concert-interval chatter. And in the world outside it proliferated in the successive forms of the music appreciation text, record sleeve, magazine, CD-ROM, and web site. (p. 37)

Pointing out the inherent paradox, Cook notes, “if music needs to be explained through words, then it must stand in need of explaining” (p. 38). Thus, we return to one of the implicit questions of this study. While we may talk a great deal and write many words about music, does this mean that in doing so we can touch on what is most meaningful to us about it?

A common opinion, observes Johnson (2002), and one expressed by many voices in the preceding pages, is that music “is meaningful” in a way that cannot be paraphrased or is “expressive without necessarily communicating something denoted by any linguistic expression” (p. 83). Unravelling the implication that music’s essence or ‘meaning’ is intangible or ineffable involves a much larger – and significantly complex – question of how we perceive and construct meaning. As Bowie (2009, p. 3) explains:

> Music’s ‘meaning’ might lie precisely in the fact that we cannot say in words what it means – why does music exist at all if what it ‘says’ could be said just as well in other ways? The important issue is, therefore, the differing ways in which something can be construed as ‘meaning’ something.

Bowie (2009) tackles this issue in his thorough exploration of music’s relations to verbal language, one that necessarily includes interdisciplinary perspectives from the fields of
epistemology, ontology, semantics, aesthetics, analytical philosophy, phenomenology, hermeneutics, critical theory, linguistics and studies into consciousness. From his extensive survey he proposes: “Meaning has to do with pre-conceptual engagements with things, with embodied ‘being in a world’, where one acts, feels, etc.” rather than thinks (p. 378). Noting his support for theories proposed by a number of other philosophers (e.g., “Is language the only language?” Wittgenstein, 1984, p. 144), he argues that meaning encompasses more than what can be described in human language, or is knowable by our human minds (p. 383). Indeed, Bowie’s aim is to point out that music, “as a ‘performative doing’, relates to the need for ways of being human which inherently resist what could be said about them propositionally” (p. 417).

Thus, according to this line of argument, while music is not a verbal language, it nonetheless contains and communicates something (Dunsby, 1996, p. 10). Highlighting the close ties between music and language, throughout these conversations a number of the pianists directly linked music’s communicative power to that of speech. Stephen Savage noted that great music “will speak to you in different ways,” and while “musicality might be equated with the ability to speak well,” an artist “is someone who speaks more from the depths.” Roy Howat referred to music as a “companion, you talk to it and it talks to you” and noted that the greatest performers will get “the story across” to their audiences. Gao Ping described his interest in pianists who could “speak” through their music, where “it seems like they’re talking through that music, even though what they are talking about is beyond words.”

As this last comment suggests, while there were many words used to speak about music-making in these discussions, when dealing with what moved them most about music, or in their engagement with it, many of the pianists felt that words were inadequate or could not be found. Jean-Paul Sevilla simply stated: “Music starts when the words stop. You know you can express with words a lot of things. And music is there to continue what the words cannot express.” Gao Ping pointed out that by its nature, music was “always indefinable,” and observed from his perspective as a composer: “I don’t know what I’m saying through my music. I’m not saying anything I’m saying music.” As he also noted when attempting to speak about artistry, “we are talking about things which language or words cannot truly describe.”

Roy Howat pointed out that the challenge in discussing music is that “we’re trying to define something that we can’t literally see.” In talking about the “spiritual essence” of a piece, he noted, “there’s something that communicates” but “I don’t know how on earth you find words for that.” Yet, as he further explained, “if you get it right and it’s a good performance, everybody might be moved to tears. Then you have communicated that feeling to a whole bunch of people at once; something that words won’t do.” William Westney similarly felt the value of music is that it “enables us to connect with people without having to use words to do it, because
words are so paltry, when it comes to ‘this’ kind of thing.” While Westney spoke very eloquently and descriptively on a number of topics during the interview, he also noted at the end of the interview: “I love the intersection of words and the nonverbal […] and I love talking to people so I can use words, but what I’m talking about is the sort of material that’s hard to express.”

**Talking about the Intangible**

Many have observed the impossibility of speaking about the music ‘itself’ given that “all discourses ‘about’ the musical object help to constitute that object” (DeNora, 2000, p. 30; cf. Kingsbury, 1991; and Hennion, 2008). Yet, as DeNora points out, we can speak about how we personally identify with, or refer to the musical works themselves, which “includes non-discursive, corporeal forms of attention” (2000, p. 30-31). However, there may be a number of factors that influence how – and indeed whether – we choose to speak about our personal experiences with music. Indeed, many have pointed to a broader resistance, particularly in contemporary western societies, to the sentimental, emotional and aesthetic in the way people talk, write, or publicly express themselves.

Australian philosopher, O’Loughlin (1997) observes that talking about emotion is one of a few remaining “major taboos” and identifies a “reason/emotion dichotomy” that characterises much public discourse and educational thinking. She suggests that emotions and particularly “embodied emotionality” constitute “a threat to the dominance of discursive consciousness” in our western culture – or “those aspects of action and situations which are verbalizeable or founded upon explicit formula” (pp. 407-408). Echoing this point from within the field of anthropology, Behar expresses the challenge of engaging with the emotions in an academic setting: “My pulse is starting to race. I’m going to say what I’ve been holding back, what I think I’ve now earned the right to say after speaking intelligently and cleverly” (1997, p. 171). Suggesting that the challenges extend beyond academia, Watson (2004) identifies a “decay of public language” as it has increasingly been made “the machine of business and politics in the information age” (pp. 2-3).

A further challenge to talking about the intangible, as noted in Chapter Two, arises from the unfortunate associations of elitism that have been attached to discourse and perceptions surrounding classical music and the arts (Johnson, 2002, pp. 83-84). Indeed, noting that many long-standing words and ideas in Western aesthetics have today been discredited, Dissanayake argues that in order to progress discussion about the arts in a way that is relevant, we need to seek a “new possibility for reconsidering and even reinstating the relevance of currently fraught words such as beauty, quality, and transcendence” (2000, pp. 206-207). Carson (2006) makes a similar argument for the word ‘sublime,’ highlighting that, in its absence, “feelings about
sublime things would remain vague in the consciousness” (p. 84). Yet, as evident from such titles as *The Sublime, the Ineffable, and Other Dangerous Aesthetics* (Lochhead, 2008), others have expressed resistance to such terminology (see also Allanbrook, 2010).

A resistance to talking about or dealing with intangibles may also reflect an underlying discomfort with those things we cannot reason, order, or explain. Ostrow (2011) suggests it is not uncommon for people to feel disconcerted or even stressed by what is unknown and uncontrollable in their lives: “Fear is a natural response to the unknown. No one likes to feel out of control.” Musicology, it would seem, has not been immune to this, as Burnham observes in his survey of trends over the past century:

> Critics fled from the twilight vagaries of spiritual divination into the comfortable rigours of formalism and structuralism. The logic of structured expression now began to hold sway over the act of expression itself, the aesthetic artefacts of human emotional life understood first and foremost as structures, their examination (best left to specialists) safely removed from any contaminating emotional implications. (1999, pp. 195-196)

Indeed, Johnson suggests, “all our theoretical discourse around music adds up to a kind of avoidance of something more urgent, a way of holding music’s power at arm’s length, an ordering in rational networks of what might otherwise be too disturbing” (2004, p. 643).

Thus, there are a number of social, cultural, psychological and potentially subconscious factors that might influence what is deemed to be intangible, or is absent from our discourse about music, or more generally in our lives. While it was not the aim – nor feasible – in this study to identify all of these factors with the pianists interviewed, several spoke directly about why they might not talk about the intangible. Practically speaking, Matteo Napoli observed, “we don't talk because we are busy to shut the door and teach Czerny Number 25,” suggesting that the problem was one of the pressures and demands placed on teachers within institutions. Roy Howat noted that it could also simply be, “we often don’t say the thing that’s most obvious – like love.” Conversely, William Westney suggested that the silence around the intangible aspects of music might be because people “do not want to get this serious.” He also noted a resistance of others to talk about this topic at all, “as if that’s the worst thing you could do – is talk about the ineffable.”

This resistance was also evident more implicitly in these conversations in what was not said, or in the use of, and attitudes towards, particular words or phrases. Reflecting the opinions above, while many of the pianists spoke about the potential for music to be emotional, either naming various emotions directly (or highlighting the challenge in doing so), talking about felt emotions was for some, a more sensitive topic. Often speech became quieter, body language more vulnerable, or gestures were used rather than words (e.g., Harvey’s reactions when discussing a
performance that had moved him, as noted in Chapter 6.1). It was also noticeable that some were more inclined than others towards the ‘safety’ of academic responses, and many chose to express their opinions through citing words of others.

However, one word stood out as acceptable, and perhaps safe when dealing with the felt aspects of music-making, with many references to the intangible as something ‘deep’ or ‘deeper.’ The pianists’ spoke of the essence of music, or their experiences with it, as touching on deep or profound realms, deep emotions, or less cognitive and more embodied ways of knowing. Gao Ping felt that classical music can “make people be aware of something deep,” and noted of his ability to “feel” certain aspects of music: “It comes from a deeper thing – not only your senses.” He suggested that engaging in artistic practice is “to search deeply for who you are” and find “ways to channel that into an expression.” Mark Kruger spoke of the “deep” emotions he experiences with music, and being taken to “a very human, deep emotional place.” Matteo Napoli explained that, in performance, “I want my brain to explore my soul […] I want to be as deep as I can.” While he felt the soul was distinct from the emotions, he suggested it could be described in some ways as “deep emotion.” Stephen Savage described an artist as someone who “speaks more from the depths” and spoke of being carried or transported into deeper or more profound realms by music.

Some words, however, were more problematic, suggesting that some pianists were more sensitive than others to be seen as promoting “New Age” or “airy-fairy” ideas (Greenfield, 2002, p. 57). ‘Energy’ was one example, used many times in the conversations, yet with various degrees of acceptance or scepticism. Mark Kruger used the word quite freely on numerous occasions, from describing “the energy around you” when people gather together, to explaining the “special atmosphere” in performance when “the music starts to live.” As he suggested, “you feel what the music has created, the energy if you like,” and “whatever word you want to use, that is a real thing.” He observed that “we don’t use that word, or we don’t use the word love” often enough, though acknowledged that while he does try to use these words with his students, it was not always appropriate, noting one example: “I didn't quite go there with [the student] the other day because I didn't think he was going to get it.”

During the discussion on peak experience, Matteo Napoli spoke of “creating a huge energy inside a concert hall,” and feeling it return to him as a performer. Yet, when asked to further describe this, he was quick to point out his belief that it was internally generated, rather than evidence of some kind of “third world.” In contrast, when speaking of the “uncanny energy” he has experienced in peak performances, William Westney voluntarily added, “it wasn’t my energy. It was energy that I was somehow finding or hooking into.” Yet, Westney was not comfortable with using the phrase ‘universal consciousness’ to describe this concept of a
communal energy: “It’s along those lines: I don’t love that phrase [...] it seems pompous to me, I don’t know, I don’t see why, actually it’s quite descriptive.” Similarly, in a post-interview conversation, Michael Kieran Harvey explained that the term ‘universal consciousness’ – one of many provided on a sheet at the beginning of the interview – had impacted negatively on his perceptions of the research agenda. Indeed, this may have contributed to his noticeably sceptical approach throughout the interview.

‘Inspiration’ was another word that featured in these interviews in various guises, from the question of what inspires (or motivates) the pianists in their profession, to receiving inspiration or being inspired in the process of making music, and inspiring the audience during performance. Mountain (2001) observes that while inspiration used to be associated with the divine, “today, much of what used to be regarded as inspiration is now referred to as the workings of the subconscious” (a similar trend – as noted in Chapter Seven – can be observed with intuition). Perhaps reflecting this more contemporary interpretation, while many of the pianists highlighted the elusive nature and origins of ‘being inspired,’ most were keen to distance themselves from any religious or mystical inference.

Matteo Napoli spoke of inspiration as one of the most mysterious and motivating aspects of performance: “If that inspiration is there, that is a magic moment, which we experience from time to time […] I look for that every day.” However, he also pointed out that he had never experienced anything he would call “mystical” (“never felt it and don’t trust it”), and felt the need to qualify that inspiration might have a physiological origin which could be measured: “Probably the sugar in the blood, the blood pressure is high. Who knows? Somebody might.” Freddy Kempf considered the ability to inspire an audience as the most important aspect of great artistry, and generating this experience for his audience was one of his main aspirations as a performer. However, he also did not want to be aligned with anything spiritual, or indeed mysterious: “I don’t feel this kind of mystery exists […] I think what we produce is a result of what we’re doing, [it just] might take us a while to understand what’s going on.” He believed that, in time, science would be able to explain how music affects us.

In speaking of his efforts at composing, Michael Kieran Harvey spoke of the inspired ‘idea’ as the unquantifiable intangible. He also acknowledged experiencing moments in performance of “being inspired to reach a higher plane […] these transcendental moments if you like.” Yet, he immediately qualified this by suggesting “they are moments where the brain goes somewhere it’s designed to go in moments of duress.” In contrast, while Gao Ping noted that “inspiration is a luxury” and “not an every day thing – when it comes it comes,” he did not feel the need to find any tangible explanation for it. Indeed, he suggested, while we may not be able to identify the inspired idea or “the source” of inspiration, it was an important component of music, and
may carry “some weight spiritually.”

While inspiration is clearly important to pianists, as William Westney pointed out, the word itself could be risky:

> When I was in graduate school we never used words like inspiration, or anything like that, we’d be laughed out of school, I mean, that was a long time ago. And it’s safe talking to you about it, because I already know what we’re talking about, and who we are. I couldn’t have this conversation we’re having here with just anyone. I would have to gauge it carefully, they’d think I’m nuts or you know…

It is worth highlighting that Westney and I had only just met, so the level of trust was something that was established very quickly, and, arguably, in the first few minutes of the conversation given the depth of the discussion at the very beginning of the interview. In contrast, however, and in an even briefer encounter, Jean-Paul Sevilla was quite happy to openly mention occasions where God had inspired him, without any need to qualify his beliefs further.

The topic of spirituality was certainly one of the more sensitive areas of discussion in these interviews, and presented as both a methodological and personal challenge. This became obvious in the first interview I conducted with Michael Kieran Harvey, who stated his scientific materialist perspective, and passionate disregard for religion and spiritual belief very early in the session. Throughout the conversation, the association between the ‘intangible’ and religious belief was difficult to negotiate. Having already held some concern over embarking on this line of questioning, this interview confirmed from the beginning the delicate nature of the topic. In the following interview with Freddy Kempf, I resisted even raising the concept of the spiritual, for fear it might negatively impact on the discussion, and even interrupted him when he attempted to do so. These two pianists were the most resistant to the concepts associated with spirituality, and the topic was far easier to navigate in the following discussions. However, even those acknowledging aspects they considered to be spiritual noted their resistance towards talking about them.

As mentioned in Chapter Six, Roy Howat expressed similar sentiments to Westney (on inspiration) in terms of the words ‘spirit’ and ‘spiritual’:

> They’re just slightly risky words because they mean so many different things to people and because they will sometimes be connected with religious ideas, then constructs get put on them. Then there’s always the danger of then putting paraphernalia on something that it wasn’t intended for.

Arguing from a different perspective on the topic of spirituality, William Westney suggested that not speaking about spiritual matters could display both an appropriate level of perception and respect. As he noted of Aldous Huxley’s writing on the topic of ‘blessedness’ in the music
of Beethoven, “he tries to go there but he’s respectful enough and perceptive enough to know that there are no words to talk about that.” Charles Rosen (2002a, p. xi) echoes this point in his argument that translating the sublime and transcendent aspects of Beethoven’s music into words will not “make it more accessible, only more commonplace” (see Chapter Two). Scruton makes a similar observation in relation to both the spiritual and the beautiful:

People who are always in praise and pursuit of the beautiful are an embarrassment, like people who make a constant display of their religious faith. Somehow, we feel, such things should be kept for our exalted moments, and not paraded in company, or allowed to spill out over dinner. (2011, pp. 11-12)

Such comments highlight that the way in which we approach or talk about the intangible and ineffable aspects of music is closely linked to our perceptions of what is, or what should remain sacred or symbolic, or in other words, unsayable or unknowable.

**Attitudes towards the Unknown**

“Man’s need for certainty is a disease beyond all cure,” noted the twentieth century Australian Poet A.D. Hope (in O’Connor, 2006). Despite this particularly western interest in the tangible and quantifiable, it is evident from a variety of voices sourced in this research that we maintain an ambiguous relationship to knowing, and not knowing. As noted in Chapter Two, voices from a variety of disciplines will allude to the dangers of not affording the ‘unknown’ enough value in our lives. Additionally, warnings from a variety of literature and guises can be found for those who attempt to approach too closely the ‘intangible’ or ‘unknowable,’ ranging from the well-known proverb ‘curiosity killed the cat,’ to “ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you mad” (Aldous Huxley, in Johnston, 2004, p. 68). Indeed, one of the underlying conflicts between the ‘two cultures’ appears to lie in how the ‘unknown’ is perceived and approached.

Claxton reports “a recurrent concern” amongst “artists of all kinds” that “if you unpick it too much the magic will go away,” and suggests it is crucial that an artist is “able to cherish that space of ‘I don’t know, I don’t know what I’m doing’” (2003, pp. 2-3). Musicians will similarly highlight the importance of the unknown to their art-form. Walker spoke of music-making as being “about trying to make the unknown known” while cautioning that performers “must keep the unknown just out of reach” (K. Walker, personal communication, September 13, 2005).

According to Rubinstein, the “mystery” of not knowing what will happen in performance, for both the performance and the audience is what “makes it alive” (in Sturrock, 1999). For Gould, “the ideal way to go about making a performance […] is to assume that when you begin, you don’t quite know what it is about” (in Page, 1990, p. 287). Indeed, in advocating the value of the arts to society, Lehrer argues: “We now know enough to know that we will never know everything. This is why we need art: it teaches us how to live with mystery” (2007, p. 196).
Such comments bring to the fore additional questions underlying this research: is there any justifiable basis for musicians’ reticence in examining music’s mystery any further, or too closely? Are there aspects of music-making, in either the process or the result that should remain unknown to us? And if so, should we be attempting to make the intangible more tangible? In these interviews, the pianists presented a variety of attitudes towards the intangible or the ‘unknown,’ emerging in their responses to such questions as whether some ‘magical’ element exists in the symbolic representation of music, in the sound, in the presence of the performer, or in the communication with an audience.

All of the pianists felt that explaining, defining, quantifying, or finding tangible evidence for all that is mysterious or unknown about music was currently impossible. However, there were differences in opinions about what will become tangible, what will remain intangible, or as some argued, what is best left intangible. Addressing the question of why we may be resistant to unveil the more mysterious aspects of music, Jean-Paul Sevilla argued, “there a lot of things which cannot be explained and it is better that they cannot be explained.” As he noted:

I don’t think that anything can explain the mystery of music. I don’t think so. I think that in every art there should be a part of mystery which cannot be explained […]. Maybe in a way it can be explained because you have in you some genes which make you more attracted by that. I don’t even believe that. It is better to keep some sort of mystery in the heart.

William Westney expressed similar sentiments. Throughout the interview, he used a variety of terminology and concepts that pointed to his belief in music’s power lying in a metaphysical realm, beyond the cognitive or tangible. He spoke of “uncanny” energies, transcendence, powerful forces, and the potential of music to “activate” and “awaken” another less rational “way of knowing.” Yet, he added, “if you’re asking me how does it tell us things we need to know, I could never explain that […] and I don’t know that it’s given to us to know the mechanism.” Additionally, when asked whether he felt that thinking too much about, or trying to rationalise or explain the mysteries of music could be potentially damaging to creative or inspired artistry, he responded:

I kind of agree with that. I tend to say that too, but I mean the things I’ve expressed to you before are very open-ended and so I don’t feel they are limiting – because they just leave a lot of things open […]. But I’ve always been repelled by people who try to analyse in a computer which phrase shapes people tend to find more eloquent than other ones. I mean if they find it, I don’t ever want to hear about it.

While noting, “it might be foolish of me to not to want to hear about it,” he clarified his views by explaining that, in his experience, “if what you come to know is a received idea it’s very
dangerous. If what you come to know came from your own – as you say – investigation, it’s not
dangerous.” This attitude, he observed, also had much to do with individual differences:

So the fact that I like to preserve the mystery, and invent it myself and find it myself in
a sort of special way, that’s very typical of the sort of person I seem to. And I’m not
necessarily proud of it; that’s just the way it is.

In contrast to Sevilla and Westney, at the other end of the spectrum, Kempf, Napoli, and Harvey
all noted their belief that aspects of music-making currently intangible to them would possibly
be made tangible and explainable through science in the future. Yet, even these pianists
highlighted aspects of intangibility as a valued part of their art form. Matteo Napoli, for
example, spoke in great detail of the soul, indicating that it was neither the brain nor the
emotions, but rather a “primary element.” He also explained, “I don't ask myself why I feel it. I
feel it, and then I organise it.” While Freddy Kempf was the least inclined towards the idea of
music as mysterious, he spoke of the thrill of taking risks and the unpredictable nature of
performance, and music as a means of accessing and experiencing an intensity of emotions
beyond what he encountered in daily life.

