

A Shared Lexicon for Musical Co-creation: Towards an Authorship Attribution Model for Composer–Performer Collaboration

Alberto Michele Cavallaro

Conservatori di Pescara, Ferrara, Trieste ed Udine

albycavallaro@libero.it

ABSTRACT | Recent studies on musical co-creation have proposed several frameworks to describe how composers and performers collaborate during the development of a musical work. These approaches provide valuable perspectives on collaborative dynamics by identifying different modes of interaction and performer roles. However, while they successfully map collaborative structures, they offer limited analytical tools for distinguishing the specific types of creative contribution that performers may bring to the development of musical material. This paper, developed within an ongoing doctoral research project, introduces a preliminary Authorship Attribution Model for Musical Co-Creation, designed to analyze how creative contributions are distributed within composer–performer collaboration. Rather than focusing exclusively on interaction patterns, the model proposes an additional analytical dimension centered on the nature of contributions. By identifying different forms of creative involvement—ranging from interpretative and technical input to the generation and organization of sonic material—the framework aims to clarify how performers participate in the creation of a work. Formulated within a practice-based research context, and grounded in personal experience as well as in a comparative analysis of collaborative cases, the model contributes to the development of a shared lexicon for describing collaborative practices. Such a lexicon may support the methodological documentation of co-creative processes and foster a more transparent understanding of authorship attribution within contemporary musical production.

KEYWORDS: *co-creation, composer–performer collaboration, authorship*

1. INTRODUCTION

In recent decades, artistic research and musicological studies have increasingly focused on processes of *musical co-creation*, in which composers and performers collaboratively shape sonic material [1, 11].

Within these practices, the traditional distinction between composition and performance becomes less stable, as performers may actively participate in the development of timbre, technique, and musical structure.

Several theoretical frameworks have attempted to describe these dynamics. Paul Roe describes composer–performer collaboration as an *interactive process* [7], comparing models of collaboration developed in different disciplinary contexts.

Among these, the model proposed by Hayden and Windsor [6] specifically addresses collaboration within compositional practice. A complementary perspective is offered by

Jennifer Torrence [9], who analyses the roles performers may assume within collaborative compositional environments.

However, while these frameworks effectively classify modes of collaboration and performer roles, they do not systematically analyze the specific types of creative contribution that emerge during the compositional process.

2. EXISTING MODELS OF COLLABORATION

Hayden and Windsor describe three primary modes of collaboration between composer and performer [6]: *directive*, *interactive*, and *collaborative*.

In the *directive* mode, the composer retains full control of the compositional process and the score functions as the primary medium through which musical decisions are communicated. In the *interactive* mode, performers contribute with feedbacks during the development of the work, often through rehearsals or workshops. In the *collaborative* mode, compositional decisions emerge through shared interaction, and hierarchical distinctions between composer and performer become less rigid. Jennifer Torrence approaches the same relationship from the perspective of the performer's role [9], identifying three positions: *interpreter*, *adviser*, and *deviser*. These roles describe increasing levels of performer involvement, ranging from the execution of a predefined score to situations in which performers actively contribute to the creative process with generation of musical material.

While these frameworks successfully map collaborative practices, they remain primarily descriptive and do not provide a structured framework for categorizing the different types of creative contribution involved in the articulation of the creative process.

3. CREATIVE STAGES IN COLLABORATIVE COMPOSITION

In practice, composer–performer collaboration unfolds across multiple stages of the compositional process [4, 5]. These stages can be broadly described as:

1. Ideation;
2. Collection of sonic material;
3. Development of notation strategies;
4. Composition: sonic and structure organization;
5. Performance.

At each stage, performers may contribute in different ways. These contributions may include interpretative decisions, technical feedback related to instrumental practice, the proposal or generation of sonic material, and structural decisions affecting the organization of the work [3, 4, 5, 7, 8].

Recognizing these distinctions requires an analytical framework capable of identifying how performers contribute to the creative process, not only how collaboration is structured.

4. AUTHORSHIP ATTRIBUTION MODEL FOR MUSICAL CO-CREATION

The model integrates the modes of collaboration proposed by Hayden and Windsor with the performer roles identified by Torrence, adding the dimension of the *typology of creative contribution* provided by the performer in relation to varying levels of *authorship attribution*.

Within this framework, the model provides a structured approach to describing composer–performer collaboration and to documenting the distribution of creative contributions. It also functions as a metacognitive tool, supporting the reconstruction of collaborative workflows and fostering reflective awareness of roles and decisions. Through a context-specific analysis of interactions, it enables a more precise tracing of the emergence of creative intuitions. In this sense, an initial definition of authorship attribution may contribute to addressing the persisting lack of shared general terminology [2] in this area of the performing arts.