Michael Kieran Harvey was one of the strongest voices for the importance of the rational,
tangible and scientific in our lives. Yet, he also argued that, in the same way that we
increasingly understand evolution, knowing how music works would not change the fact that
“it’s still awesome.” Continuing with this analogy, he observed that while we may be able to
measure and define many elements of the Big Bang, as with musical compositions, we are still
left with the questions of why, and what inspired the event or work in the first place:

You look at counterpoint and you look at self-generating rows and stuff like that. And
they’re there as tools to help generate material. But it’s still like what happened before the
big bang – what happened to start the piece? You have to have an idea, something has to
strike you, and where that comes from is so diverse and so intangible.

Equally, while he believed science should attempt to pin down the “amorphous,” and seek the
“truth,” he felt that the other key components for humanity are curiosity, creativity and
openness, and that when approached in the right way, music is a medium through which to
nourish these. Indeed, as Harvey concluded, the intangible in music was crucial for how it
reflected the non-static and non-accountable qualities of being human: “It’s the interesting part
of it. Because it’s moving all the time, because of your humanness, you never do anything the
same and you can never count on anything.”

The importance of being open to a sense of wonder and awe, as with the unknowable and
uncontrollable aspects of music-making was similarly highlighted in various – and sometimes
less explicit – ways throughout these discussions by Howat, Savage, Viney, Gao Ping, and
Kruger. **Mark Kruger** presented himself as very open to things that he could not rationalise, and indeed noted that he was actively embracing these in his approach to piano playing and in life, particularly in his efforts to engage again with his “intuitive” side. **Liam Viney** suggested that music connects with “something that makes you feel alive,” reflecting and providing a “way of experiencing the human condition, in its totality.” While he found the intangible aspects of music and life “too bewildering” and “gave up thinking about it,” he nevertheless suggested that the potential to experience something beyond one’s comprehension or control, and be part of “something bigger” than oneself through music might “ultimately” be the point of performance. This desire to transcend the limits of the self was shared by **Gao Ping**, who openly embraced the unknown, the “irrational,” and paradoxical in all aspects of his experience with music and the world around him.

A strong advocate for informed pianism, **Stephen Savage** presented as not only accepting, but also actively seeking experiences of the unknown, evident in his desire to be “transported,” or be “taken outside of yourself” through music. **Roy Howat** similarly appeared to take delight in both the search for knowledge, and a “sense of wonder,” noting the importance of remaining open to the element of “surprise” as a significant feature of music’s affective power, and conversely, warning of the “tyranny” of conscious thought. As Howat observed, perhaps best reflecting the opinions of all of the pianists, it is crucial that performers “allow in an element of the unknown.”

**Implications for the Intangible**

While much was said about music in these conversations, all of the pianists highlighted the challenge, if not impossibility, of finding words for the most meaningful aspects of their music-making. These discussions provide support for the argument that certain, and potentially crucial, aspects of our musical experiences will always remain beyond the capacity of words. Indeed, Bowie suggests, this extends to crucial aspects of “our relationship to the world” and life experiences more broadly (2009, p. 383; cf. Maslow, 1962/1998, p. 228). Yet, as seen across the many themes presented throughout this document, aspects of these experiences could be discussed, though there may be a number of forces influencing their lack of representation in public discourse, or the pianists’ resistance to talking about them. This included practical reasons, such as simply forgetting to mention the more obvious intangibles (it is notable that while a couple of the pianists mentioned the word ‘love,’ it did not feature in these interviews), or being too pressured by external expectations for tangible and accountable processes or products.

However, as most of the comments above indicate, a resistance to talk about the intangible appears more likely to be influenced by concern over how what is said will be received or
perceived. As several of the pianists highlighted, some of the words or phrases they personally felt might be appropriate could prove to be risky. Others stated explicitly in the interviews, or post interview communication, that when words are taken out of context, comments in this realm can all too easily be connected to religious constructs not intended, or erroneously imply an uncritical belief in something metaphysical, mystical or otherworldly. The underlying danger, particularly in an academic setting, appeared to be one of being perceived as non-intellectual, unintelligent, or irrational, or as Westney noted, “nuts.”

These concerns are not unreasonable within a culture that places great emphasis on the rational, the measurable and provable. If musicians’ perceptions on the more intangible mysteries of the art form are likely to be dismissed as naïve, outdated or lacking in intellectual insight, it is perhaps no surprise that they might feel the need to remain silent. Reflecting on current academic trends, Dogantan-Dack (2007) points out that words such as inspiration, intuition, let alone spiritual, “are suspect in musicological discourse: they are too subjective, too elusive.” However, as she argues, “these are terms frequently used by performers to refer to and articulate real experiences and we cannot simply dismiss them if we want to understand how performers work” (p. 9).

In addition to the inherent challenge of talking about something intangible, and concern about being misconstrued or misjudged when attempting to do so, another key factor contributing to the lack of discussion about the intangible was the conviction that such things are best left not discussed, or even analysed too closely. These latter perspectives are potentially influenced by a number of factors, including cultural and family backgrounds and beliefs, personality, education, and life experiences. As was evident more generally throughout these discussions – explicitly in most cases – the pianists’ opinions and expressions of intangibility in music were reflective of their broader perceptions of the world, and the more mysterious aspects of life.

However, while the pianists expressed various attitudes and beliefs in this regard, in addition to a shared appreciation of the importance of the factual and tangible skills of their craft, they all spoke of the need to embrace aspects of the unknown in their music-making. Even in those cases where the pianists believed tangible explanations might one day be found, the aspects of music-making highlighted as most valuable to them appeared to be distinct from – or inaccessible through – logic, intellect or reason. For example, Kempf highly valued his engagement with music for the potential to engage with emotions otherwise not accessible in daily life or through intellectual means. Harvey placed great importance on the ever-moving, changing and unreliable (human) aspect of music, the mystery of inspired ideas, and an ongoing sense of awe. Napoli considered the cultivation of the soul as essential for great music-making.
and while a human quality, he understood the soul to be something distinct from reason and emotion.

Given the many ambiguous and intangible aspects of music-making highlighted as valuable during these discussions, the way in which pianists deal with the challenges of embracing these would seem worthy of further research. Indeed, the attitudes we adopt towards the unknown may have a significant impact on the way we talk about, appreciate, engage with, and teach music.

8.2 Teaching the Intangible

While words might not always be easy to find in regards to music, there is no doubt that pedagogues make extensive use of them. From a study conducted with forty-six college musicians, Woody (2000) reports, “a majority of subjects (61%) indicated that their lessons consisted mostly of verbal-based instruction regarding expressivity” (p. 14). However, many have highlighted that words are not always sufficient to deal adequately with the intangible in pedagogical practice. Edwin Hughes observes:

There are so many things in piano playing which cannot be put into words, and the teacher must constantly illustrate. How can one teach the interpretation of a Chopin nocturne, for instance, by merely talking about it? I can say, 'play loud here – soft there'; but how far do such directions go toward an artistic conception of the piece? (in Brower, 1915, ch. xvi)

Others will argue that even musical illustration is limited in what it can communicate. Ronald Farren Price suggests that finding the appropriate sound quality at the piano can often be less about verbal instruction, sonic example, or thinking “too seriously of what each finger is doing,” than “allowing the soul to express” itself (in Grabowsky & Carson, 1997).

Comments such as this suggest that intangibles in music cannot be imparted in the same manner as historical or theoretical facts, and require other modes of transmission. They also point to another theme and area of debate to emerge in these discussions, the roles of explicit and tacit modes of learning, and the conscious and subconscious mind in knowledge and skill acquisition (see Chapter 7.2). As highlighted in Leon Fleisher’s observation of his lessons with Schnabel, there may be various modes of learning involved: “In the beginning I didn’t know what was going on in an intellectual way. But over the years, his sound, his thoughts and his reverence and love for great music seeped in” (in Dubal, 1984, p. 171).

A number of the pianists interviewed in this study noted the importance of informed pianism,
including an understanding of the composers, historical styles, musical form and structure. Additionally, many musicians have emphasised the importance of a broader education beyond the instrument. Anton Sadler observed in 1799: “Anyone wanting to understand music must know the whole of worldly wisdom and mathematics, poetry, elocution, art and many languages” (in Lawson, 2002, p. 16). A variety of similarly broad recommendations can easily be found amongst the voices of other pianists (e.g., Arrau, p. 18, Badura-Skoda, p. 85 and Horowitz, p. 195 in Dubal, 1984; and Banowetz, p. 153 and Frankl, p. 145 in Grindea, 2007).

However, beyond the acquisition of technical, theoretical or historical knowledge about repertoire, the extent to which intangible aspects of music-making can be taught, and by what means, has attracted a variety of views. As noted in Chapter Two, this includes those who question whether pedagogues do in fact adequately deal with these realms. Juslin, for example, suggests that musicians are “unable, or unwilling” to discuss or critically reflect on expressive aspects of musicianship (2003a, p. 2). Others have argued that the crucial aspects of emotion, personal expression and individuality have not been encouraged in the learning environment within traditional music conservatories (Lindström et al., 2003, pp. 38-40).

While such intangible aspects may not be explicit in the conservatory curricula, as has been well established in the discussions thus far, this does not signal an absence of their awareness by conservatoire-trained musicians (such as the pianists I interviewed). Neither does it mean that they are not taken into account, either explicitly or implicitly in conservatory performance assessments. However, some would argue the environment is not always ideal. Pianist Philippe Entremont suggests: “the spirit of competition in the music schools is too strong. Everyone is concerned with outdoing everyone else, and this is at the expense of the music” (in Dubal, 1984, p. 156). Others point to the broader practices and expectations within the culture of contemporary Western classical music. As cellist and conductor Benjamin Zander comments:

We in the music profession train young musicians with utmost care from early childhood, urging them to achieve extraordinary technical mastery and encouraging them to develop good practice habits and performance values. We support them to attend fine summer programs and travel abroad to gain firsthand experience of different cultures, and then, after all this, we throw them into a maelstrom of competition, survival, backbiting, subservience, and status seeking. And from this arena we expect them to perform the great works of the musical literature that call upon, among other things, warmth, nobility, playfulness, generosity, reverence, sensitivity and love! (Zander & Zander, 2000, p. 30)

Such comments suggest that when considering whether and how intangible aspects of music can be taught or fostered in musicians, there may be a number of factors and potential challenges to consider. During the interviews conducted for this research, the question of whether the more
‘intangible’ elements of music could be taught was posed to most of the pianists, or came up in discussion in various guises at other points during the conversations. In a number of cases the pianists also provided their views on the broader influences of institutional practices, whether prompted, or volunteered. While not all of the pianists had strong opinions about these, or did not feel sufficiently informed, there were several who were significantly passionate on this topic. The pianists’ views on these important aspects of the ‘ecosystem’ of intangibles are considered in turn below.

**Teaching, Listening, and Talking**

While a number of the views included in the earlier thematic discussions were made in the context of teaching, the following presents the pianists’ specific views on the influence of the teacher, the importance of sound and listening, and the potential and limitations of talking when dealing with the intangible aspects of music-making. As is evident from their responses, modalities of ‘learning’ in this realm appear to correspondingly embrace the less tangible spectrum of pedagogical practice. Reflecting their views on talent discussed in Chapter 4.2, the pianists presented a range of opinions on the degree to which a teacher could be influential in developing the crucial intangible aspects of artistry in their students. As perhaps the most outspoken on the influence of talent, Jean-Paul Sevilla simply stated, “you cannot make a musician from somebody who is not. That is God. You cannot teach sensitivity. You can only give a kind of polish, which will last [as long as] it will last.” Conversely, Stephen Savage felt that a great deal “depends on the teacher,” observing that “a lot of teaching leads to an awful wastage of talent.”

In between these opposing perspectives, there were subtle distinctions between the views expressed. Liam Viney felt the students he is most able to help were already “open and just need to be shown,” in contrast to those “whose hearts are closed or whose mind is closed,” whereas Roy Howat considered the basis of teaching as “trying to open windows that may appear shuttered.” Gao Ping spoke of teaching as a “very special art” and noted that he did not always know how to help people on the more intangible aspects of their artistic development: “I suppose you can open them up in different ways.” However, he also felt that music-making was about “the search for self,” and noted that it was only through a “self-imposed” process of unblocking that he came to “be more one with the instrument.”

Mark Kruger felt that ultimately “you’re just trying to open [students] up to the intangible and make it possible for them to experience the intangible.” He spoke on a number of occasions of the importance of nurturing self-belief and self-esteem, arguing that in order to help students engage with the intangible in music “a big part of that is making them feel bloody-well worthwhile; that it’s open to them.” During a post-interview conversation, he also noted his
belief that, as a pedagogue, “your prime interest has to be the person that you’re teaching.” As he further clarified: “Of course you teach technique [but] I find it much more engaging to teach the person, and help the person to do what they want to do.” On this basis, he concluded, “certainly you’ve got to be a psychologist to teach.”

Echoing Kruger, William Westney explained that his pedagogy practice is largely focused on empowerment and self-trust, and helping his students access or activate what he refers to as “vitality,” which he felt was “hard for us to always feel.” As noted in Chapter 7.3, he felt that this “always involves getting away from the instrument in some way.” While Liam Viney felt that the pianist’s personality was a crucial aspect of artistry, he professed to “focus mainly, almost completely on the musical goal, because ultimately I feel like their personality is none of my business, except in the sense of how it relates to their performing at the piano.” He noted only one exception: “I would never say that I am trying to help a person grow their personality – except in the sense of appreciating beauty, that’s the main thing […] you’re trying to deepen their sense of the beauty of music.” While this seems to represent a range of contradictory approaches, a shared mission of fostering, unlocking, or opening up the intangible connects them, whether the process is perceived to focus on the music or the person.

Several pianists highlighted the influence of activities that bypass words, whether in listening, watching, or otherwise ‘imbibing’ the intangible aspects of great music and music-making. William Westney spoke on numerous occasions about the power of sound, from its ability to “open up that door” to the heart, or to other “forces that can’t be named.” To the question of how we might teach intangibles, Roy Howat’s first response was through the power of simply being exposed to music, as it “invites so many things” and can “wake something up.” While he discussed this as particularly relevant for children, he also pointed out that “you never know when you will discover it,” and explained how he “very quickly learnt to travel the length of the country if need be” to listen to great musicians: “I just watched and watched and listened and listened.”

Stephen Savage similarly felt that that exposure to great music could “feed the imagination” and “really set you alight,” and noted that hearing and seeing great musicians perform had been influential on his development: “having those sort of models made an effect straight away. I think it does. It’s not a question of copying it, you are just imbibing it.” He spoke of how his most influential teacher had taught him about sound structure and quality without him “knowing it […] but just by example,” and felt that ideally teachers should be aiming to “unlock the imagination of a child through evoking what it is that sound can do.” Yet, as he also observed, it was not always the case that a student will be “tuned into sound as a vehicle for his imaginative
potential,” and teachers needed to be “awake to the possibilities” of what is going to best help the student “flourish” or “unlock them at that time.”

**Matteo Napoli** also felt strongly about the importance of demonstrating sound quality through example, advising students: “Always ask your teacher to play for you during the lesson – ‘would you show me?’ He doesn't have to play perfectly but even a wrong [note] from your teacher has to be a good one.” **Mark Kruger**, however, was less convinced of this type of learning, on the basis that it does not “empower” the student: “I hate when there are two pianos and someone plays – ‘no, not like that, like *this*, do it like this.’” As he argued, this “doesn't really educate them or help them to move forward to themselves – to what *their* idea of a good sound is […] I'm not talking just about sound but it’s [the student’s] relationship with music.”

This point is also echoed by Claudio Arrau: “The moment one notices that the student is imitating the teacher, the teacher should encourage the students to go his own way and try to find himself” (in Dubal, 1984, p. 31).

Words are used to assist in technical instructions, directing physical movements, and in communication of analytical, stylistic or historical facts. As the pianists highlighted throughout these conversations, words can also be useful in helping to stimulate a students’ imagination, and to encourage them to be aware of their emotional connection to the music or expressive intentions. However, finding the right words may well be the domain of the experienced pedagogue. As **Freddy Kempf** explained, he does not teach other than in the occasional masterclass, and he often finds it challenging to know what to say to help the student improve: “Usually I can hear if something is great and if something is not great, but that’s not very helpful.”

**Roy Howat** noted that he had learned a great deal through verbal explanation from his teachers, though acknowledged that individuals can be radically different in how they learn and experience music: “For some people it’s the conscious processes that are interesting, and they say ‘I don’t like all this emotional stuff,’ but it doesn’t mean it’s not there, it’s just they’re not conscious of it. Or, someone else will say I can’t stand all this intellectualising about it; I just like the feeling of it.” Howat explained that while he employs a number of different pedagogical approaches, ranging from the analytical and technical to the emotional and imaginative, often he is simply attempting to “draw somebody’s attention to something and see how they engage with it.”

**William Westney** felt that “intent is everything” and explained how he encourages students to explicitly question their intentions in words before performing:
One of the consistent procedures I always do, before a person performs, is ask them:

‘What would you like us to tell you about your performance? What do you most want us to know about the way you’re performing this?’ And I won’t let them do, sing or play a note until they come up with an answer.

Westney noted that while the musicians he worked with understood what he was asking them, it could be a challenge to verbalise what it was they were trying to express: “I have to pin people down – ‘well I have to express my feelings’ – ‘I don’t know what you’re talking about, what feelings?’” He also pointed to the barriers of standardised musical language:

I want to deconstruct all this music-school jargon that we use about dynamics and articulation. I don’t want to hear any of that talk during my workshops. It’s just, let’s be human beings, ‘what do you want me to get from this?’ […] ‘Why are you doing this? Why are you up here?’

Matteo Napoli felt that it was necessary for a pianist to connect with their “soul” in order to “move” listeners (Chapter 4.2). As with Westney, he explained how he approaches this in his pedagogical practice by challenging his students to “think in another way” about their expressive intentions, rather than focusing on dynamics or score based instructions:

I would say that there is always a question with an answer which moves the water … It is, ‘okay, what is the character of these eight bars? What is the mood you are in, in these eight bars? What is the mood you want me to be with you, or not with you, in these eight bars?’ And the answer, whatever is the answer, right or wrong, is connecting with your soul.

Mark Kruger also spoke of the importance of helping the pianist to identify and refine “their intention,” suggesting that through our intentions in performance we could “create that special atmosphere” or access the “freedom, that energy, that spontaneity” of great music-making.

In discussing how he attempts to “open” up his students, Liam Viney highlighted that “the Socratic method is good in any kind of educational context,” and that he often asks his students such questions as “Why the hell are you playing this piece? Why do you like this piece? Do you like this piece? Why does it exist?” However, he also acknowledged that he might be approaching it “a little too intellectually” and could find himself simply “lecturing.” He felt that the best approach was one of leading more by “intuitive example,” noting his admiration for other teachers in this regard. Using beauty again as an example, he explained this approach as one where simply through your presence as a teacher, a student could “sense that you find something beautiful in the music.” While Michael Kieran Harvey did not discuss his pedagogical practice, when asked whether he felt we could ‘teach the intangible’ he responded:
Well, you can only teach it if you like it yourself, and I guess the images that young people have of all these jaded and pretty cynical old musicians teaching [music] is pretty awful isn’t it. But you know, they’ve been institutionalised, and I don’t blame them. Indeed, as discussed further below, Harvey was quite opinionated about this topic.

**Institutionalising the intangible**

The pianists expressed mixed views on the degree to which the environments of tertiary teaching institutions adequately recognise, support or foster intangible aspects of music-making. All of the pianists in this study attended such institutions, and many currently teach within them, or have at some point, thus commenting from their experiences as both student and pedagogue. While some of the pianists were particularly passionate on this topic, it was evident that not all of the pianists felt concerned about institutional structures, procedures or policy, or felt strongly influenced by them in their practice. **Freddy Kempf** – the only pianist not experienced in, or currently teaching – was quite happy with his institutional education, yet suggested that the onus was also on the student to further their own development. As he explained, while he felt he lacked an education in the broader and supporting arts, “that’s possibly my own doing as well.” **Liam Viney** noted the difficulty of making generalisations about institutional practices due the significant differences between conservatoires he had attended, and the many factors that had influenced his musical development.

When prompted for his opinions on music institutions **Jean-Paul Sevilla** simply noted, “it depends on the teacher,” while also pointing out that teaching could not be standardised: “Music is individual. You teach music according to the personality of the student.” Sevilla did however highlight the importance of a broader education beyond what was provided within institutional curricula: “Culture is everything […] I would like that my students be interested not only in piano of course.” Yet, as he noted, while he used to insist his students read more widely, very few found the time to do so: “I was so disappointed that I gave up.” **Roy Howat**’s only reference to this topic was to the ongoing debate about balance between research and performance practice, arguing that it was important not to be dogmatic about institutional curricula, but to make all avenues available for students. As he observed, “there are some performers where it’s going to be a total waste of time saying to them now you must learn to do Schenkerian analysis or something of this sort. It’s like making centipedes count their legs in order of motion.” At the same time, Howat felt that these subjects should be made “available for those who are hungry for it, like I was.”

The remaining pianists were more outspoken in what they considered to be the problems associated with teaching music within institutional structures. **Stephen Savage** suggested “much of the best work is arguably done in the years before people get to institutions,” noting as
an example, that in a recent piano competition in Queensland which was open to all ages, those reaching the finals were not old enough to have yet enrolled in a tertiary music degree. As he added, somewhat contentiously:

There may or may not be a lesson to be learned from that. But the fact is that very often you will get people who became a fine musician in spite of going to an institution […] but then if they do have something to say that’s positive about the institution, it will certainly be about the quality of the encounter that they had with a particular master.

Savage did however feel that the lack of improvisational and compositional skills amongst classical pianists was unfortunate (a view shared by others such as Parncutt, 2007, p. 9). He also observed in an informal setting prior to the interview, that creativity was not always a key feature in institutions, and that the most creative people tended to exist outside of them. At the same time, he felt that institutions have an important role to play in maintaining and protecting our cultural heritage: “Cultural institutions are very, very important because what is happening now may not, or will not, be static.”

Matteo Napoli argued that a focus on the quantifiable aspects of music training was problematic: “We are not looking at contents. We are not looking at philosophies. We are looking at the number of pieces, the marks, these kind of things.” In a strong statement at the end of the interview, he noted how this was impacting on the potential of the teachers: “We have lots of beautiful people but we don’t get the beautiful people in the condition to work properly. We fill them up with papers and bullshit.” He also felt that the criteria used by institutional administration when employing pedagogues was misplaced, with a focus on academic qualifications rather than their skill and insights as performers: “Ninety percent of the teachers, they cannot sit and play an example, and that's why we're not getting there.” As he suggested, institutions should be concerned with “how to make the music work better, which is different to how we employ people.”

Mark Kruger noted his “disillusionment” at the idea of pursuing a teaching career within an institution after “seeing what goes on in university,” observing, contentiously that “being institutionalised for so long is detrimental to really engaging with music.” During a post-interview lunch, he further shared his thoughts on this: “I’ve been in quite a few [five] institutions now. I don’t think I’ve met anyone who I would call so-called happy, happy in their job, happy in music, happy in institutionalised music, unless [they are] a born teacher, a born educator.” While Kruger noted a couple of examples of the latter, in his experience, most performers end up teaching to “pay the bills,” while what they really want to be doing is performing. Though he was not sure how to make positive changes to institutional structures, as with others, he recommended more embodied activities to help pianists connect with their
“emotions and intentions” and inner ‘self,’ while observing, from his experience, that few conservatories explored these areas.

**Gao Ping** pointed out that “unfortunately” institutions need structure, regulation and examinations to function, yet these aspects “hardly have anything to do with artistic development. That’s the problem, that’s the contradiction, but you cannot do without them. It’s almost a necessary evil. You have to have those things so it actually functions.” However, as he also observed with resignation, increasingly “musicians are robots, many of them, in a way. They are trained to be that way; forgetting the very essence of it.” Gao Ping felt that conservatories should be providing students with a broad range of experiences, and, as noted in Chapter 7.3, spoke of meditation and ayurvedic practices as beneficial to his music making. Yet, he also acknowledged, “of course conservatories should be conservatories not ayurvedic practices,” and additionally, while such alternative activities “can inform people,” there is always the risk of making “mistakes in judgment,” for instance if encouraging people to have acupuncture: “Do they really need it? How do you know?”

**William Westney** felt that there were significant issues to be addressed with teaching practices within institutions. He argued that the “training has to be much more embodied” with classes that allow students to “respond with visuals, respond with movement, respond by singing, with drama,” and additionally that intuition needs to be taken more seriously: “Many school environments are not set up for you to develop your intuition.” He also believed that in order to for a student to reach their full potential as a musician, it was extremely important to build trusting relationships and make sure students “feel honoured.” As he observed, too often this is not the case: “I think the ‘symptomology’ is that we have a field that’s terribly threatening and everyone has insecurities and so we work that out through being small.”

In particular, Westney pointed to the problems associated with assessment: “Assessment has to be handled very, very, very carefully. It’s so charged and people are delicate, and I don’t say that because I’m such a bleeding heart, it’s just true.” He argued quite passionately that there are major problems in the way critique and feedback is frequently delivered, observing “a toxic atmosphere that we hardly notice as that, of being disrespectful to students […] I think we’ve become immune to it. It’s what we know. It’s like being in a chain of family dysfunction.” As he suggested, assessment needs to be conducted “in a situation that’s healthy, which isn’t to molly-coddle people” but neither should it be a “minefield” where “you’re going be sneered at or rejected.” Westney spoke in detail about a negative “energy field” that can exist when a performer knows they are being judged, noting from his own experience, and the reports of others, how exhausting such performance situations could be. Relaying advice he had received from a kinesthesiologist (John Buttrick), he spoke of how such environments could foster
“antagonistic” and “hostile” thoughts within the pianist rather than a more positive and empowered sense of sharing and giving through the music. Such views add further support to Davidson’s suggestion that, “both musician and performance skills develop optimally in unthreatening situations” (2002b, p. 99).

Michael Kieran Harvey spoke of his ideal views of the master-student relationship, and, in a striking contrast, what he felt this tradition had now become:

My belief – it’s like the Guild system, Bach and so on. You teach music; you get attached to somebody; you learn all the tricks. You do it because you’ve got a particular gift, and the teacher just teaches because they’re passing on a flame, type of thing. It’s got nothing to do with the monetary aspects. But you know, when various systems come into play – and they’ve been systematising piano education for centuries now – it becomes a business and you have to achieve certain results, and you have to turn idiots into pianists by a certain time. And that’s different, that’s a sausage factory.

Harvey raised the concept of being “institutionalised” on several occasions during the interview. He explained, passionately, what he meant by this:

The piano people I come across are twisted wrecks and I don’t understand it. It’s got to be the training. I sort of do understand it – I had the same problems, where you have structures that try to make you conform. There are all sorts of agendas: Don’t be a threat; don’t be too full of yourself; don’t do things that are going to upset us; don’t play repertoire we don’t know about because it makes us look stupid. All these factors, you know, don’t play jazz because we’re a classical strand; don’t play rock ‘n’ roll because you’ll ruin your technique; don’t explore anything else because you should be practising; don’t have a life. And I reject all that. I think [music] is a process – like life.

Echoing Westney, Harvey also observed a “sense of panic and fear” amongst pianists. As he highlighted, this was far from ideal for either the music or the musician: “Why is everything so competitive? It’s so destructive.” On a more positive note, and echoing Savage (above), he felt that if we could do something to inspire pianists and encourage a sense of awe with music, it would be to teach them to compose, which, he highlighted “we used to do.”

Implications for the Intangible

Most pianists agreed that intangible aspects of music-making require less tangible approaches to pedagogical practice. While brief references were made to technical issues related to expressive playing, and the use of words to stimulate expressive intention and imagination, most emphasised the limitations of direct instruction, whether verbal or physical. Rather than focusing on the accumulation of knowledge or technique, the comments were more in the realm of opening up, waking up or unlocking the potential, with an emphasis on encouraging self-trust
and belief, and empowering the student. Some pianists spoke of their efforts to broaden or strengthen the personality of a student, reflecting the importance they placed on the individuality crucial to artistry. However, in this realm the pianists appeared to agree that the pedagogue is primarily a facilitator rather than a teacher.

The pianists spoke of a variety of non-verbal means of communication within the pedagogical environment, often resorting to metaphor to explain these, for example the power of sound to “feed the imagination,” “set you alight” (Savage) “wake something up” (Howat), “open up that door” to the heart, or to other “forces that can’t be named” (Westney). This interest in sound was evident in the argument put forward by both Savage and Napoli that teachers need to be able to demonstrate a “good,” or “alluring” sound on the instrument. Yet, as they suggested elsewhere in their conversations, and as explicitly pointed out by Kruger, rather than encouraging imitation, the pedagogue is ideally aiming to open up the realm of possibilities for a student, and their own personal connection with the music. Others highlighted less tangible means of transmitting knowledge such as “imbibing” (Savage) or “sensing” knowledge through the “intuitive example,” or physical presence of the teacher (Viney).

Such ideas are not new, and have been demonstrated to exist across cultures (Schippers, 2010). However, as evident from the discussions earlier in this chapter and in Chapters Two and Seven, tensions exist between research cultures when attempting to explain all of the empathetic, embodied, subconscious forms of awareness, or more intangible “forces” suggested by the pianists above: the view, for example, that intuition reflects consciously acquired knowledge might not account for all the forms of intuitive experiences these, and other musicians have referred to. Yet, given the pianists’ references to these modes in both accessing and imparting intangibles in performance and pedagogy, their potential should not be ignored or underestimated. Additionally, the pianists’ reflections suggest a relationship between a student’s level of openness or embodied awareness and their ability to receive, imbibe, or appropriately interpret the more intangible modalities employed by their teachers.

Combined, the discussions in these two chapters suggest that there is still much research to be done before we can come to a full understanding of the workings of, distinctions and connections between, mind and body, or how musicians optimally engage with both in performance or pedagogy. As Hodges (2010) reports, “undoubtedly, many exciting findings will enrich our teaching in years to come” however “our current state of knowledge concerning music learning in the brain is too limited to allow for revolutionary changes in our pedagogy” (p. 12). Indeed, such comments and findings suggest that, while not empirically based – and criticised by some – “the current ‘commonsense teaching’ that relies largely on tradition and folk theory” (Lindström et al., 2003, p. 39) may still have merit.
Some of the pianists noted a tension between nurturing intangible aspects of music-making and institutional environments, reflecting possible frictions between rigid structures and imperatives of accountability within institutions and the intangible aspects of music-making discussed in this thesis. In observing what some felt was the underlying contradiction, Gao Ping expressed the view that the factors that enable an institution to function are essentially in conflict with those deemed crucial for great artistry. A number of comments highlighted various ways in which this conflict negatively impacted on the teachers, students and ultimately the music-making: educational approaches based on a business or financial model leading to a focus on musical performance as a product, at the expense of the importance of the process; administrative tasks (and potentially politics) impacting on teaching time and mindset; employment criteria for pedagogues focusing on academic qualifications rather than musical experience or insights; a dogmatic approach to curricula; pressure to conform to ‘classical’ conventions (in technique, repertoire and styles); examinations, assessments and judgemental atmospheres potentially having a negative impact on performers; and a lack of creativity, particularly noted in the absence of composition and improvisation in the standard training of classical pianists.

However, it also needs to be acknowledged that many conservatoires do produce well-rounded, sensitive, satisfied, and creative musicians. As explicitly noted by several pianists above, a student’s experience largely depends on their relationship to the primary teacher, who has considerable freedom to emphasise what he/she considers important within the one-on-one pedagogical model. As several pianists noted, this may also involve advocating work away from the instrument, and additionally, through engaging with activities that extend beyond what is commonly offered in conservatoire curricula. As discussed in Chapter 7.3, and echoed in their comments above, the pianists noted their desire and efforts to engage with activities that would help them foster a less technical, cerebral approach, and more embodied engagement with their instrument and music-making. While, as Gao Ping pointed out, there is risk involved with recommending more embodied or alternative approaches within institutions, this may be an unavoidable ingredient in fostering the personal, expressive and arguably ‘human’ aspects of great music-making that have been highlighted throughout these conversations.

**8.3 Valuing and Positioning Intangibles in Society**

Eltham (2011) suggests that all artists attempting to find a place in modern society “must in the end situate their work in an artworld defined and constituted by their peers, and by the institutions, audiences and organisations that might potentially support them, and by the broader economic and cultural currents of their society.” Johnson (2002) similarly argues that music
cannot be “divorced from the world in which it is made” (p. 81). This raises the question of whether internal ideals and values are prone to being compromised by external perceptions or expectations, which as discussed in the beginning of this exploration, also appears topical in debates about distinctions between such notions as intrinsic and extrinsic value. While not the focus of this thesis, this section presents an overview of the pianists’ comments in relation to the complex issue of music’s value, and some of the challenges in communicating this value, as raised by the various voices and perspectives presented in Chapter Two. This includes their responses to the question of what the value of music to society might be; and the extent to which this might be intangible. This also brings back some aspects of music advocacy and underlying debates over instrumental or extrinsic benefits of music, which, while peripheral to the content, was one of the triggers for embarking on this research, and for initiating discussions on these concepts with the pianists.

Identifying and Communicating Value
Following on from the various perspectives on music advocacy that initially inspired this investigation, in order to address the broad topic of value, the pianists were asked how they would communicate what they considered most valuable about music to others, particularly educational, government or funding organisations, and for their opinions on the use of extrinsic, instrumental or cognitively focused arguments. Evidently, some had given more thought to this question than others. However, while most claimed to consider the intangible aspects of music as crucial, they found it challenging to promote or justify these within social and political environments emphasising the measurable, accountable, or commercial.

Mark Kruger noted that he was not sure how to best explain the value of music or music education to funding bodies or the government: “I don't know how to communicate that yet, but I'd want to communicate all this stuff we've been talking about. It helps build better people, if that's a way [of explaining it], better societies, more people in tune with themselves.” Kruger did not feel there was “necessarily anything wrong” with tangible results showing “it's going to create better mathematicians” or “help connect neural pathways.” However, he did not believe this is how it should be promoted, noting that he considers the value to be “something intangible,” and without this in music-making “there’s no point really.” Gao Ping also admitted to not having thought about music advocacy, and felt he “wouldn't be very persuasive at all.” His response was simply, “it’s the most basic need of the human being” and we need music “to survive, to be healthy, to be sane.” He was keen to emphasise, however, that we should encourage pianists to “go into music for the right reasons, which is to enjoy the art and be part of a continued tradition of making music; not as entertainment.” As he argued of classical music, “we are speaking about music that can broaden us or enrich us,” or “make people be aware of something deep.”
Freddy Kempf acknowledged the challenge of justifying “the need for anything which doesn’t simply relate to human beings functioning from day to day,” and on this basis felt that scientifically proven benefits of music to the brain should be promoted if found. However, he highlighted “emotional balance” as essential to ensure “society can function,” and felt “the only way you can balance society’s emotion is by having access to these extremes – ways to experience those extremes.” This is where he considered music as most beneficial to society. As he explained, while other “recreational things which have no apparent function” such as “alcohol,” “drugs” and “sports” also help us deal with our emotions, “I think music’s probably the most powerful tool for that.” Kempf suggested that given our emotional needs, music would always survive, with or without advocacy. However, he also observed later in the interview, “music and all the arts [are] one of the key things that we have. I think people don’t realise how important culture is, and why it’s there.” In a comment that suggested he felt the responsibility to explain this lay elsewhere, he noted, “the only way we can really have a change in terms of how well it’s promoted and educated is simply [through] the leader of the country. And a lot of that’s to do with that person’s understanding and stance.”

Liam Viney similarly felt that that music and the arts are “absolutely essential for any healthy society […] you don’t have mentally healthy individuals if they’re not allowed to [express], or supported in expressing everything that they feel.” Countering the idea that the arts are a “luxury,” he argued, “they are necessary for the spiritual health of a nation, otherwise you have the nightmarish world of 1984, or Brave New World.” He clarified, however, “I don’t mean spiritual in specifically a religious sense, I just mean in the fact that there’s no denying that humans beings’ brains have developed areas of activity that transcend food, clothing and shelter, and we can’t cut them off.” Viney felt “we do compromise” the value of music by focusing on scientific and extrinsic benefits, and would prefer it “if the politicians also had a sense of beauty,” rather than having to resort to what “the scientists say.” However, Viney also observed, “the world’s a very cynical place and money really determines everything […] so maybe we do need to compromise.” While noting this was a topic he was still reflecting on, he concluded, with a sense of resignation:

I think that our civilisation is probably going down the toilet, and that music’s role in that is reflective of broader trends, but people have been saying that for decades – that our spiritual sustenance is not being fulfilled. […] So, in one sense I lament the decline of valuing beauty in our society; on the other hand, I think there’s always going to be a number of people who keep it alive.

When asked whether he considered the value of music to be intangible, Stephen Savage agreed, “I think mostly it is.” He felt that music could “help people know their own full potential as human beings,” yet, as with Kempf and Viney, pointed to the political challenge of promoting
such a value, arguing that governments needed to first cater for citizens as “whole people”:

If I were able to get to the government of the day, I would say, ‘look for heaven’s sake, stop treating the whole country as a collection of consumers. Get back to the idea of being citizens again’ […]. The whole concept that the government should be looking after the betterment of our citizens – apart from material benefit – has gone out the window really, so for example the subsidies to the arts – slashed, education – slashed. It’s all just bread and butter and issues of superannuation and health and tax, and that’s all apparently people are interested in from the point of view of their basic intentions.

Savage argued that a “materialistic” and “consumerist” approach to life was “limited” and that we do need a “vision of the stars.” As noted in Chapter 6.3, this included the potential of music and the arts to bring us closer “to the idea of a godhead.” He suggested that one line of argument to support this could be found in the way that music appears to have little extrinsic value:

If someone is going to be out and out atheist and you wanted to persuade them otherwise, one of the things you would have to do would be to point to that extraordinary legacy, and the continuing legacy of something which is there in huge abundance, but which has no outward value at all really, apparently.

Arguably, however, this approach is not likely to succeed widely within climates that trend towards quantifying or rationalising the role and value of music in education and our lives. Neither is it likely to appeal to some of the more secular members of society. Indeed, the challenges of advocating the spiritual value of music were highlighted by Jean-Paul Sevilla, the only pianist amongst those interviewed identifying himself as religious. His response to the question of how he would explain what he considered valuable about music to ‘the government’ was simple and succinct: “I don’t think they would listen to me.” In various ways, this view seemed to be shared by others.

Roy Howat observed that current music advocacy trends were not necessarily new: “They’re saying the same things as Pythagoras and all that lot were saying two thousand years ago without the computers […]. So now we’re going into bottom gear to prove exactly every cog.” As he observed, “they had other ways of reasoning that out. They just observed and saw – all the old ancient Greek rules about which modes would awaken what states of mind and soul. You can see that – I can feel it.” On whether he felt that scientific findings should be used to advocate music, Howat suggested we should “use any justification for music […] as long as we don’t tie it down” or suggest these findings should be the motivating factor: “Use them to promote it, but not say to them you’re doing it because it will increase your brain [power].”

When challenged to find an alternative message that would communicate to politicians, Howat was less than optimistic that anything he could say would make a difference, and indeed might have the opposite effect:
Would they be in the least interested? […] I don’t know how I’d start because I have the feeling that what music means to me is actually not relevant to their political interests. And if I said what it meant to me, it would almost give these particular guys [referring to past politicians] the more reason for not wanting to go with it, because it makes people think for themselves and question things. As he concluded, “It’s hard to know what I could say without appearing to be preaching … I think what I’d probably say is ‘Can I just play you something?’ Play them some piece of music […] that’s why it’s there, because it says what words can’t.”

William Westney was conscious of the challenge of finding an appropriate language that might be “acceptable to school administrators,” or those who fund education. Continuing his discussion on intuition (see Chapter 7.2), he suggested that music might be promoted as a more embodied and less-intellectual “way of knowing”:

What we call feeling is a way of knowing, perhaps the most important way of knowing. […] This is what the arts and music maybe in particular, encourages us to celebrate and to use and to know – that kind of understanding that is not reasoned, but is actually the kind we trust the most, isn’t it? […] something that’s physical inside, something that moves, that expresses inside of you when you’re in touch with it. Wouldn’t we all be more ‘realised’ people if we worked with that sense, and enjoyed it and developed it, and paid attention to it and thought it was important? […] I wish we had that conversation about what music could do, to trust it, not just to express yourself, but as a way of knowing something.

Westney also noted another argument he sensed might be a good “selling point” for music, and one his students seemed to like hearing, “if somebody masters some great music, they learn what it feels like to be part of something greater.” While Westney agreed that such arguments may be morally or spiritually loaded, he suggested, “another way to look at it is that it makes you happy to be part of something greater than yourself.”

While the topic of music advocacy was not directly addressed with Matteo Napoli, he felt that society at large would be greatly improved by placing more emphasis on music and the arts, noting that previous empires had “disappeared because the morality and the culture were disappearing. That's what is happening now in many countries.” As he also acknowledged however:

I would say that [music] would be a salvation to the world […] but you know, on the other hand – being a professional, living in the music, for the music, and of the music for my last 44 years – if I didn’t think like that, I would be – it would be a disaster. My life would be a failure.