Collaboration mode	Performer role	Creative contribution	Authorship Attribution
Directive	Interpreter	Interpretative contribution (execution and realization of the score)	Composer Authorship
Directive / Interactive	Interpeter / Adviser	Technical contribution (playability feedback, notation solutions)	Composer-led Authorship
Interactive	Adviser	Material contribution (timbre proposals, sonic exploration)	Distributed Creativity
Interactive / Collaborative	Adviser / Deviser	Material generation (joint development of sonic material)	Joint Authorship
Collaborative	Deviser	Structural contribution (decisions on form and organization)	Shared Authorship
Fully collaborative	Deviser	Co-creation (material and structure developed collectively)	Co-creation

Table 1. Authorship Attribution Model for Musical Co-Creation. (the framework represents a development of the models presented by Hayden and Windsor [6] and Torrence [9])

When examining the model, it is necessary to further articulate the transition from contribution to generation. The origin of this shift can be located in the initial creative input. In the case of *material contribution*, the performer operates within a defined framework, assuming a responsive role in relation to proposals that may originate, for instance, from the composer. By contrast, *material generation* refers to an active function in the genesis of ideas, which may concern both the production of sonic material and its organization.

In this context, Habbestad introduces the notion of *instrumental newness* to describe a competence emerging within the paradigm of contemporary music performance, referring to the performer’s ability “*to conceive and to create new sounds*” [5]. The conceptualization of this competence, extended to a broader understanding of interactivity that includes the organization of sonic material, supports not only a

rethinking of composer-centered authorship, but also a redefinition of performer expertise.

5. AUTHORSHIP AND COPYRIGHT IMPLICATIONS

The distinction between different forms of creative contribution raises important questions regarding authorship attribution and the legal framework of copyright. In many collaborative compositional practices, performers contribute significantly to the development of musical material.

However, this contribution is rarely reflected in the formal attribution of authorship, which often remains assigned to a single composer. As a result, a gap frequently emerges between creative participation and legal recognition of authorship (a notable exception is the collaboration between Jonathan Harvey and his computer music designers, whom he explicitly acknowledged as collaborators and co-authors and to whom he allocated a share of the copyright [10]).

Developing a *shared lexicon* capable of describing collaborative contributions may therefore support a clearer understanding of how creative agency is distributed in musical production and may contribute to future discussions concerning the relationship between collaborative creativity and copyright frameworks.

6. CONCLUSION

This study proposes a preliminary analytical model that extends existing frameworks on composer–performer collaboration by introducing the concept of creative contribution as a central analytical dimension.

By distinguishing between different forms of performer contribution and relating them to levels of authorship attribution, the model provides a tool for analyzing the dynamics of musical co-creation. In the context of artistic research, such a framework may support the documentation of collaborative processes and contribute to ongoing discussions on distributed creativity, authorship, and collaboration in contemporary music practice [1, 11].

REFERENCES

- [1] E. F. Clarke and M. Doffman, *Distributed Creativity: Collaboration and Improvisation in Contemporary Music*. Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2017.
- [2] H. Frisk and S. Östersjö, “Negotiating the Musical Work: An Empirical Study,” in *Proceedings of the International Computer Music Conference*, 2006, pp. 242–249.
- [3] P. Green, “It Gently Makes Itself Known...: A Composer and Performer Discuss the Genesis and Practice of *Cranes for Solo Viola*,” in *A Century of Composition by Women: Music Against the Odds*, L. Kouvaras, M. Grenfell, and N. Williams, Eds. Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2022, pp. 367–382.
- [4] E. Gyger, “No Stone Unturned: Mapping Composer–Performer Collaboration,” in *Collaborative Creative Thought and Practice in Music*, M. S. Barrett, Ed. Farnham, UK: Ashgate Publishing, 2014, pp. 33–48.

- [5] B. Habbestad, *Chasing the Collaborative: Critical Studies of Performer Agency in Modern Flute Music*, PhD dissertation, Norwegian Academy of Music, Oslo, 2022.
- [6] S. Hayden and L. Windsor, "Collaboration and the Composer: Case Studies from the End of the 20th Century," *Tempo*, vol. 61, no. 240, pp. 28–39, Apr. 2007, doi: 10.1017/S0040298207000113.
- [7] P. Roe, *A Phenomenology of Collaboration in Contemporary Composition and Performance*, PhD dissertation, Department of Music, University of York, Oct. 2007.
- [8] R. K. Sawyer and S. DeZutter, "Distributed creativity: How collective creations emerge from collaboration," *Psychology of Aesthetics, Creativity, and the Arts*, vol. 3, no. 2, pp. 81–92, May 2009, doi: 10.1037/a0013282.
- [9] J. Torrence, "Rethinking the Performer: Towards a Devising Performance Practice," Apr. 8, 2018, doi: 10.22501/vis.391025.
- [10] L. Zattra, "Symmetrical Collaborations: Jonathan Harvey and His Computer Music Designers," *Nuove Musiche*, vol. 4, special issue on Jonathan Harvey, C. Felici and S. Lombardi Vallauri, Eds. Pisa: Pisa University Press, 2018, pp. 29–57.
- [11] L. Zattra, "Combined Methods to Study Collaboration, Co-Creation and Collaborative Performance in the Digital Music Era: Three Case Studies between Oral History and Source Criticism." in *Performing Live Electronic Music*, edited by G.T. Perez, L. Bennett & J.P. Hiekel, Wolke Verlag, 2024, pp. 173-207.