Napoli’s final words on this topic were revealing, and a reminder that all statements on value
are highly personal, and inevitably challenging to separate from individual interests.

**Michael Kieran Harvey** shared concerns over promoting the value of music for its extrinsic or academic benefits: “I’ve also distrusted that you have to justify music in those terms at all, and I would prefer that they didn’t do those studies because it just devalues it.” As he noted further on in the interview: “You can’t quantify [music]. It’s immensely satisfying and worthwhile beyond the dreams of most people who are brought up to appreciate things that society says are valuable. And I could never understand why this society values the things it does.” Harvey also spoke of his dismay at parents showing their love for their children by trying to increase their “scoring on exams” and the “accelerated learning and the competitive edge that parents are willing to pay for.” As he provocatively suggested: “I think the pursuit of what the brain does and why people respond to music is important and should be investigated, but not so you arm your children to outperform other children. It’s pretty scary.”

Harvey’s final comments on how we should promote music were highly idiosyncratic and extreme:

> Well I wouldn’t promote it. I think we should all go underground and just hide it. Take it away […]. Not shove it down their throats, and not conform to marketing strategies and middle managements […]. I also don’t agree with the way the powerful classical music industry is set up. I don’t agree with classical music marketing either. I’m totally outside. And I’m comfortable thank you very much. I don’t get so depressed anymore. But, you know, if everybody thought like me the world would probably collapse, but then I think it’s a good idea. I don’t think the systems are working.

While Harvey explained that he does not want “to deal with” or “have time to fight the system,” he remains very concerned about the continuation of music. He recommended that by “word of mouth” and their own entrepreneurial efforts, musicians could find a way to survive, without the need to compromise their values. As he emphasised, “if you’ve got anything interesting to say as a musician then you’ve got an obligation to pass it on and try to keep the thing going.”

While others shared this sense of social responsibility, they also added notes of caution. **Liam Viney** spoke of the strong “aesthetic social conscience” he had early in his career, particularly in relation to his role as a performer and advocate of contemporary classical music. However, he noted that his views had been significantly influenced by mentors he admired at the time, and his opinions have since changed: “I was missing out on so much in music by having a kind of polemical position – a kind of a dogma.” **Roy Howat** cautioned that it’s “dangerous to put weight on people, saying that by being a musician you have a duty to society.” Yet, as he also observed in general of musicians “most of us feel we have some sort of social conscience […] we do tend to feel there’s something here we can give to the world and with a bit of luck it’s
going to put a smile on people’s faces and make the world a happier place.”

Implications for the intangible

Whether implicitly or explicitly stated, all of the pianists perceived the value of the music as something unquantifiable, while regarding it as a beneficial or even essential part of being human. Their views ranged from seeing music as necessary to support the mental, emotional and spiritual health of both the individual and society at large; as something that can “broaden us or enrich us” (Gao Ping/Howat); “make the world a happier place” (Howat); help us reach our “full potential” (Savage); as a “way of knowing” (Westney) or to know ourselves (Savage); or as a means through which to transcend the self and “be part of something greater” (Westney). A number of the comments reflected the pianists’ personal needs to feel valued and appreciated – most prominent in Napoli’s acknowledged connection between music as moral salvation and his own need for self-validation. This is perhaps not surprising given the widely accepted links between music-making, self-concept and identity (see Chapter 7.3).

The pianists presented a range of attitudes towards current trends in positioning or advocating the value of music to society. Most of the pianists felt that scientifically quantifiable and tangible benefits of engaging with music were not in themselves problematic, and if they could be found, it was worthwhile to embrace them. As Howat suggested, “use any justification for music […] as long as we don’t tie it down.” However, half of them also qualified this by noting that instrumental arguments promoting music for its benefits to intellectual prowess, or other academic pursuits, were not ideally “the right reasons” (Gao Ping); what we should be talking about or paying attention to as important (Westney); appreciating and valuing in society (Harvey); or using as motivational messages for engaging with music (Howat). As Kruger argued, without “something intangible” in music-making “there’s no point really.”

However, explicitly or implicitly, many of the pianists appeared to feel that advocacy was not their responsibility. Viney, Kempf, and to some extent Gao Ping, felt that music does not need to be proactively advocated to survive, and as several pianists pointed out, they had not previously thought about it. However, this might also reflect the difficulty they noted in finding adequate words to describe their values, or the sense that the task of explaining or demonstrating music’s emotional, cultural, moral, or spiritual value is too challenging. Given the sensitivity and contention surrounding these topics, as discussed above in ‘Talking the Intangible,’ it is perhaps understandable that musicians may feel their best course of action is to “just do my job” (Viney), or “play you something” (Howat). Or, as Harvey suggested, given the conflict between his views and what “society” says is valuable – “go underground.” Indeed, underlying their comments above, there appeared to be a general sense of disillusionment, and in some cases depression, over how (classical) music and the arts are currently valued, both
culturally and politically, and doubts about their ability to make any difference.

However, when considering Eltham’s suggested musical ecology in reverse, the ‘cultural currents’ and views of society on music, what is funded and prioritised as crucial in our educational curricula, and significantly, what is valued about music and musicians, will be greatly influenced by “those people most well equipped to move the field decisively forward” (Juslin & Sloboda, 2001, p. 457). In this light, the voices of musicians may be of great potential value in defining and shaping the cultural perceptions of the “artworld” they inhabit. As Scruton argues, “anybody who cares for the future of humanity” should be focused on how to “revive” an appreciation of the beautiful and the aesthetic in our lives (2011, p. 156). Yet, as McCarthy et al. (2004) observe, many arts advocates are reluctant to introduce such concepts into policy and funding discussions as “because they do not believe such ideas will resonate with most legislators and policymakers.” This, they point out, is largely due to “the predominant use in policy analysis of the social science model that focuses on measurable outcomes” (pp. 37-38).

Debate will surely continue over the exact concepts and words we choose to use when describing and promoting both tangible and intangible values of music. However, in the same way that life involves a continual negotiation between the known and the unknown, the objective and the subjective, the rational and the emotional, the real and the imagined, the human spirit and the spiritual, if music is to live, as a creation, reflection or celebration of our own humanity, it too will surely need to embrace the full scope of this continuum.
Chapter Nine: Discussion and Conclusions

9.0 Introduction

This thesis has investigated the presence, nature, and role of intangible aspects in Western classical piano music from the perspective of the professional pianists who perform it; voices which have been strongly underrepresented to date in academic discourses concerned with the issues of musical performance, pedagogy and research. I have emphatically not tried to define what the intangible *is* in music, but rather, explored how it can be approached, understood, and operationalised. In Scruton’s words, instead of analysing “things in the world,” this study has focused on the pianists’ “particular experience of them, and about the pursuit of meaning that springs from that experience” (2011).

Following an initial exploration of the discrepancies noted from my own lived experience, I have centred this investigation around ten in-depth interviews with professional pianists, cross-referenced with a broad body of literature, as well as informal and semi-formal discussions with colleagues. In spite of variations in age, cultural backgrounds, attitudes, and temperaments, all of the classical pianists interviewed overwhelmingly agree that intangible aspects play a crucial role in the practice of their art. Moreover, while they highlighted the challenge of finding words to describe the abstractions of intangibles, they sketched similar outlines of the places and spaces in which the intangible reside in music-making, from their ideals and aspirations to the challenges of locating, accessing, and communicating these elusive yet essential aspects of performance.

The previous chapters have explored in considerable detail the various (clusters of) concepts that emerge when ‘unpacking’ the intangible. While I see these extensive explorations as the core of a thesis with a topic that does not lend itself to crisp conclusions and recommendations, I will try to bring together the main strands of this thesis in three concise sections: Locating the intangible, summarising the different places/aspects of piano performance where intangibles reside; Accessing the intangible, highlighting what aspects of piano music, practice, transmission, and culture the pianists have identified as conducive for allowing the intangibles to blossom, and which factors are less so; and finally Finding the balance, where more philosophical reflections converge, with a focus on three significantly intangible aspects to emerge in these discussions: the self, the silence and the sacred.
9.1 Locating the Intangible

In order to locate the intangibles in piano performance, I have used a methodology that is ironically akin to some employed in science. Having established that pianists perceive intangible aspects relating to performance to be important to their art, my role in these semi-structured interviews can be likened to that of an explorer attempting to navigate and map an area of uncharted ocean bed, and my questions as sonar waves. The returning ‘echoes’ in the ensuing dialogues and responses provided contours of this unexplored terrain, which I – as researcher – attempted to process, analyse and order. The initial part of this analysis presented a rich vocabulary of words that can be broadly associated with less tangible elements of piano practice, including (presented alphabetically):

Artistry; Awareness; Awe; Balance; Being a Channel; Beauty; Charisma; Communication; Compassion; Connection; Consciousness; Creativity; Depth; Ego; Elusive; Embodiment; Emotion; Empathy; Energy; Excitement; Expression; Feeling; Forces; God; Goodness; Happiness; Heart; Humility; Identity; Imagination; Imbibing; Ineffable; Inner Vision; Inspiration; Integrity; Intention; Intrinsic; Intuition; Journey; Joy; Letting Go; Liberation; Love; Magic; Metaphysical; Morality; Musicality; Mystery; Peak Experience; Perfection; Platonic Ideal; Presence; Process; Psychological; Relationship; ‘Self’; Self-expression; Sensitivity; Silence; Sincerity; Space; Soul; Spirit; Subconscious; Sublimation; Symbolic; Talent; Time; Transcendence; Truth.

Analysing the contexts in which these words were used, three potential loci of intangibility emerged: intangibles in the music, in the musician, and in the musicians’ engagement with the music. It was the last of these that provided the richest material for discussion. In this sense, the discussions focused more on ‘playing’ the piano than the piano, and ‘making music’ – or to use Small’s term ‘musicking’ – rather than music as residing in the score. This emphasis on the ‘process’ is evident in a number of the sub-themes that emerged: expressing, communicating, experiencing, accessing, feeling, thinking, embodying, knowing, teaching, and talking. The following paragraphs summarise the pianists’ main ideas as reflected back to me during our communications.

The Intangible In…

The meaning of music is significantly challenging to pin down. Historical, cultural, and personal factors were all noted by the pianists as potential variables, however, even here a number of ambiguities emerged. While several highlighted the culturally contingent nature of music – and the rise of ethnomusicology has largely debunked the cliché of Western classical music as a ‘universal language’ – others suggested that on an “incomprehensible” level there was some kind of common point or meaning that transcended cultural and sub-cultural barriers.
Conversely, many argued that meaning in music is highly subjective and based on the personal perception, projection, understanding or imagination of those engaging with it, which, additionally, will change over time. Adding to this ambiguity, several suggested the meaning could indeed be embedded in the musical language itself, illustrating this through what they felt was lacking in much contemporary music. Others felt that the distinguishing feature of great music was its flexibility of meaning, and capacity to reflect or mirror the evolving perceptions of those engaging with it.

A highly debated question is how music expresses meaning. Though many did not address or answer this question directly, several highlighted the circular relationship between perceived and inherent meaning, suggesting that music acts as a metaphor, gesture, wave-form or trigger for something felt, remembered or residing in the listener. This topic was no less elusive when considering the most concrete reference point for musicians, the score. While structure was highlighted as one of the more tangibly expressive aspects of the music, and analysis of the score was encouraged as a valuable tool in understanding the music, the pianists spoke of a mysterious intangible element in great music that (frustratingly) defied analysis, and could not be accounted for through intellectual or rational means. Indeed, while structure was felt to contribute to expression and meaning in music, many suggested it does so best when it is not possible to see fully how it works. Such perceptions suggest that an overly analytical or semiotic approaches might not always be appealing.

In discussing the attributes of great musicians, most of the pianists made a distinction between musicality and talent. The majority appeared to ascribe to a ‘nature via nurture’ position on musicality, suggesting that all children were born with an inherent responsiveness to music, and this could be encouraged or woken up through early exposure. Significantly however, they noted talent as far more selective, potentially instrument specific, and varying in degrees from a “bundle of some kind of musical abilities” to an “incredible wiring” found in prodigious talent or genius. The pianists displayed a definite leaning towards the innate rather than acquired expertise side of ongoing debates in this field, with a variety of opinions as to the origin of talent, from a genetically inherited aptitude for music, to something ultimately unexplainable, or as explicitly expressed in one case, a God-given gift.

While virtuosity is no doubt a requisite for successful contemporary pianists, the pianists considered it to be primarily tangible, and it was discussed far less than its more intangible counterpart – artistry. Most of the pianists agreed that a great if not virtuoso technique was required in the profession. However, they were quite dispassionate about the topic, and indeed highlighted in various ways that a focus on technical perfection could be detrimental to fostering ‘true artistry.’ The question of what constitutes or contributes to great artistry yielded
a range of responses, including a balance between concentration and passion; a broad conceptual understanding combined with attention to detail; a sensitivity to the colour, texture, or shape of the music; being aware of, awake to or in touch with the dramatic, emotional, psychological, beautiful, spiritual or profound content of the music; an ability to engage empathetically or imaginatively with the music; and to communicate by ‘speaking’ or telling a story through music.

The influence of personality was highlighted as significant, with comments ranging from the value of individual differences amongst pianists, the importance of the “person’s fundamental nature,” as a crucial component that must be worked on, or “the soul” which needs “cultivating.” The pianists also attempted to describe the more embodied aspects of the presence of the performer that appear to play a role. They spoke of great performers as having a charisma, poise or nobility, or sexual electricity; as being clean, pure, or authentic; as free, open, or not blocked; and as being inspired or able to inspire their audience. Conversely, it was noted that performers could use their personal attributes to play on an audience or be “manipulative,” just as audience perceptions could be manipulated by an “x-factor” media hype.

The Intangible Between…

It was evident from the above discussions that the greatest intangibility was to be found in the interaction between the musician and the music. This was considered further through a metaphorical reference to the ‘spaces between’ across three different spaces of interaction: the ambiguous yet crucial interpretative spaces between the pianist and the composer; the expressive spaces between the pianist and the music (the score and its sound); and the communicative spaces between performer and audience. It is widely accepted that an artistic performance is characterised by interpretation that goes beyond the notes on the page. There were several factors that emerged as significant influences on how a performer approaches the score, presented according to the themes of being perfect, authentic, and creative.

All of the pianists spoke of striving for a form of perfection in their playing. However while note-accuracy was considered admirable, many of the pianists perceived the concept to be directly in conflict with their other artistic ideals. This was highlighted by situations in which wrong notes played with the “right feel” could be more appropriate to the “deeper intention” of the composer or “integrity of the music.” Presenting a far more intangible and elusive ideal, they spoke of seeking a “contextual or gestural perfection,” an emotional clarity of expression, or intensity of emotional exchange with the audience, and doing justice to their own perceptions of the music, or individual voice as a musician. As noted by one pianist, perfection could encompass a broad range of aspirations – from the platonic, to the sublime and divine, areas discussed further by the pianists when considering the aesthetic and spiritual aspects of music-
making. Significantly, while striving for the perfect interpretation, they all highlighted it was inevitably impossible to reach, and rather than focusing on the product, it was the process of aiming for perfection that was valuable.

The concept of authenticity, in itself highly debated and ambiguous across the literature, raised the equally contentious – and morally laden – expectations of being faithful or true to the composer. In discussing their perceived roles as interpreters, the pianists displayed a mix and tension between cultural expectations and individual aspirations. On one end of the continuum of opinion, two pianists expressed strong views on the subservient role of the performer, suggesting that, “the artist is nothing” in comparison to “the genius of the composer.” They described the importance of staying “true” to the composer, and approaching the score with “respect,” “honesty” and “integrity.” Yet, even here, one pianist paradoxically argued that the performer’s individual voice, or “soul,” was crucial to great artistry.

In complete contrast however, two others argued equally as passionately for their expressive or experimental rights as performers, speaking in terms of being “true” or “authentic” to their own “expression.” In between these two extremes, the pianists’ views highlighted the inherent tension between being faithful to the composer’s intentions, and their own expressive ideas or interpretations. Their comments suggested that the performer’s intention would contribute as much to an authentic performance as all other considerations of authentic practice. In this sense, the quest for ‘authenticity’ is as important in the performance of music written yesterday as that written 200 years ago. Yet, this is authenticity in a slightly different guise, one of “authentic intention” or “sincerity of expression,” or being “true to self” – far more intangible aspirations than simply adhering to the score.

The pianists made many references to the concept of creativity, and various forms of this word throughout these conversations, however, notably, it did not feature in their descriptions of the interpretative process. There were only two aspects of interpretation they directly described as creative: the choice of whether to adhere to the rules, bend or break them, within defined stylistic boundaries, and the feeling that striving for perfection can bring. While more direct questions on how interpretation could be creative may have produced more discussion, the creative aspect of piano performance was far less emphasised in these conversations than many may anticipate or advocate. As one pianist observed, piano playing “can easily become the least creative aspect of music.” In most cases, the pianists spoke of creativity as manifesting itself in composition and improvisation rather than performance as such. Indeed, half of the pianists expressed a desire to engage in these more ‘creative’ aspects of music-making, while also highlighting that these had been actively discouraged or disallowed during their training.
Moving from the ambiguous and conceptually challenging interpretative space between pianist, score and composer, the **expressive space** between the score and its translation into sound appeared equally intangible. This was evident in the pianists’ descriptions of their perceptions and ideals of sound and the spaces between them, and the challenges involved in achieving these. The instrument itself presented as the first of these. While **the piano** may be considered to be one of the most emphatically tangible of instruments, several pianists highlighted a key aspect of their art as the ability to transcend its highly evolved mechanical qualities, and achieve soundscapes beyond its inherent limitations as “a box of strings and hammers.”

Similarly, while sound itself is a tangible and measurable phenomenon, the way in which sound is perceived and appreciated was highly subjective. The pianists all emphasised the importance of producing “quality” sounds on the piano, yet highlighted the elusive nature of **sound quality**. While tangible factors related to various aspects of technique were noted, crucially, the underlying success of these relied on sensitivity (physical, aural, emotional); imagination (to hear or “evoke” various sounds); intention (expressive and emotional); and balancing perception, (subjective internal hearing) with projection (objective assessment of sound). The challenge in identifying what constitutes quality in sound was further emphasised by several observations that ideals will be influenced by both fashion and the evolving perceptions of the individual.

The **spaces between sounds** were considered crucial to expressive music-making, though similarly subjective, and influenced by personal perception. The pianists described a variety of ways in which the subtle relationships between sounds could be perceived and approached, ranging from the (contested) illusion of a true legato; the importance of balancing the rhythmic, lyrical and dynamic relationships between sounds; attending to “the precise shading of one note to another”; the “intervallic tensions” between sounds; or sculptural shapes created in the resonance of combined sounds. As they observed, the expressive potential of these spaces is dependent on the pianist being able to not only hear, but also feel, sense and imagine these relationships, and constantly balance these subjective ideals with objective listening.

**Silence** emerged as a powerful parallel to the medium of sound, featuring in the pianists’ discussion of the ‘spaces between the notes,’ and in how they communicated with the audience. They spoke of the “expressive possibilities” of silence, ranging from silence as a tool to encourage listening and make the notes more “meaningful,” to the silence itself being meaningful – and having its own “sound.” The importance of silence included not only the gaps of sound between individual notes, or those within and between phrases, but also the larger more conceptual – and metaphorical – relationship between sound and silence.
Finally, most pianists subscribed to the idea that **communication** is a key and significantly motivating factor in performance. They spoke of performance as an opportunity to give, share a journey, connect, bond, or achieve contact and oneness through music, and described a special atmosphere imbued with electricity, energy, excitement, intensity, or other felt — but indescribable forces. The backdrop for this communication or connection included both sound and silence, but for many, it was the latter that provided the means for two-way interaction. It was noted that particular qualities of sound would “speak to” or “draw the audience in,” expressed in terms of the “core,” “fullness,” or “intensity” of the sound rather than volume. They also spoke of being able to distinguish between qualities of the silence returned to them from the audience, whether hearing or feeling its content. This included being able to physically and emotionally sense the presence and reactions of their audience. As several highlighted, in this sense, performance was a “collaboration,” or a “a circuit of give and take.”

**The Intangible As…**

These discussions opened the way for more ‘concrete’ — but inevitably subjective — identification of what the pianists perceived was being expressed or communicated in the act of music-making, or felt they were engaging with: the intangible as emotion, beauty, truth, virtue, and the spiritual. While few will dispute that music communicates **emotions**, the exact nature and tangibility of these is the subject of much debate. Some have argued that the idea that music expresses profound or otherwise ineffable emotions is a myth. However, the pianists appeared to be positioned on the other side of this debate, expressing the opinion that the emotional attraction and power of music was very much to do with accessing and experiencing emotions more complex than those experienced in daily life, and crucially, that music could offer this experience in a way that words cannot.

Many of the pianists described the emotional impact of music in **physical or embodied** terms, either through their words or in gesture. Notably, these were experiences which could be felt somewhere physically but not necessarily verbalised, or processed into words. This was most often the case when attempting to explain the “deeper” ways in which music or their engagement with it moved them. On this topic there were many gestures employed, referring most frequently to the heart or the chest, but also the “gut,” the entire body, or in some cases extending to a larger space beyond it. Some spoke of the current or energy that can be felt, either through direct access to the music through the fingers on the keys, or in less tangible means of interaction with the audience in performance. While the word itself was not often used, embodiment seemed to be a strong underlying concept.

The trio of aesthetic and virtuous ideals often associated with music — beauty, truth and goodness — appealed in various ways to the pianists, yet as many highlighted, the concepts
themselves were extremely hard to pin down or account for. The opinions on beauty ranged from it being the most important aspect of music-making, to a pleasing but not crucial by-product or outcome of performance. Beauty was found in the composition itself, whether in the perfection of construction, the intensity and integrity of the composer’s emotions or “soul,” or as a “purity which touches us.” Far from being merely “pretty,” the beauty in the composition could be found in harsh, or even unpleasant sounds, and through these, variously interpreted as “spiritual,” “sad,” or even “barbaric.” Some suggested the intention or manner in which a performer engages with the music could determine if a performance was beautiful, yet this did not necessarily imply an intention to play “beautifully.” Indeed, for some, placing too much focus on beauty as a performer was noted as less than ideal for communicating it. Ultimately, the concept of beauty emerged as a desired, yet “complex,” “elusive,” and highly personal ideal.

In contrast to positivistic, objective, or universal truths sought through the empirical and analytical methods of science, the concept of truth in music and the arts appeared as far more pluralistic. In these discussions, truth emerged as challenging to both locate and discuss, variously interpreted as “seeing what is,” to a philosophical or spiritual truth, a reflection of “our perception of mortality,” or as “too bewildering” to think about. In most cases, the conversations quickly turned to truth in regards to how the musician engages with the composition, raising concepts such as integrity, honesty and sincerity. However, while two pianists spoke of being faithful to the score or the composer, most pianists emphasised their interest in being true to “self,” whether in terms of felt emotions, “authentic” or “genuine” expression, or an ongoing process of searching for “self-realisation.” Truth in performance was also discussed in terms of clarity of communication, as determined by the excitement it generated in the audience, or as something that could be felt, but was otherwise ineffable.

Reflecting the persisting yet contentious connection between music, goodness and virtue, several pianists directly highlighted the lack of evidence to support it, noting in particular that artistic genius, whether in a composer or performer could not be equated with a virtuous character. However, there appeared to be a general desire, if not in some cases adamant belief, that certain virtuous qualities could be associated with, or developed through engaging with music. This was evident in their general positive perceptions of music’s value to society as discussed in Chapter 8.3 above. Yet, the pianists diverged quite significantly in their views when discussing concepts such as integrity, sincerity, humility, morality, purity and courage. Reflecting their similarly diverging attitudes and approaches to the concept of truth, while two pianists suggested honesty as an integral part of “the process of mastering classical music,” it was described by one as an honesty towards the score, and another, as being “honest with your own process.” Humility was similarly presented in these two guises. Additionally, while noted as both important and developed through music-making, it was considered “susceptible to
corruption” by the ego. While the purity of the performer, whether an intention or emotion, registered with several pianists, others highlighted the concepts of sincerity, integrity, and morality as essentially problematic and elusive. However, even the pianist most critical of these maintained overall that the ideals of goodness, as with beauty and truth are worth aspiring to, and that music “will lead us into a consciousness of what these things are.” It was evident however, that the more closely these ideals are examined, the more elusive they become.

Undoubtedly the most intangible aspects of the discussions in this area were those that highlighted connections between music and the spirit, or the spiritual. Despite these concepts receiving little to no reference in mainstream publications such as Grove Music Online, and suggestions that both academia and society have shifted “to a purely this-worldly concept of music” (Hammerstein, 1973b), all but one of the pianists described aspects of their engagement with music in terms that could be broadly categorised under the banner of the spiritual. Significantly, only one pianist explicitly confirmed a religious belief, and another noted Buddhism as a serious practice. While several others acknowledged or appreciated some of the underlying values of religion, most were keen to distance themselves from being associated with it. Nevertheless, they variously articulated spiritual concepts in terminology reflective of their respective perspectives and values beyond music. While not easy to locate, or explicit in their responses, the spiritual emerged as personal and intrinsically human (soul or spirit); as something embedded in the musical composition itself, whether consciously or not, by the composer; and in the experience of engaging with music, whether felt as a sense of awe, connecting with something “alive” that “communicates,” achieving “transcendence” through intense concentration, or in the communal experience with an audience. In each case however, it was considered beyond measure, and many resisted attempting to define or talk about it.

For most of the pianists, these aspects of the intangible merged or communed with others in the ultimate state of communication and musicianship, which many refer to as peak experience. Related but not identical to Csikszentmihályi’s concept of ‘flow,’ peak experience was generally described as abandoning or even superseding all conscious and tangible aspects of the art. Many similarities could be observed from the pianists’ descriptions. The experiences were referred to as definitive and significant moments, positive, motivating and sought after. It was apparent they perceived something important was happening, whether noticing a physical impact, increased abilities, an altered sense of time; or significantly, an altered sense of awareness and self. The latter ranged from a loss of self-consciousness to an expanded sense of self, or transcendence of self. While peak experiences were considered elusive and unpredictable, a number of factors were noted as potentially influential, including the environment (particularly the audience), the musical content, the musician’s relationship to the music, prior preparation, and state of mind during performance. Significantly, many emphasised
that these experiences occurred when they were not trying, thinking or controlling the process. However, perceptions of peak experience during performance were noted as ambiguous, and not necessarily aligned with audience experience or performance success.

When taking into account the wide range of potentially influential factors in achieving peak experiences during performance, the demands of the vocation and the desires of those aspiring to the highest experiences of artistry involve a greater level of complexity – and indeed ambiguity – than is most commonly reported. However, if peak experiences are highly sought after and motivating, then they should surely be more widely acknowledged, discussed, encouraged and studied. Additionally, and critically, if the potential to experience such moments while performing is related to perceptions of either what is possible, or what should be experienced, this begs important questions about how we educate classical pianists, and what messages are being instilled in Western classical piano culture.

In summary, it is clear that the pianists interviewed for this study locate the intangibles in piano performance across a number of areas in increasing degrees of relevance. They see some intangible aspects in the score, the instrument, the skills of the craft, and the contingencies of performance, though attribute a greater degree of intangibility to the interpretative, expressive, artistic and communicative aspects of their art. Finally, they locate the most prominent intangible aspects of their art within a realm which could be described as either the metaphorical or metaphysical, or spiritual: transcending the score and indeed the sound into the silence and spaces of the musical experience; the act of performance to the expression of self; and ultimately, through peak experience, transcending the self. In addition to the structure presented and themes discussed in the previous chapters, this might be summarised as in the following table, highlighting a continuum from tangible to intangible to aspects of piano performance, while also representing an increasing association with what the pianists perceive to be excellence in music-making.

**Table 9.1 Locating Intangibles in Piano Performance**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TANGIBLE</th>
<th>INTANGIBLE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The score</td>
<td>Interpretative process</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The instrument</td>
<td>Expression in sound</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Virtuosity</td>
<td>Artistry</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Performance</td>
<td>Communication, connection</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Between and beyond the notes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Silence and space</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Self-expression and soul</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Transcending the self</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

While tables of this nature inevitably constitute oversimplified representations of complex, non-linear and non-binary worlds of perceptions, they can serve as conceptual maps to raise awareness and position various key intangibles at play in the art of classical piano performance.
9.2 Accessing the Intangible

As discussed in detail across the previous two chapters, under the broad themes of accessing, communicating, and valuing intangibles in piano performance, the pianists referred to a wide range of factors that were conducive to operationalising intangibles in piano performance and others that they felt were less so. These are key outcomes of this thesis, as they help explain the ‘low profile’ of intangible elements in the various discourses on piano performance, and form the basis for recommendations and further research. Taking an overview of the preceding chapters, this section considers the pianists’ perceptions of these factors in three domains that emerged as the key loci for tensions between the tangible and the intangible: 1) the training and expectations within the practice and culture of professional pianists; 2) the experience of performance and 3) communicating and valuing intangible aspects of music-making. Inevitably the three overlap, interrelate, and influence each other, and any significant change to valuing and experiencing intangibles will need to occur across all domains.

Training and Culture of Professional Pianists

Many pianists pointed out that in the realm of intangibles, the intellectual approach could be in direct conflict with accessing emotions, a more embodied and complex form of knowing, when engaging with the ‘deeper’ or more ‘profound’ aspects of the music, or in achieving peak experiences during performance. They highlighted that the intangible aspects of music-making could not be taught in the same manner as historical or theoretical facts, and very often required less explicit, cognitive or even less conscious modes of transmission. These included the power of sound to “wake something up” or “open up that door,” to being informed, “imbibing” or “sensing” knowledge through the “intuitive example” or physical presence of the teacher. As pedagogues, they spoke of opening students up to the intangible, instilling different ways of thinking, and seeking the most suitable approach to accommodate the needs of individual learners.

Additionally, it was noted that the personality of the pianist will impact on how they teach and learn, and while some may never engage at a consciously intellectual level, this does not necessarily equate with un-expressive playing, or constitute a lack of musical understanding. Together, their views suggests that closer scrutiny should be given to the increasing emphasis in music research on the conscious and cognitive aspects of learning and teaching, and more attention to musicians’ concepts of intuition, which includes the perception that this phenomenon is more than simply a subconscious manifestation of previously acquired conscious knowledge. As is evident from many voices in the above discussions, an overly simplistic or dogmatic view of the interplay of conscious and subconscious mechanisms does not account for all of the pianists’ experiences as both pedagogues and performers.
A number of the pianists highlighted the importance of informed pianism, and undoubtedly a great deal of time is spent on the accumulation and mastery of technique and repertoire, theoretical, stylistic and historical knowledge. However, the pianists highlighted that an awareness, sense, or appreciation of the intangible was not something to be gained like other musical skills, but came from “opening up” or “letting go.” Indeed, as discussed further below, the ability to ‘let go’ of much of what has been consciously acquired, or that which is more tangible in the skill set was presented as a key factor in both great artistry and in order to achieve peak experiences in performance. This suggests a need to consider more seriously how to help facilitate or prepare pianists for that process in pedagogical practices, as well as the institutions that support these. Given that each student will approach such a task at different times and with different capacities, it is likely to be a very individual process, which makes it difficult to plan, account for, or control within institutional environments that require a structured, uniform and accountable approach to educational curricula. The challenge for musicians, music educators and researchers appears to be finding a balance between teaching the musical methods or techniques (the pathways of knowledge) and allowing ‘space’ for the ‘opening up’ or ‘letting go’ so crucial for artistry.

In Australia, as in many developed countries, there is a highly evolved educational structure in place to facilitate the study of piano at both amateur and advanced levels, which in principle is highly conducive to enabling young musicians to become accomplished performers. However, while many of the pianists highlighted the direct relationship between teacher and student as most influential, some expressed concerns about the environments and expectations within contemporary specialised music institutions, suggesting various ways in which they felt intangible aspects crucial to great artistry could be compromised by an overly ‘systematised’ training. They highlighted that a growing emphasis on institutional accountability, “accelerated learning” and gaining the “competitive edge” could lead to pedagogical practices dictated by quantifiable and measurable aspects of performance; outcomes based primarily on the demands and expectations of exams or competition environments; the system rather than the development of the individual learner; and the product rather than the process.

When translated into performance practice, this could lead to pianists being overly focused on the tangible factors of technical and note perfection; exhibiting a tendency to play ‘safe’ rather than taking risks; having limited aspirations beyond score-based or standardised interpretations (including a prescribed sense of authenticity); and foster a sense of competitiveness, which in some cases could lead to a stifling sense of panic and fear. As many argued across these discussions, such attitudes and approaches towards music-making were antithetical to their artistic ideals, which required the personal voice and perceptions, time for these to evolve, a sense of artistic freedom, and willingness to experiment in order to achieve individually
expressive, creative, and inspired interpretations.

Within the culture of professional piano practice a variety of converging influences have led to an excessive emphasis on note-perfection in performance. As identified in the literature, and reflected in the voices of the pianists, these included the exposure and scrutiny associated with the recording industry; the historically informed performance practice movement (through encouraging a focus on reliable, historically correct and de-personalised editions); and growing expectations of accountability leading to an undue emphasis on those aspects of performance that can be quantified and marked in exams and competitions, more or less objectively. While it was clear that perfection was something that the pianists aspired to, a crucial factor in fostering intangibles in their music-making appears to be how perfection is conceptualised and approached. None of the pianists advocated messy performances, yet while maintaining that note-accuracy was important they seemed to regard this as a beginning rather than end. They expressed their interest in other, more intangible forms of perfection, such as “contextual,” or “gestural” perfection, achieving emotional “clarity,” connection, or “intensity,” or preserving the “integrity of the music.”

As several pianists explicitly highlighted, these ideals could sometimes be in direct conflict with aspirations for note-perfect performances, and most of the pianists were quick to emphasise that being overly focused on the notes alone could be at the expense of the less quantifiable expressive spaces in between the notes, crucial to enabling the music to ‘speak.’ Indeed, they expressed concerns in various ways throughout these discussions that a culture of perfection fostered an overly standardised, mechanical approach to playing, a focus on virtuosity rather than artistry, on display rather than musicianship, and on impressing rather than touching or moving an audience, or sharing a musical experience. As their combined voices argued, pianists who are “seduced” by the idea that “clean and neat” – or fast and loud – performances are expected and desired, run the risk of producing sterile, mechanical or robotic interpretations, failing to communicate or connect with their audience, or indeed, forgetting the “very essence” of music-making.

**Experience of Performance**

A number of factors were presented in these discussions as influencing access to the more intangible realms during performance. These included the extent to which a pianist is engaged with, or feels the emotions in the music, and the challenges in doing so; the problems associated with conscious thought, and the benefits of being informed by less conscious modes of knowing; the critical and multi-faceted role of the body; and incorporating all of these elements, the paradoxical desire to affirm and express – yet transcend – the self in performance. As could be expected, some of these overlap with factors identified in relation to learning and
professional piano culture at large; others, however, are specific to the individual path of the performer.

The majority of the pianists explicitly argued that personality and individuality were crucial to artistry and needed to be embraced and cultivated. Yet, many voices observed that all too often today’s generation of pianists attempt to imitate or duplicate what others have done – at the expense of artistic potential. In addition to accessing and expressing a personal ‘voice,’ in order to communicate, speak or tell a story through the music, collectively it was felt that a pianist must have a connection or sensitivity to the musical content, including the emotional, psychological, spiritual, profound, or otherwise unnameable “essence” of the work. Conversely, factors deemed to obstruct a free flow of musical expression included being superficial (vs. profound); inauthentic, impure, unclean, and, potentially, manipulative; and relying on preconceptions about the content of the music, the composers, or ideal interpretations.

Many spoke about the problems, or “tyranny,” of conscious thought during performance, and conversely the importance of being open to less conscious modes of awareness, identified explicitly in some cases as intuition. Approaching and dealing with the emotions however was more ambiguous. While some felt they should truly feel the emotions during performance, others emphasised this could be counterproductive and risky. Several pianists spoke of their role as a pianist as being akin to that of an actor, suggesting they are removed from the emotion, or conversely, have embodied the music to the extent that they become a conduit or channel for its expressive content – or indeed the composer. The complexity of the concept of ‘feeling,’ as with the challenges of accessing, managing and talking about the emotions was particularly highlighted in those cases where the experience was physical, rather than conceptual.

The importance of the personal, individual – and indeed human – aspects of music-making was reflected in the emphasis given to the physical or embodied aspects of musical experience. The pianists described physical, emotional and psychological tensions or “blocks” that could restrict sensitivity to and expression of the intangible aspects of music-making, as well as a fulfilling engagement with their instrument. They spoke of needing to “open up” to the intangible and noted this often needed to take place away from the instrument, suggesting activities such as drawing or moving to music, singing, dancing or drama classes, theatre-sports, or through practices broadly perceived as ‘alternative,’ such as meditation, yoga, acupuncture, ayurvedic medicine or kinesthesiology. The pianists’ desire for a more embodied engagement with the music and their instrument, particularly when considered alongside their comments on the problems of thinking, or conscious thought, invites a re-evaluation of the degree to which pedagogues, and curricula, adequately deal with the body – beyond the technical demands.
required of the craft. Fortunately, this is a topic that is attracting a growing body of literature (cf. Chan, 2005; Davidson, 2002a, 2007).

As noted above, in contrast to the acquisition of skills or knowledge, many also made reference to the need to “let go” in the pursuit of artistry. This concept was noted across a range of topics: letting go of a focus on the notes, the score and technical perfection; preconceived ideas of how the music ‘should go’ or composers ‘should sound’; an overconfidence in one’s own knowledge; narrow-mindedness; the critical and judgmental voice; or control and conscious thought. These fixed, static, or dogmatic approaches to music-making, while difficult to quantify or even identify, constitute substantial obstacles for performance. Equally – if not more – elusive, the concept of transcending or letting go of aspects of the self in performance was to appear in many guises throughout the conversations, from transcending the thinking, feeling or conscious self; transcending the ego in order to reach the ‘true’ self, and/or the separation between self and others; to transcending human limitations (connecting with the spiritual).

While self-esteem and self-worth were noted as critical for positive experiences at the instrument, and allowing access to the intangible, the ego was highlighted as both the source of anxiety in performance and a barrier to reaching the ‘true’ self. Rather than suggesting a complete loss of self, it appears to be the separation between self and others (the ego) that the pianists most desire to transcend. This is evident in phrases such as being “in and out,” opening “yourself up as a channel,” being “a conduit through which something passes,” or becoming “part of something greater.” This ‘something greater’ was conceived of in various ways by the pianists, though all felt it was impossible to define or pinpoint in words. However, it is evident from these discussions that we can talk about it, and the way we do so may be crucial to how it is understood or valued.

Communicating and Valuing the Intangible

There appear to be a number of – sometimes competing – forces influencing the way musicians do and do not talk about intangible aspects of music-making. Compounding the evident difficulties many had in finding the words to describe the more elusive aspects, conceptual ideals, or physical experiences of their practice, while not explicitly discussed, it was clear that talking about emotions and the body were sensitive topics for some. This was noticeable in softer speech, more reserved or vulnerable body language, or tendencies to shift into humour, or indeed away from the topic. More explicitly, some pianists suggested that attempting to unravel the intangible could be disrespectful, or damaging to artistic instinct or inspiration. In the majority of cases, however, the resistance to discussing the intangible appeared to be based on an underlying concern with being seen to be irrational, unintelligent, non-intellectual, lacking in academic rigour, or implying links to religion, or the mystical.
This latter concern was particularly prominent. While most pianists confirmed a sense of ‘the spiritual’ as important in either the music, how they engaged with it, or in their lives, many noted a resistance to being aligned with the word itself. This appeared to be largely due to how spiritual was defined, and as several explicitly observed, this in itself was incredibly difficult. There were two pianists who suggested that one should be silent about the spiritual or deeper meanings of music. Others said that reducing the spiritual to words could be disrespectful and a sign of limited perception, or that some things should not be explained, and we should keep some “mystery in the heart.” As can be seen from these comments, the words we use and concepts we align ourselves with can be conducive, or constitute obstacles for considering intangibility as valuable. Similarly, an emphasis on what is tangible or knowable may hinder whether, and how, we embrace what is not.

Returning to one of the particularly elusive concepts to emerge early in this research, as discussed in Chapter Two, the notion of ‘intrinsic’ value, while appealing to a number of voices attempting to promote both music and the arts, is both ambiguous, and vulnerable. One of the identified – philosophical – challenges in pinning it down appeared in the seemingly contradictory views that music’s value is inherently personal and internal, yet beyond and distant from us. As Johnson points out, “classical music, like all art, has always been based on a paradoxical claim: that it relates to the immediacy of everyday life but not immediately […] it creates for itself a distance from the everyday while preserving a relation to it” (2002, p. 5). Copland similarly claims, “there is something about music that keeps its distance even at the moment that it engulfs us. It is at the same time outside and away from us and inside and part of us.” The “very nature” and value of music, he suggests is “to give us the distillation of sentiments, the essence of experience transfused and heightened and expressed in such fashion that we may contemplate it at the same instant that we are swayed by it” (1959, p. 20).

This dichotomy between the personal, ‘everyday’ human aspect of music, and the ‘heightened,’ distant, external or otherwise unreachable experience was similarly reflected in the many aspects of music-making the pianists in this study considered as motivating, inspiring and valuable. They spoke of music’s “uncanny ability” to reflect the non-static nature of our emotional life or intangible aspects of our “humanness,” or provide a “way of experiencing the human condition, in its totality.” Additionally, there were many references to the intangible as something ‘deeper’ – or significantly personal and internal, whether in terms of emotions, subconscious or intuitive forms of knowing, or the ‘true self.’

Conversely, many of the pianists spoke of their interest in – and aspirations towards – a higher ideal or experience that took them above and beyond the personal. One highlighted his key motivation for performing as being able to connect with an “uncanny energy” that wasn’t his,
and might be described as a “transpersonal” or even ‘universal’ experience. Others spoke of striving for a “kind of platonic ideal of perfect interpretation” which may reflect the sublime and divine; the crucial “idea” or inspiration in music-making, the origins of which are “a mystery” and “so intangible”; and the potential to experience “something bigger” beyond the personal and indeed comprehensible. Or as was also suggested, music might be a “representation of” or “lead us into a consciousness of” something “purer” or “more idealistic,” and “all the more powerfully through not being subject to the usual human frailties and problems.” In this light, the pianists presented the intangible realm they aspire to and experience through music-making as both located ‘inside’ or ‘within,’ yet also beyond, external and perhaps unattainable.

Additionally, as highlighted in Chapters 4.1 and 4.2, and indeed throughout these discussions, there was widespread agreement that ‘meaning’ – as with any potential ‘value’ in music was highly subjective, personal, and based on individual perception. However, again highlighting the paradoxical nature of this topic, the pianists also spoke of intangible qualities embedded in ‘great’ music that a pianist aspires to reach, or must be aware of, sensitive or awake to. Thus, they represented both ends of contradictory views on this topic; there is a potentially intangible value and/or meaning of music that may exist in the work itself, yet this potential is reliant on, and perhaps manifested through what we ascribe – as individuals – to it. In the absence of any concrete resolutions to the challenging and ambiguous notion of intrinsic value, this leads back to one of the triggers for embarking on this research; the questions of whether there is an identifiable intangible value in music or our engagement with it, and if there is anything necessarily wrong with seeking or identifying tangible or extrinsic justifications for its place in our education systems or lives.

Evidently, some of the pianists had given more thought than others to the question of how to best advocate music. Indeed, there was an overall impression that many felt that advocacy was not their responsibility, or as some explicitly suggested, was not necessary to ensure music’s survival. Additionally, most of those that did comment on this were not overly concerned by the use of scientifically measurable and/or extrinsic benefits to support music’s place in education – if they could be found. However, half of the pianists felt it important to qualify this, variously highlighting that such arguments were not ideally what we should be talking about, promoting as most important, using as motivational messages for engaging with music, or appreciating and valuing about music in society. With the rise in various cross-disciplinary studies into music’s demonstrable tangible and extrinsic effects, advocates for music may find themselves able to discuss the ‘value of music’ in the terminology of the day. Yet, given the ideals expressed by the pianists in this study, and the factors they noted as both more and less conducive to these, the question remains as to how valuable, relevant, helpful or indeed counterproductive these arguments will be to musicians, the music they ‘produce’ and the audiences that listen to them.
While all of the pianists noted the challenges of defining what they ideally felt to be music’s essential value, arguably, there were many phrases that could be picked from their responses to help promote the more intangible aspects of engaging with music: music as a means to be “in tune with yourself,” to realise your “full potential,” to experience “the human condition in its totality” or be “part of something greater than yourself;” to “balance” our emotions; access another “way of knowing”; to “broaden” or “enrich us”; to “make the world a happier place” or even as a means to achieve “salvation.” In addition, references were also made to the potential for music to foster community spirit; virtuous character traits; a sense of, or access to the spiritual; or as an avenue for self-expression and creativity, although some of these remained ambiguous and contentious.

However, the pianists highlighted a range of broader cultural and political influences they felt competed against, restricted or compromised this potential intangible value – and their potential to make any difference in attempting to communicate it. These included a focus on the commercial aspects of music, music as a product or industry or merely as entertainment; pressure to conform artistic practice and choices to “marketing strategies and middle managements”; turning music into a competition; a bias towards the intellectual, or reasoned, aspects of music; dogmatic approaches to value – of any kind; or only appreciating aspects of music the market or “society says are valuable.” Additionally noted as less-conducive were political environments that focus on the material, economic, or scientific rather than the emotional, aesthetic, or spiritual aspects of being human; that lack attention to “morality and culture”; that discourage people to “think for themselves and question things”; or view society as “a collection of consumers” rather than “citizens.”

Considering the pianists’ perceptions throughout this thesis, and over-arching categories under which these have been addressed in this section, it is possible to tentatively map out some of the factors they consider more and less conducive for operationalising intangibles in music-making. While reducing the rich and diverse views of the pianist to any kind or reductive table is problematic, the table below is not intended to suggest clear-cut dualities – or indeed any notion of ‘right’ and ‘wrong’, but rather, that a balanced approach to music-making arguably requires an awareness of both tangible and intangible aspects, and the ability to negotiate these dichotomies more like continuums. This is relevant for performers, pedagogues and advocates alike.
**Table 9.2. Less Conducive and More-Conducive Factors in Accessing the Intangible**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>LESS-CONDUCTIVE</th>
<th>MORE CONDUCTIVE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>TRAINING AND CULTURE</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Defining, testing and selecting for talent</td>
<td>Encouraging all children to make music</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emphasising technique and virtuosity</td>
<td>Fostering and allowing space for artistry</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Focusing on canonic works</td>
<td>Encouraging composition and improvisation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prioritising the music</td>
<td>Acknowledging the musician</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Focusing on the score</td>
<td>Embracing the spaces between the notes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teaching on the basis of set criteria</td>
<td>Facilitating learning (according to individual)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intellectualising / lecturing / talking</td>
<td>Embracing non-verbal means of transmission</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Being competitive</td>
<td>Focusing on the act of making and sharing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Focusing on note perfection</td>
<td>Striving for a more holistic ‘perfection’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aiming to be polished</td>
<td>Aiming to be profound</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>EXPERIENCE OF PERFORMANCE</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Being ‘authentic’</td>
<td>Being true to self</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Avoiding silence</td>
<td>Embracing silence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thinking too much</td>
<td>Letting go of conscious thought</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intellectualising / being ‘in the head’</td>
<td>Acknowledging and embracing the body</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reproduction with prescribed feeling</td>
<td>Embracing one’s own feelings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overconfidence in preconceived ideas</td>
<td>Encouraging a sense of wonder and awe</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ego</td>
<td>Losing or transcending self-consciousness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Playing safe</td>
<td>Taking risks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Duplicating others</td>
<td>Cultivating personal interpretation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aiming to impress</td>
<td>Aiming to share, communicate and connect</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>COMMUNICATING AND VALUING</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Focusing on explicit discourse</td>
<td>Awareness of the implicit and non-discursive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Focusing on words</td>
<td>Being sensitive to the silences</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Focusing on the rational and intellectual</td>
<td>Embracing the irrational and emotional</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Focusing on the measurable</td>
<td>Acknowledging the immeasurable</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Being dogmatic about beliefs and values</td>
<td>Being open-minded and respectful</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Focusing on extrinsic benefits</td>
<td>Cultivating awareness of ‘intrinsic’ benefits</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Valuing the material, economic and scientific</td>
<td>Embracing the totality of human experience</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Viewing music as a product</td>
<td>Viewing music as a process</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
9.3 Finding the Balance

We put thirty spokes together and call it a wheel; but it is on the space where there is nothing that the usefulness of the wheel depends […]. Therefore just as we take advantage of what is, we should recognize the usefulness of what is not. (Lao-Tzu, transl. Waley, 1958, p. 155)

Echoing this Taoist perspective, and that of many voices sourced in this research, Nupen (1999) observes that while the “30,000 musical notes” a great pianist may play in any one performance are impressive, it is the “delicate balance” of these with what lies between, behind or beyond the notes that truly inspires us. In an effort to consider what is involved in achieving this balance, in this thesis I have sought to bring into focus these intangible spaces of music-making through exploring some of the perceptions, aspirations and considerations that influence the sounds pianists do make.

Considering these intangible spaces through the perceptions of others has demanded lateral and cross-disciplinary thinking. It has necessitated allowing the potential for the spoken and written word to represent individual and metaphorical choices in terminology, and a richness of symbolic or conceptual interpretations; spaces between sounds, between objects, between people, and those within bodies; spaces in timing, and the progress of time; the sculpted spaces; the silent spaces; and the otherwise unseen, invisible or conceptual spaces that resist more concrete definitions. The preceding chapters demonstrate that there are indeed many intangible spaces and aspects of music-making to be considered.

While – through the voices of the pianists interviewed – I have sketched the contours of a number of intangibles in this document, the challenge involved in attempting to find a standardised model for music-making that caters for the many intangible themes to emerge is evident. However, while the realm of the intangible is highly personal, when reading between the lines and across the many spaces of intangibility described, I would like to conclude by drawing particular attention to three elusive and related conceptual strands that emerged as both personally, and more broadly, valued by the pianists. Appearing either explicitly or implicitly in the discussions thus far, in this section, I will refer to these as The Self, The Silent and The Sacred. In light of the angles through which this topic was approached, these appear particularly relevant for further consideration and research into the challenges involved when attempting to locate, engage with, teach, talk about, and advocate intangibles in music-making.
The Self

As could be expected, the view that music-making is a means of self-expression is widespread. It is one to which over half of those participating in Australian surveys consistently subscribe – and historically the piano is the first choice as an instrument to realise this, only recently equalled by the guitar (AMA, 2001, 2007). These expressive ideals were echoed in the voices of the professional pianists interviewed in this study, who emphasised the importance of the personality, individuality, and the “fundamental nature,” or “soul” of the pianist. They also spoke of their desires to be “true to self,” or engaging with music as a “search for self,” and towards this goal, their interest in the creative acts of improvisation and composition. However, considering the underlying expectations and realities as observed by many in this research, the degree to which the broader culture of contemporary classical piano performance encourages or allows space for either self-expression or explicit forms of creativity may be – as some suggested – limited.

Within a standard classical piano training, where musical expression is achieved through the interpretation of a pre-existing canon of music, pianists almost exclusively focus on music composed by someone else, most often from a different era and in many respects, different culture. To be successful, they are required to do so with a high degree of fidelity to the original, and despite the many arguments countering claims to ‘authentic’ performance, pianists still operate within a culture that advocates faithfulness to, respect for and humility in the face of the composer and/or ‘the work.’ Additionally, the most obvious forms of accessing the creative self in music are no longer skill sets required in order to become a professional classical pianist.

As highlighted in these discussions, and the literature, this suggests a less than ideal scenario for both the music and the musician. Many voices can be heard complaining about the lack of individuality amongst today’s generation of pianists and competitions winners, and as seen explicitly in the voices of several pianists, attitudes that the performer is a “servant” or “nothing” in comparison with the composer suggest little space for a pianist to develop a healthy sense of self or self-esteem. The body is an equally crucial part of the ‘self’ and plays an important role in accessing intangibles. However, the pianists highlighted the embodied self as one of the more challenging aspects to engage with at the instrument, and one of the least supported aspects in institutionalised music learning and making.

Conversely, presenting a paradoxical relationship to self, and one that goes beyond the oft-cited link between learning to play a musical instrument as a means of ‘self-expression,’ the pianists spoke in various ways of their desire to transcend the self, and the rare moments of experiencing this in performance. This adds greater complexity to discussions involving the self and music-making, and suggests that not only psychological and social, but also metaphysical and moral
factors might be at play. This paradox between expressing and transcending the self is one that appears to be of relevance in many other contentious themes in this document, such as being a channel for the music, getting out of the way to let the music speak, or conversely, speaking through music. While these are areas not usually addressed within standardised conservatoire curricula, a more serious consideration of the relationship between these aspirations of self-expression and transcending the self may provide insights of benefit not only to performers but also to other disciplinary explorations of the self. For example, what is the exact relationship between the two? Are they mutually exclusive, or is it necessary to embrace and ‘know the self’ before being able to transcend it?

While the concept of the ‘self’ was one of the most elusive and ambiguous ones encountered in this study, it is evidently important to pianists. However, the extent to which we are ourselves, express ourselves, or come to know ourselves as performing pianists in the current culture of Western classical music is worth further discussion. Indeed, if we value and advocate the act of making music for its potential to encourage self-esteem, self-expression or the creative self, given contemporary expectations, demands and values promoted in the profession, it may be argued that training to be a classical pianist may not be the most appropriate pathway to take.

Additionally, given that the opportunity to transcend the self in performance was described as inspirational and motivational, this ideal and the challenges associated with it deserve more attention. In order to embrace and foster the full potential of music-making within the culture of Western classical piano-playing, the views expressed in this study invite a re-evaluation of the emphasis that is frequently placed on the music over the musician. That is, how we can better embrace, encourage and nurture the self or the personal ideals in the pianists we train, and in the culture of the profession we prepare them for?

The Silent

Ultimately, and poetically, many of the trains of thought in these discussions led to the concept and metaphor of silence: from the pianists’ approach to and experience of the intangible in their music-making, to how many responded when asked to talk about it, and some of the broader parallels they drew between music and life. In this sense silence emerged as a key intangible in this research, sharing – along with sound – the role of a medium through which to access, express, and communicate these intangibles. Indeed, the distinction between sound and silence has been questioned by some, most famously John Cage (see Cage, 2011). However, while sound was referred to in terms of “speaking” or “giving,” in contrast to its more audible counterpart, silence was presented as that which encourages ‘listening,’ and crucially, as the more powerful means of ‘connecting.’ In considering the parallels between the pianists’ various references to this connection through silence, and insights from others on this topic, the
intangible again appears to be both deeply personal, while at the same time transcending the individual.

Many of the pianists spoke of silence as a means of preparing for performance. Accessed through solitude, being still, or formal meditation practice, it was considered variously as a space to reflect in, “collect our thoughts,” as a means of “lessening thought,” or reaching a state of “emptiness.” Crucially, it featured as a means through which to recharge, rebalance, be present, more deeply know, or connect with the embodied ‘self.’ In the absence of the voices of others, or one’s own internal dialogue, meditation could provide “glimpses of what is really you.” As noted earlier, this suggestion that the self can be found in the silence that lies beyond thought, sounds, or in solitude has been made by many in contemplative and spiritual traditions.

As highlighted by the pianists in Chapter 4.3, while sound was a means of “projecting” the music, it was the silences during performances that enabled a two-way communication between the performer and audience. Silence was noted as encouraging the audience to both listen to what was being ‘spoken’ in the sound and to participate in the exchange by “filling in the blanks,” and for the pianist, providing an elusive means of hearing or sensing how their message was being received. As they observed, it was in these silences that they felt the deepest connection with their audience, gauging their success in doing so by the quality of the silence returned to them.

Just as the more powerful moments of connection in performance were felt in the silences, it was suggested this might also be true in daily communications. In an observation of direct relevance for both, Howat noted with regret an increasing absence of silence in music-making, and suggested this was “a psychological thing: we’re scared of silence.” As he observed, citing research – and a phenomenon not unfamiliar to most – people who “really know each other well” are able to sit comfortably in prolonged silence. Without this connection however, silence is uncomfortable, embarrassing and usually avoided. When viewed in this light, our resistance to silence suggests a sensitivity and hesitancy to revealing oneself. Conversely, when comfortable in doing so, and when truly connecting with the ‘self’ of another, people tend to be able to embrace it.

The pianists described their deepest connection with the audience in terms of an expanded sense of self, or transcendence of self. Highlighting the links between the self, transcendence and silence, Savage suggested that by beginning and ending in silence, a musical performance reflects at a deeper level “a kind of birth to death experience,” an analogy, as noted in Chapter 5.2, also made by others (e.g., Barenboim and Jankélévitch). When considering this association between the silence – whether in music or our minds – and the unavoidable finiteness of our
own lives, we are perhaps presented with a more profound explanation of why we might, as Howat observed, have reason to avoid it. On a more optimistic note, Barenboim suggests that in the act of playing music, “it is possible to achieve a unique state of peace, partly due to the fact that one can control, through sound, the relationship between life and death, a power that obviously is not bestowed upon human beings in life.” As he explains, through silence we can metaphorically play with, and experience a sense of timelessness and transcendence (2009, p. 9-10). DeNora suggests this is shared by the audience, who, by listening intently in silence are able to “abandon, albeit temporarily, the realm of material and temporal being” (2000, p. 57).

Silence thus presents as potentially more powerful than both words and sounds as a medium through which to ‘connect’ with the self, with others, and through breaking down barriers between self and others, the transcendent or spiritual. While references to silence in relation to music are ubiquitous (in various forms and often implicit), the broader and interdisciplinary relevance of this area has been little explored (Losseff & Doctor, 2007). Given that these intangible aspects of music-making were highly valued by the pianists, the role that silence plays in music-making surely deserves more serious attention in performance practice, pedagogy and research.

The challenge of training for – or fostering – silence within our pedagogical or institutional curricula is evident, given the potentially subconscious or psychological fears that may play a role, from a sense of vulnerability in being and sharing ‘oneself’ with others, to coming face to face with our mortality. However, if the silences in music foster positive and powerful moments of connection, and as Savage suggested, audiences come to concerts specifically seeking them, an understanding – if not mastery – of silence is arguably as important as sound. Additionally, as these voices suggest, music may be one of the most powerful and approachable tools through which we can access, play with, shape, and perhaps come to terms with silence, a phenomenon that affects the way we communicate with others, and whether we are always aware of it or not, impacts daily on our lives.

**The Sacred**

As with the ambiguity surrounding the nature and role of the ‘self’ in performance, the complex notion of ‘intrinsic value’ remained paradoxical. On the one hand it is presented as inherently human, highly personal and ‘internal,’ and on the other, as being beyond and distant from the individual, situated either in the music itself, or more mysteriously an ‘external’ ideal that it represents. As noted in Chapter Two – whether explicitly or implicitly – the latter often implies the realm of the divine or sacred. Taking into consideration the range of pianists’ views on this topic, it is possible to consider this paradox as an integral part of music’s value through
adopting a broader perspective of the ‘sacred’; one that embraces both the highly personal and the transcendent or spiritual ideals of music and music-making.

While most often referred to within a divine context, the sacred might also be considered as that which we hold sacred or most valuable to us, which, while encompassing the transcendent and the spiritual, does not necessarily point to what is beyond us. The sacred can also be what we consider precious in, or about ourselves, from the embodied, physical aspects of our being, to what inspires and motivates us, what we are passionate about, our sense of self, integrity, personal truth or search for meaning. Ultimately, what is sacred for one person will not necessarily be sacred for another. However, from the pianists’ voices and those of other musicians, there were several aspects that stood out as personally valued in the artistic experience: the expressive, creative, emotional, embodied, intuitive, ‘deeper’ and very human aspects of their engagement with music; their aspirations towards a higher ideal – or something beyond the daily experience, whether conceptual, aesthetic or inspirational; and through performance, the potential to transcend the boundaries of separation between self and others, experienced either as a direct connection with others, or with a spiritual realm.

When considering what musicians value about their art form within this broader context of the sacred, the dichotomy and conflict between internal and external, personal and universal that appears in intrinsic arguments is mediated. By further considering the parallels between concepts related to ‘intrinsic’ and that which the pianists held sacred about their music-making, a more appropriate angle on the noted resistance to tangible, measurable or quantifiable ‘extrinsic’ outcomes might also be offered. In each of the valued or ‘sacred’ aspect of music-making noted above, the pianists highlighted their immeasurable nature, and many resisted attempts to define, quantify or even talk about them. This supports the view, expressed by numerous voices, that music’s inherent appeal and value lies in its capacity to act as a symbolic reference to aspects of the human experience considered unknowable by other means – or indeed unspeakable.

Additionally, in a similar way to suggestions that a focus on the extrinsic, utilitarian or instrumental can compromise intrinsic value, others suggest that the sacred (or symbolic) can be ‘desecrated’ or demeaned if intellectualised, rationalised, conceptualised, objectified, commercialised, or de-personalised. This concern is perhaps particularly prominent given that voices from a variety of perspectives have observed that references to ‘the sacred,’ whether from a spiritual, aesthetic, or personal perspective, have largely – if not completely – disappeared from the prominent academic discourses in modern western society.
With science potentially seeking – and claiming – cognitive explanations for not only music’s reception but creation, and advocacy arguments focused on music’s value as instrumental to extrinsic academic and intellectual outcomes, it is perhaps no surprise that some musicians may feel that such approaches threaten what is most ‘sacred’ to them about their art form: its capacity to enable access to the intangible aspects of being human. In this light, rather than the contentious and highly debated ‘intrinsic’ banner under which many music advocates currently gather, arguing for the ‘intangible’ value of music may be a more appropriate and accurate representation of the underlying issues at stake.

Highlighting the additional and related aspect of ineffability, as several pianists explicitly suggested, silence has a sacred element to it, whether as a feature of the religious “ritual” of the concert hall, in the way we do not talk in order to protect “some sort of mystery in the heart,” or out of respect for what is beyond our comprehension. Given the above, it is perhaps also not surprising that many of the pianists highlighted silence as either the only – or most appropriate – response when asked to talk directly about what was most meaningful to them about music-making. As Bowie (2009) – and others – have suggested, words quantify concepts, they are the language of ‘the mind’ or the knowable.

The challenge of talking about what we value most about music may indeed be one of the most relevant and revealing aspects of it. As suggested by many of the voices above, the silences in both music and our daily communications appear to embrace valuable aspects of our human experience that cannot be accounted for in words and while people may communicate through words and sounds, it is in the silence that they feel truly connected. In this sense, while talking about the intangible in music can help us to locate, point to, or access it, it may be in those moments when silence seems most appropriate in our speech, or particularly powerful in our music-making, that we both explore the sacred, and know we are there.

A Delicate Balance

In their conclusion to *The Art of Possibility* Zander and Zander (2000) suggest that the great potential of art “points to relationship rather than to individuals, to communication patterns, gestures, and movement rather than to discrete objects and identities. It attests to the in-between […] the story of the unseen threads that connect us all” (p. 183). While this idealistic statement is appealing, and reflects many of the ideals of the pianists above, the potential of music – as Lao Tzu might have expressed it – inevitably involves a relationship and balance between ‘what is’ and ‘what is not’; between the seen and unseen, spoken and unspoken, or the tangible and intangible. To return to Behar’s observation (p. 13 above) of the challenges of engaging with the complexity of human experience within an academic environment: “I think what we are seeing are efforts to map an intermediate space we can’t quite define yet” (1997, p. 174).
In mapping this “intermediate space” in music-making the pianists highlighted the breadth and complexity of factors involved, using a variety of terminologies and dualities: objective/subjective; thinking/feeling; cognition/emotion; head/heart; mind/body; conscious/subconscious; knowing/intuiting; ego/humility; and control/letting go. In effect, most of these dualities may be extremes of carefully negotiated continuums. As one pianist observed, while it may be necessary to separate these concepts out in order to talk about them, in performance the pianist negotiates these in one “holistic” balancing act. Arguably, if we want to adopt and encourage a balanced approach to performance or pedagogy, and foster those peak moments that can occur when it is achieved, we need to take into account all of the influencing factors.

Crucial amongst these is the balance between ideals and realities. As could be seen in these discussions, while the pianists’ aspirations in music-making were largely intangible, the tangible demands and expectations of the profession could lead to a stark contrast between reproduction and creation; automaton and artist; the robotic and the human; and the pianist and person. While the pianists considered tangible and technical skills, musical knowledge, and understanding of the repertoire as essential aspects of their vocation, when considered in this light, the culture in which they attempt to manifest the great potential of music appears far from ideal and significantly imbalanced.

Summing up many of the comments, one pianist suggested a balanced approach to music-making necessitates taking into account the “the integrated whole” of the musician, and spoke of great musicians as those able to access “the mind and body and spirit,” and express these through the music. Or, as another observed, great artistry requires the “spiritual, emotional [and] technical.” Alberici similarly concludes that music performance at its most powerful is “clearly an experience of body, mind, and spirit” (2004, p. 121). While it is easy to reject this concept—and oft-used phrase—as a facile cliché, in some senses it constitutes a useful ‘human’ framework to conceptually locate the various aspects noted by the pianists as contributing to this integrated whole, and the intangible—and ‘sacred’—spaces that emerged as most valuable to them.

As presented in Table 9.3 below, the ‘mind’—framed on either side by the ‘body’ and the ‘spirit’—appears as the most tangible, and the area that has attracted the most attention and documentation from those disciplines focused on what is measurable, provable, quantifiable, or knowable about music and music-making.
Table 9.3 Finding the Balance within the Musician

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>BODY</th>
<th>MIND</th>
<th>SPIRIT</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Feeling Self</td>
<td>Thinking Self</td>
<td>Transcending Self</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emotions</td>
<td>Intellect</td>
<td>Imagination</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sensing</td>
<td>Knowing</td>
<td>Believing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vulnerability</td>
<td>Control</td>
<td>Letting go</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Irrational</td>
<td>Rational</td>
<td>Mystical</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Subconscious/Intuition</td>
<td>Conscious Thought</td>
<td>Inspiration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sensations/Sounds</td>
<td>Words/Notes</td>
<td>Silence</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

While the act of piano playing undoubtedly embraces all layers above, in speaking of what they aspire to and value in their engagement with music, the pianists focused on aspects that lie either ‘below’ or ‘beyond’ that which could be captured or quantified by the intellectual or reasoning mind; whether this lay in the inherent (and valued) ambiguities and contingencies in music-making; the emotional, embodied, intuitive, subconscious or otherwise ‘deeper’ aspects; or the aesthetic, inspirational, transcendent or spiritual. Similarly, many of the factors they noted as less conducive to their ideals were associated with aspects directly or tangentially related to the mind: the cognitive, conscious or controllable, mental or mechanical, or visible (rather than visceral).

There is undoubtedly a complex interplay between internal and external factors when considering the ‘integrated whole’ of any individual and how they engage with their environment (Scruton, 2011, p. 19; DeNora, 2000, p. 76). This complexity was clearly evident in this research, which highlighted the many forces, contradictions and paradoxes that must be negotiated by the professional pianist. While acknowledging that this complexity cannot be captured in simplistic reductions, Table 9.3 above aims to illustrate that a focus on the ‘mind’ and what it can ‘know’ does not fully account for the less tangible or unknowable aspects that pianists aspire to and engage with during the process of music-making. This elusive – and essentially human – nature of the art form may very well constitute the appeal of the profession and be the crucial – intangible – aspect that keeps drawing us back to the concert hall.

The opinions presented in this research strongly suggest that performers, pedagogues and music-researchers acknowledge and embrace the intangible aspects of music-making. This is relevant from the pursuit of great artistry to attempts to enhance “the quality of human life” through “furthering research on the brain in the context of music and art” (Neurosciences Institute, 2011). Beyond the concert hall, the insights of musicians and performers on the intangible aspects of music-making offer significant value for cross-disciplinary knowledge,
including neuroscientific and psychological insights into the interaction between cognition, emotion, and embodied knowledge; studies into consciousness (cognitive science, neurophysiology and philosophy); the psychology of education including the roles of concentration, intention, motivation and inspiration; ‘peak’ performance studies; music therapy; and broader studies of health and well-being.

However, in order to foster a constructive collaboration within and between disciplines, underlying tensions between differences in perceptions need to be addressed, and handled with sensitivity. Juslin suggests (2003a) that musicians are “often unable, or unwilling, to define the concept of expressivity or to probe its underlying mechanisms.” Are musicians unable, unwilling, or just quiet in the face of a research paradigm dominated by the tangible and quantifiable, and one that might view them as mystics, “New Age,” or “airy-fairy”? (Greenfield, 2002, p. 57). Ideally, we are heading towards a cross-disciplinary perspective that will embrace the role that the sciences can play in understanding music, while also valuing the intangible, yet arguably essential aspects of music-making. The debates that currently thrive in their respective disciplines need to be broadened, and incorporate the voices of musicians not just as subjects, but also as co-researchers.

As the voices of the pianists have described in various ways – also reflected in my personal experience and that of many other performers – we cannot always rely on the cognitive, the conscious, the rational, or the tangible for the optimal or most fulfilling engagement with our instruments, the music we play, or the audiences we share it with. Within the discipline of music, if our hope is to foster such experiences for performing musicians, intangible aspects in music need to be acknowledged alongside the tangible realities of the profession. Thus, consideration needs to be given to the varying – and arguably conflicting – demands of competitions and performance careers; risk-taking and experimentation; ‘letting go’ in stages of development and performance preparation; coping with ambiguity, vulnerability, and the unknown; embracing and dealing with alternative pathways of knowledge – whether philosophical or physical; and communicating values.

The intangible – whether considered as the personal, emotional, the embodied, the subconscious, the aesthetic, the self, the silent, the transcendent or the spiritual – has been identified by the pianists as crucial in both influencing and inspiring their engagement with music. While these aspects of music-making are not always easy to talk about, the great variety of ways that performing musicians perceive, express and access the intangible deserves to be further researched, more widely acknowledged, and embraced.
Bibliography


297


timing in the initial measures of Chopin’s Etude in E major. *Journal of the Acoustical
Society of America, 104*, 1085-1100.

and dynamics to the aesthetic impression of the initial measures of Chopin’s Etude in E
doi:10.1121/1.427078

Repp, B. H. (2000). Pattern typicality and dimensional interactions in pianists' imitation of


Press.


guide to understanding* (pp. 35-58). Cambridge University Press.

Mind games: Coma calamities and delusional deliberations* [Audio podcast]. Retrieved

to understanding* (pp. 75-88). Cambridge University Press.

Robson, C. (1993). *Real world research: A resource for social scientists and practitioner-

Yale University Press.

Schuster, Inc.).

Rosevear, J. (2002). A preliminary snapshot of the academic achievement and self-concept of
music and non-music school students. In J. Rosevear, & J. Callaghan (Eds.), *Research

ProQuest Dissertations & Theses. (AAT 882332825)


Appendices

Appendix no. 1: Michael Kieran Harvey Artist Biography

Australian-based pianist Michael Kieran Harvey was born in Sydney and studied piano in Canberra with Alan Jenkins, at the Sydney Conservatorium under Gordon Watson, and at the Liszt Academy, Budapest, under the Director, Professor Sándor Falvai. He has especially promoted the works of Australian and contemporary composers and recorded well over 30 solo CDs on various labels.

Michael Kieran Harvey regularly appears as soloist with all Australian Symphony orchestras. His career has been notable for its diversity and wide repertoire. Harvey has especially promoted the works of Australian composers, internationally and within Australia. He has premiered many new Australian concertos by composers such as Vine, Westlake, Grabowsky, Sitcky, Joseph and Conyngham. In Australia he has premiered important international works by Andriessen, Wolpe, Martino, Zappa, Jon Lord, Keith Emerson and Babbitt. He has performed and recorded most of Messiaen’s works involving piano to high critical acclaim, in 2005 releasing a live 3-CD recording of the Australian premiere of the entire “Catalogue d'oiseaux”.

Released in 2009, his CD “Elektra” (Move MD 3329) was described by Australian critic Clive O’Connell as the product of an “indefatigable master-pianist...pieces commissioned especially for his volcanic talent”. Harvey’s homage to Zappa, 48 Fugues For Frank, was premiered at Mona Foma 2010 and received the AMC Tasmanian state award for composition in 2011. His compositions have been performed by Brett and Paul Dean, Slava and Leonard Grigoryan, Dominic Harvey, Bernadette Balkus, Natsuko Yoshimoto, Ian Grandage, Arjun von Caefferer and Alister Barker.

Michael Kieran Harvey’s distinctive pianism has been recognised by numerous national and international awards, including the Grand Prix in the Ivo Pogorelich Piano Competition, USA (1993), the Debussy Medal, Paris (1986), four consecutive Australian “Mo” awards for best classical artist, the Australian government’s Centenary Medal for services to Australian music (2002), and the APRA award for Distinguished Services to Australian Music (2009). His recordings are regularly nominated in the ARIAS and APRAS.
In 2005 the estate of the late Susan Remington established the Michael Kieran Harvey Scholarship to encourage future directions in keyboard art music. He is currently Adjunct Professor at the Tasmanian Conservatorium, Visiting artist at the Victorian College of the Arts and Fellow of the Faculty of Music, Melbourne University. [Sourced (edited and updated) June 2012, from http://www.musicaviva.com.au/countrywide/pianists/michaelkieranharvey. See also http://www.mkharvey.com]

Appendix no. 2: Freddy Kempf Artist Biography

Freddy Kempf is one of today’s most successful pianists, performing to sell-out audiences all over the world. Exceptionally gifted with an unusually broad repertoire, Freddy has built a unique reputation as an explosive and physical performer not afraid to take risks as well as a serious, sensitive and profoundly musical artist. Born in London in 1977, Freddy made his concerto debut with the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra at the age of 8, and, maintaining a strong link with the orchestra ever since, joined them for his conducting debut in 2011.

[Photo Neda Navaee 2010]

Freddy came to national prominence in 1992 when he won the BBC Young Musician of the Year Competition. In 1998, his award of third, rather than first, prize in the Tchaikovsky International Piano Competition in Moscow provoked protests from the audience and an outcry in the Russian press, which proclaimed him “the hero of the competition”. His international career was rapidly established and his unprecedented popularity with Russian audiences has since been reflected in numerous sold-out concerts and television broadcasts. Many international debuts followed, and Freddy has since travelled all over the world to take up a wide range of invitations, from opening the Shanghai Concert Hall in October 2004 to recording Chopin’s Etudes for DVD in a Chateau near Paris for BBC Television.

Freddy’s collaborations have included such eminent ensembles and conductors as the Philharmonia Orchestra under Sir Andrew Davis and Kurt Sanderling, the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra under Daniele Gatti, Matthias Bamert and Charles Dutoit, the City of Birmingham Symphony / Oramo, Royal Liverpool Philharmonic / Petrenko, La Scala Philharmonic / Chailly, St Petersburg Philharmonic / Temirkanov, Russian State Symphony / Sinaisky, Dresden Symphony / Herbig, Salzburg Mozarteum Orchestra / Ivor Bolton, Seattle Symphony /
In July 2011, Freddy made his debut with the Sydney Symphony Orchestra under Thomas Dausgaard at the Sydney Opera House. A favourite with orchestras in the region, he has also appeared recently with the Tasmanian Symphony, Adelaide Symphony and Queensland orchestras, as well as the New Zealand Symphony Orchestra. In the United States, following previous successes with the Oregon and Detroit Symphony orchestras among others, Freddy was a featured artist last season at the San Antonio Symphony Orchestra’s Tchaikovsky Festival, performing both concertos under Sebastian Lang-Lessing.

The 11/12 season sees Freddy embarking on a major new project, in which he play / directs the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra in a complete cycle of Beethoven’s piano concertos in many of the UK’s most important venues. Other highlights of the current season include concerts with the Bergen Philharmonic under Andrew Litton and the RTVE Symphony Orchestra Madrid under Carlos Kalmar. Freddy also collaborates with the Australian Chamber Orchestra along with violinist / director Richard Tognetti and trumpeter Tine Thing Helseth in a performance at Birmingham’s Symphony Hall. Elsewhere, Freddy returns to the Tokyo Metropolitan Symphony Orchestra and the Vancouver Symphony Orchestra. Next season opens with a major UK tour with the St Petersburg Symphony Orchestra.

A committed recitalist, Freddy has built up dedicated audiences worldwide appearing at London’s Barbican Centre and Cadogan Hall, Dublin’s National Concert Hall, the Sage Gateshead, St David’s Hall in Cardiff, Munich’s Herkulessaal, Hamburg’s Musikhalle, Grande Teatro di Verona, Milan Conservatorio’s Sala Verdi, Salón Teatro de Santiago de Compostela in Galicia and Zurich’s Tonhalle. Freddy has also performed at the ABC Southbank in Brisbane, the Symphony Hall in Osaka and St. Petersburg’s Philharmonic Hall. Freddy ended his 10/11 season with a recital at Sydney’s City Hall. Last season Freddy completed an extensive Japanese recital tour including Tokyo’s Suntory Hall; such was its success that he returns to Japan for another recital tour in June 2012. Freddy’s other recital appearances this season include Manchester’s Bridgewater Hall, the Sociedad Filarmónica Bilbao and the Great Hall of the Moscow Conservatoire.

Freddy records exclusively for BIS Records, his most recent release being a solo recital disc of Rachmaninov, Bach / Busoni, Ravel and Stravinsky, praised by BBC Music Magazine for its “wonderful delicate playing and fine sense of style”. Freddy’s latest orchestral disc is a highly-
acclaimed recording of Prokofiev’s Piano Concertos Nos. 2 & 3 with the Bergen Philharmonic Orchestra and Andrew Litton, which was nominated for the prestigious Gramophone Concerto award and described by the associated magazine as “A masterful Prokofievian pair”. [Sourced June 2012, from http://www.freddy-kempf.com]

Appendix no. 3: Mark Kruger Artist Biography

Based in Berlin, Mark Kruger is a laureate of the Orleans International Piano Competition and his performances have been acclaimed around the world. His Spanish debut was hailed by El Pais as “brilliant both technically and musically… it was the revelation of a great artist”, his Purcell Room performance of the ‘Concord’ Sonata by Charles Ives for the Park Lane Group was described as “hugely impressive” in The Times, showing a “command of pianistic color in everything from the clanging chords to the dusky musings”, whilst a performance of Brahms’ Second Piano Concerto in Melbourne was hailed by The Age as “masterful”.

He has appeared on television and radio in Europe, Canada, Asia and Australia. International festival appearances include the Saint Ricquer Festival in France, the Festival Ensems in Spain, the Melbourne International Festival, the Melbourne International Brass Festival, the Port Fairy Spring Music Festival, and the Brisbane Biennial.

Mark Kruger has an extensive and varied repertoire at his command. Central to his programmes are large-scale works from the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, some of which are rarely performed. Amongst these are Beethoven’s ‘Hammerklavier’ Sonata, Chopin’s 24 Etudes in a single concert, Prokofiev’s Ninth Sonata, the ‘Concord’ Sonata from memory by Charles Ives, and Witold Lutosławski’s recently-discovered Piano Sonata. A theatrical performance of George Crumb’s Makrokosmos Vol. 1 elicited the following praise from the composer: “both technically and musically you showed an incredible mastery of my Makrokosmos piano idiom”.

Mark Kruger is also closely associated with the works of Sergei Prokofiev, and was the Artistic Director of ABC Classic FM’s “Melbourne Prokofiev Project”, a series of live broadcasts dedicated to the composer which contained the complete piano sonatas. Mark Kruger is also a
strong advocate of new music. He has had numerous compositions written for him, and has given world premiere performances of works by composers such as Barry Conyngham, Stephen Cronin, Michael Gallant, Mark Grandison, Stuart Greenbaum, Antonio Gomez Schneekloth, Andrew Schultz, Colin Spiers, Nicholas Vines, and Natalie Williams.

As well as having studied in his native Australia with Stephen Savage and Ian Holtham, Mark Kruger studied at the Moscow State Conservatoire with Professor Lev Vlassenko and at the Royal Academy of Music in London with Frank Wibaut. During the summer season he performed in Australia, Hong Kong, Kuala Lumpur, Rome, Copenhagen, Oslo and Warsaw. In 2009 Mark Kruger recorded the Concord Sonata by Charles Ives for Tall Poppies alongside works by Busoni, Copland and Sculthorpe, and in 2011 he will make his debut recording for the Naxos label with the Complete Works for Piano by Lutoslawski. [Sourced (edited and updated) June 2011, from http://www.markkrugerpiano.com]

Appendix no. 4: Gao Ping Artist Biography

Gao Ping is a pianist-composer, born in Sichuan province, known for evocative textures and piano vocalization, and is the recipient of high musical honors. Growing up as a young pianist at the Sichuan Conservatory in Chengdu, Gao Ping was affected by China’s concurrent transformation from a collective to a market economy. This transitional phase between old and new -- and the productive cultural clash between East and West -- left traces that would later be evident in his music.

From his mother, Luo Lianglian, the singer and teacher, Gao Ping gained a fascination with vocalization, while his father Gao Weijie initiated him into the Society for Exploration of New Music at its inception. The Beijing-based musicologist Li Xi’an has referred to Gao Ping as a leading member of the “sixth generation” of Chinese composers after the “fifth generation” composers such as Tan Dun and Qu Xiaosong.

As a pianist, Gao Ping’s repertoire is extensive; he has performed to acclaim all over the world. In 2008, Gao Ping premiered his Piano Concerto with the New Zealand Symphony Orchestra under the baton of Mr. Kenneth Young. The Listener enthusiastically acclaimed the two-movement work as “a major concerto that cries out for early CD release.” Reviewing a Naxos disc Gao Ping’s performance of his own chamber music, the critic Ian Dando called Gao “the
man with 1001 tone colors.” His pianistic proclivities and understanding of contemporary music have led Gao Ping to become sought after by living composers, including George Crumb and Frederic Rzewski. His recitals present thought provoking programs, and often feature improvisations which composer Jack Body described as “astounding.”

Gao Ping approaches the creation of music with the same intensity as his activity as a performer would suggest. In Europe, his music has been commissioned or performed by groups including the Berlin Piano-Percussion Ensemble the Zurich-based Ensemble Pyramide, and the Gaudeamus International Music Week in Amsterdam. Last year, pianist Frederick Chui played Gao Ping’s “Two Soviet Love Songs” at the Soloistes Aux Serres d’Autueil in Paris. In Asia, his music was performed at the Beijing-Modern International Music Festival, Hibiki Hall Music Festival in Japan, Macau International Music Festival, was commissioned by the Taiwan National Chinese Orchestra. In North America, his music was premiered at the Aspen Music Festival, and commissioned by pianist Ursula Oppens and violinist Arnold Steinhardt, respectively. The San Francisco Chronicle called his work “The Mountain” a “superb and often sweepingly beautiful work.” Gao Ping’s chamber music on Naxos label was critically acclaimed and was described by a German critic as “music which wants to be heard with ears of a child, full of wonder and amazement…. deep and vulnerable.” He provided a portion of the award-winning score to Vincent Ward’s film “Rain of the Children”.

While completing his Doctor of Musical Arts degree from the College-Conservatory of Music at the University of Cincinnati, he won the 2003 Auros Composition Prize (Boston) and was resident at the MacDowell Colony for Artists. Since 2004, Dr. Gao has taken up a composition lecturership in the School of Music at the Canterbury University in Christchurch, New Zealand. In New Zealand, his music has been presented by Michael Houstoun, John Chen, Christchurch International Arts Festival, New Zealand String Quartet, and NZTrio. Gao is the recipient of the 2010 CANZ (Composers Association of NZ) Trust Fund Award. In his most recent works, Gao returns more fully to China as a creative theme. “Night Alley,” a piece based on an essay by Chen Danqing, mingles his China inspired melodies with quotations from Chopin’s Mazurka, creating a unique sound world which once resonated in the corridors of Chinese communes. At the 4th China International Piano Competition in 2007, the piece was performed as the obligatory work, reflecting the appeal of Gao’s fusing of Western and Eastern idioms, as well as the expanding interest in his compositions dealing with China and its multiple pasts. [Sourced June 2012, from http://www.gaoping.org]
Appendix no. 5: Liam Viney Artist Biography

Australian pianist Liam Viney is a soloist, collaborative artist and teacher. First prize-winner of the Lev Vlassenko Piano Competition, Liam has performed regularly in Australia, the U.S., Europe and Israel. Liam is pursuing a multi-faceted musical career centered on performing a broad range of musical styles, with an emphasis on new music and ideas. He has appeared as soloist with the Queensland Symphony Orchestra, the Hartford Symphony, the Queensland Conservatorium Symphony Orchestra, the Queensland Youth Orchestra, the New Century Players and the CalArts Chamber Orchestra in concertos ranging from those of Mozart and Beethoven, to Prokofiev and Ligeti.

He has given solo recitals and chamber music performances in concert series and festivals such as the Norfolk Chamber Music Festival, (where he premiered the chamber ensemble version Rautavaara’s Clarinet Concerto with Richard Stolzman), the Los Angeles Philharmonic’s “Green Umbrella” series, The Dartington International Summer School, (where he gave the British premiere of Matthew Hindson’s “Plastic Jubilation”), the “New Paths” festival of New York, Melbourne’s “Next Wave” festival, the Brisbane Festival, the “Keynote”, “Celebrations”, and “Kawai” series of Australia, and the “Tyalgum Festival”. He has also recorded solo radio programs for ABC FM radio's “Young Australia” program and 4MBS radio station.

Liam’s involvement with new music has led to performances with groups such as Australia’s “Elision Ensemble”, and the U.S.-based “New Century Players” and “Inauthentica”. He was soloist with CalArts’ “New Century Players” in Berio's “Points on the Curve to Find” at REDCAT, Disney Hall. He has also been featured on several of L.A.’s esteemed Monday Evening Concerts. Other recent performances include a duo appearance with violinist Roberto Cani in the UCLA Live series at Royce Hall, Los Angeles, with the great ballerina Nina Ananiashvili and the Georgian State Ballet. He also made a guest appearance playing Stockhausen’s “Mantra” with Vicki Ray in Piano Spheres’ 2005 season, described as “first-rate” by the Los Angeles Times.

Liam has won competitions in both Australia and the U.S. Apart from First Prize in the 2001 Lev Vlassenko Piano Competition, he also won secondary prizes there such as the “People’s
Choice Prize” and prizes for “Best performance of an Australian Work”, and “Best Performance of a Classical Sonata”. The Courier Mail’s review of the competition’s final stage with orchestra described his playing as having “maturity and flair”. Other competitions Liam has won include First Prize in the Yamaha Australian Youth Piano Competition, (the prize for which was a grand piano), a coveted “Queen’s Trust” award, the City of Sydney Piano Scholarship, the Queensland Piano Competition on two occasions, and the Connecticut Young Artists Piano Competition.

Liam has formed a two-piano team with pianist Anna Grinberg, and together they explore classics of the two-piano literature, as well as create new works through commissions. Since 2006, they have commissioned four new works, including a major work by Ezra Laderman, President of the Academy of Arts and Letters, “Interior Landscapes”, which they premiered at Steinway Hall in 2006. They have also commissioned composers Shaun Naidoo and Marc Lowenstein. Critic Ivan Katz said of their duo playing at the Horowitz Series, Yale University: “I cannot imagine a finer performance, as this one had everything, illuminating every bar of the music…The audience went wild…”

Liam earned a Doctorate in piano performance from Yale University’s School of Music, where his teacher was Boris Berman. After graduating, in 2006 Liam shared a recital program of Prokofiev piano sonatas with Berman in Israel, and subsequently co-edited Berman’s book “Prokofiev’s Piano Sonatas” published by Yale University Press. He also received a Master of Music degree from Yale. Earlier, he completed his Bachelor of Music with First-class Honours at the Queensland Conservatorium of Music, where he performed the Australian premiere of Peter Sculthorpe’s “Simori” at the opening ceremony of the Conservatorium’s new building, and studied with Natasha Vlassenko, and Stephen Savage. Liam served five years on keyboard faculty at the California Institute of the Arts. He is now heading the piano department at the University of Queensland.  [Sourced June, 2012 from http://www.liamviney.com]
Appendix no. 6: Roy Howat Artist Biography

Roy Howat is internationally renowned as both pianist and scholar whose concerts, broadcasts and lectures regularly take him worldwide. A graduate of King’s College, Cambridge, he made a special study of French music in Paris with Vlado Perlemuter, and is one of few British artists repeatedly invited to teach and play French music at major French-speaking Conservatoires and on French radio. He is specially known for his lively lectures and masterclasses, which he has given worldwide at venues including the USA’s Juilliard and Eastman Schools. In a wide-ranging career he has also conducted professionally, played violin in major London chamber orchestras, and held University posts in several countries. [Photo: Fleur Kilpatrick]

A Steinway Artist, Roy Howat knows much of his concert repertoire from the composers’ manuscripts, and was one of the editors invited by the late François Lesure, along with Pierre Boulez and others, to found the Paris-based Complete Debussy Edition (Œuvres Complètes de Claude Debussy), for which he has edited much of the piano music. Among his other publications are Urtext volumes of Fauré (mostly for Peters Edition, two seminal books (Debussy in proportion and The Art of French piano music), an English edition of Jean-Jacques Eigeldinger’s classic Chopin, pianist and teacher, and chapters in numerous other books on Schubert, Chopin, Debussy, Ravel, Bartók and other topics. His championship of Chabrier has led to recordings and a Dover edition of Chabrier's marvellous piano music. Following a three-year AHRB Fellowship at the Royal College of Music, since 2003 he has been Keyboard Research Fellow at London's Royal Academy of Music.

Roy Howat has played concerts and broadcast with an array of distinguished soloists, chamber groups and singers. His recent performances with the Panocha Quartet in Japan, the Czech Republic and the UK (including the Wigmore Hall) have brought the house down, and in 2001 he toured in Egypt as both pianist and violist with the Sarastro Ensemble.

Roy Howat’s recent book The Art of French piano music chosen as 2009 Book of the Year by International Piano, and earned citations including ‘Outstanding’ in International Record Review and ‘Editor's Choice’ in Classical Music. Equally enthusiastic reviews have appeared in Musical Times, Piano and Gramophone. [Sourced June 2012, from http://www.royhowat.com]
Appendix no. 7: Matteo Napoli Artist Biography

Matteo Napoli is an honours graduate of the Girordano Conservatoire in Foggia. He has studied with a galaxy of world-renowned teachers such as Aldo Ciccolini, Nikita Magalov, Alfredo Speranza and Yvonne Lefebuerre. Early in his career he captured worldwide attention with first and second places in many competitions including first place in the International Liszt competition in 1986 in Lucca, Italy. Since then his career as a pianist has spanned many countries, as both performer and teacher.

Over the last 20 years Matteo has appeared throughout Italy, Europe (Paris, London, Lausanne, Brasov, Munich, Nicosia, Larnaca), America (New York, Mexico City, San Paolo) Japan, Australia, and New Zealand in collaboration with orchestras and as a recitalist. Matteo Napoli is based in Salerno, Italy. While maintaining a busy international performance schedule Matteo teaches at the Salerno Conservatoire and is the founder and director of the Mozarteum International Academy of Music in Salerno. He is frequently called upon to sit on juries for national and international competitions and he has also found time to also carry out extensive research in regard to performance and teaching methodology. At times he holds an Artistic Director role.

In 2003 in Auckland New Zealand Matteo gave a breathtaking performance as guest pianist with the Manukau City Symphony Orchestra playing Piano Concerto No. 6 in C by Ferdinand Ries – the first time this music had been performed for 165 years. New Zealanders were fortunate to hear this world premiere. The first European performance of this concerto was held in Romania followed by the first Asian performance in April 2004. In 2005 a concert was scheduled in Wellington New Zealand where Matteo and Uwe Grodd performed more re-discovered Ries music – sonatas for flute and piano. Again this delightful music has not been performed for 165 years. Matteo’s recordings include a world premiere recital of works by Blacher, Rozsa and Scolari for Radio Television Suisse Romande in 1980; and Kuhlau Sonatas for flute and piano (2002).

In 2005 Matteo Napoli was the first Artist in Residence – a new programme at King’s College – a prestigious school in Auckland, New Zealand. In 1995 Matteo was appointed Artistic Director of the International Piano competition in Brasov, Rumania. As a direct result, they have
repeatedly hosted groups of children for master classes and study grants. He was music advisor of the Festival of Classics in Tauranga, New Zealand from 1994 to 1996. From 2002 has been artistic director of “Pianosolo”, an international piano festival held annually in Salerno.

Matteo Napoli has included research and development in his busy schedule. Together with the teaching staff of the Mozarteum Academy, he designed a project of research and performance of the entire opus of Johannes Brahms in 10 concerts. Together with a group of philosophers in charge of the Nietzsche Museum in Sielz Marie, Switzerland, Matteo conducted an extended research on the piano compositions by Friedrich Nietzsche, leading to a conference and recital. Together with colleagues, students and a team of neuro-physiologists, Matteo carried out a seven-year research project on the neuro-physiological aspects of the learning process. The result of this work was the development of a new methodology that he and the students of the Mozarteum academy apply daily with considerable results.

He regularly repeats a master class on piano technique for the Salerno Conservatoire of Music. This class focuses on the correct use of the muscles and tendons for the various techniques (fingering, cantabile, double notes, etc.). This technique is called the ‘tecnica del peso’, and is taught to all his students. As Director of the Mozarteum, he sponsored one of the staff to complete a 4-year course with the best specialists in Austria and Italy of the Orff Methodology School. As a result of this study work, the Mozarteum now teaches children according to this methodology. [Sourced (edited and updated) June 2012, from http://www.matteonapoli.com]

Appendix no. 8: William Westney Artist Biography

William Westney holds the B.A. from Queens College (N.Y.) and a performance doctorate from the Yale School of Music, all with highest academic distinctions. He studied in Italy under a Fulbright grant. Performing credentials include top piano prize in the Geneva International Competition, top prize (and only American winner) in Radiotelevisione Italiana auditions, recitals at New York’s Lincoln Center, in London, in Denmark, Iceland, Taiwan and Korea, throughout Italy on a U.S. State Department tour, and on NPR’s “Performance Today”, appearances as concerto soloist with such orchestras as Houston.
Symphony, San Antonio Symphony and l’Orchestre de la Suisse Romande, and solo recordings for Musical Heritage Society and CRI. The CRI recording, the first ever of music by futurist Leo Ornstein, was cited by Newsweek magazine as one of the “Ten Best American-Music Recordings” of the year. [Photo by Artie Limmer]

Westney’s educational ideas continue to have a refreshing, invigorating impact on the musical world. Widely in demand as a workshop leader (the trailblazing “Un-Master Class”), interdisciplinary lecturer, writer, and private consultant, he was awarded the prized Certificate of Merit from the Yale School of Music Alumni Association for his innovative work as an artist/teacher. He has also received three special teaching honors at Texas Tech University – most recently the Chancellor’s Council Distinguished Teaching Award – where he is a Paul Whitfield Horn Distinguished Professor of Piano and the Browning Artist-in-Residence. The “Un-Master Class” was the subject of a featured NEW YORK TIMES article (1997), and has been held at such prominent centers as the Aspen School, Beijing Central Conservatory, Peabody Conservatory, Kennedy Center, Royal Conservatory (Toronto), Cleveland Institute, Tanglewood Institute, Royal College of Music (London), Universität für Musik und darstellende Kunst (Vienna), Royal Danish Academy of Music (Copenhagen), Sibelius Academy (Helsinki) and the Juilliard School.

He was named in 2005 to the roster of the Fulbright (Council for International Exchange of Scholars) “Senior Specialist” program, through which the U.S. government sends professors around the world for academic residencies. His first such assignment was in Seoul, Korea (November 2006). During 2009-10 he divided his time between the U.S. and Denmark, having been awarded the Hans Christian Andersen Guest Professorship at the University of Southern Denmark (Odense), an appointment for an interdisciplinary researcher.

Schirmer Performance Editions issued William Westney’s edition, and CD recording, of piano etudes by Stephen Heller in October 2005. His latest release in this series, in November 2009, consists of the Etudes op. 109 by Friedrich Burgmüller. Amadeus Press published Westney’s first book, The Perfect Wrong Note, in Fall 2003 to widespread critical acclaim. Now in its second printing and having sold over 13,000 copies worldwide, it is a “well-thought-out approach to music instruction to which many aspire, but which few attain” according to the Library Journal, and American Record Guide described it as “refreshing and rewarding.” Professional organizations in fields outside of music – such as photography and the culinary arts – have also invited Westney to give presentations on the book’s themes regarding problem-solving, communication and creativity. [Sourced June 2012, from http://www.williamwestney.com]
Appendix no. 9: Jean-Paul Sevilla Artist Biography

Jean-Paul Sevilla is a French pianist of Spanish descent, born in Algeria. He gave his first recital at the age of nine, and at the age of fourteen entered the National Conservatory of Music of Paris. Here he obtained the First Prize in piano with unanimous support of the jury as well as the Prix d’honneur, which has not been awarded since. He also received the First Prize in chamber music. In 1959, he captured, also unanimously, the First Prize at the Geneva International Competition. His numerous tours, as soloist and chamber musician, have taken him from Europe and Africa as well as to both Americas and Asia.

For more than twenty years Jean-Paul Sevilla has been living in Canada where he is now Professor Emeritus, after being full professor of piano, chamber music and piano literature at the University of Ottawa, while continuing his successful career as a concert pianist, lecturer and ‘clinician’. He has trained many talented young pianists, many of whom have won top awards at different international competitions. Jean-Paul Sevilla’s extensive knowledge have seen him in high demand for courses, lectures and master classes alike. His articles – notably on Fauré and Ravel (whose complete works he has often performed) have been published in several musical journals in the United States and Japan. In 1986, he spent one year as guest professor at the Musashino University in Tokyo, and has since returned every year to Asia, adding Korea, the Philippines, Indonesia and Hong Kong to his tours. Jean-Paul Sévilla teaches summer courses in Europe (Aix en Provence, Perpignan, Toulon, Nice, Poitiers, Saint jean de Luz, Flaine, Courchevel), in Canada (Orford, Banff, Victoria), and in Korea.

From 1997 to 2001 Jean-Paul Sevilla taught at the Schola Cantorum in Paris. From September to December 1999, he was guest Professor at the Oberlin (Ohio) Conservatory of Music. He is regularly invited as a jury member at national (C.M.C., the Canada Art Council, the Paris Conservatories, and other French cities) and international competitions such as Munich, Lisbon, Cleveland, Porto, Senigallia, Marsala, Jaen, Orléans, Moscow, Leipzig, Pretoria, Monterrey and Xiamen.

Jean-Paul Sevilla has released a number of CD’s including a collection of works by Vincent d’Indy and Albert Roussel recorded in Canada. He has released a double album Homage to
*Childhood* featuring pieces inspired by childhood, a CD of the world premiere of Gabriel Pierné’s *Variations in C minor* which was awarded a Diapason d’Or, as well as a double album featuring the *Préludes* op 103, the *Nocturnes*, the *Miniatures* and *Thème et Variations* of Gabriel Fauré. He has also recorded a CD of works by Fauré in Japan. Jean-Paul Sevilla is an Officer of the Order of Arts and Letters (France). [Sourced (edited and updated with translation from Pauline Maudy) from http://www.jeanpaulsevilla.com]

**Appendix no. 10: Stephen Savage Artist Biography**

Stephen Savage received his early training from Dorothy Hesse, and began his career in his native UK where he came to attention at 16 with his performance of Beethoven’s 4th Concerto with the National Youth Orchestra. Study with Bruno Seidhlofer in Vienna was followed by four intensive years with Cyril Smith at the Royal College of Music where he won major prizes. He soon appeared in recital at the Wigmore Hall’s London Piano Series, and made many BBC broadcasts including live appearances in the Invitation Concerts. His repertoire covers the fullest range, from Bach to Tippett and Lutoslawski, with special emphasis on the great Viennese classics. He is the dedicatee of major works by Justin Connolly and Roger Smalley and became known as an authoritative performer of Tippett's sonatas.

From 1982 he lived in Australia and appeared frequently as concerto soloist with most of the country’s leading orchestras. He collaborated with Werner Andreas Albert, Nicholas Braithwaite, Omri Hadari, Jorge Mester and Ronald Zollman, among others. He was invited by the composer to give the first Australian performance of Lutoslawski’s Concerto, with the Sydney Symphony. Stephen has made distinguished recordings of works by Beethoven, Debussy, Liszt, Moussorgsky and Tippett. He has appeared in concerts and on radio throughout Australia and in Asia as well as the UK. From 2006, he has been based once again in England where he is active as performer and teacher.

Stephen’s teaching career began immediately following his graduation from the RCM when his own teacher, Cyril Smith, nominated him as his assistant. Two years later, in 1967, Stephen Savage was appointed Professor at the RCM and soon became recognised as an authoritative and decisive influence, training many who now have important and productive careers in music. In 1982 he took up an offer to work in Australia, as Head of Keyboard at the Queensland...
Conservatorium Griffith University. There his influence extended to the artistic development of his Department at a time when the School was acquiring a national and international profile. Under his direction, the Department became recognised as the most progressive in the country, attracting both talented students and visiting artists of the highest calibre. He is now acting consultant and visiting artist to the School. He became, and continues to be active as visiting artist/teacher to other leading Schools both in Australia and in Hong Kong, China, Singapore, Japan and Korea as well as the leading UK Colleges. He initiated the piano programmes of the Australian National Academy of Music, teaching and directing acclaimed intensive courses for Australia’s leading young pianists. In 2009 Stephen was appointed Senior Tutor in piano at the Royal Northern College of Music, Manchester.

Stephen began his conducting activity when he was invited by Edwin Roxburgh to assist in the running of the RCM’s Twentieth Century Ensemble. He was co-Director for over ten years, preparing and conducting this student group in a wide range of important and representative music of the last hundred years. Highlights included the first-ever student performance of Stockhausen’s Gruppen, Lutoslawski’s Preludes and Fugue (for the composer) Berio’s Laborintus and Ligeti’s Chamber Concerto. In Australia, he took charge of the Contemporary Music Ensemble at the Queensland Conservatorium for 15 years from 1985 and also founded and conducted the Griffith University Ensemble which presented leading composers introducing and performing their works, and gave concerts which were broadcast nationally.

He is founder and (past) curator of the Kawai Keyboard Series in Brisbane, now the most extensive recital series in Australia. Stephen is an experienced juror on leading national/international piano competitions, most recently in Australia, UK and Italy. Stephen has been awarded the degree of Doctor of Philosophy at Griffith University, Brisbane, for his thesis “Behind the Text, Beyond the Sound: Investigations into Processes of Creative Musical Interpretation”. During a return visit to the Wuhan Conservatory, P R China, Stephen was appointed Visiting Professor. He has made presentations at major conferences in 2009, The Reflective Conservatoire (Guildhall School of Music, London) and The Performer’s Voice (National University of Singapore). Recital performances in 2009 have included appearances in Australia, China and the UK. In 2009, he has appeared as Visiting Artist at the Hong Kong Academy for Performing Arts, the Nanyang Academy of Fine Arts, Singapore, and the Wuhan Conservatory. He continues his association with the Queensland Conservatorium, Griffith University, in Brisbane. In 2012 he once again made his annual appearance as Visiting Artist to the Hong Kong Academy for Performing Arts, and will teach and perform in Sydney and Brisbane. [Sourced (edited and updated) June 2012, from http://www.savagepianist.com]