

Two doctoral projects by musicians in "Musikalisk Gestaltning"

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Vidar Vikøren: Studier omkring artikkelasjon i tysk romantisk orgelmusikk, 1800-1850. Med et tillegg om registreringspraksis. Diss. Göteborg: Göteborgs universitet, 2007. 114 s., CD. ISBN 978-91-975911-6-4.

Svein Erik Tandberg: Imagination, Form, Movement and Sound. Studies in Musical Improvisation. Diss. Göteborg: Göteborgs universitet, 2008. 312 s., 2 CD. ISBN 978-91-975-911-8-8.

Two doctoral projects by two musicians, Vidar Vikøren and Svein Erik Tandberg, in the discipline of 'musikalisk gestaltning', that combines research and art in Western classical music. These projects resemble each other in many ways, but they also show dissimilarities. The exact relationship of research and art in both of these cases is, in fact, complex and possibly also complicated. Do they display 'artistic research'? Is 'artistic research' an attempt to define the character of the work in question, or has the work carried out been determined and forged by 'artistic research', whatever it is taken to mean? Or is it a well-intentioned attempt to override the difficulty in trying to define the complex character of the work in question? Is it not an oversimplification to call the work represented in these projects 'artistic research', or possibly a serious misrepresentation? Is there simply no other way to describe the character of the projects?

I will try to explain my understanding of the character of each work as well as their common ground in the light of my experience in supervising, tutoring and assessing artistic, practice-based and research-oriented doctoral work, mainly at (the music university of) Sibelius Academy in Helsinki, and in some international circumstances, since 1993. I had also the opportunity to act as opponent to Vikøren and a member of the examining committee (betygsnämnd) for Tandberg. I will not make a detailed investigation or assessment of these interesting and ambitious projects, as it has been done earlier, and they have been found worthy of the degree of Doctor of Philosophy. Both works were prepared in the Academy of Music and Drama, in the Faculty of Fine, Applied and Performing Arts in the University of Gothenburg. I will focus my attention on the relationship between art and research, or possibly 'artistic research'.

Both projects are typical of the kind of work practising musicians find necessary and rewarding, and do even outside academia. For a doctor's degree the formal requirements have been determined beforehand, as a prescribed 'learning outcome', achieved by setting and attaining a specific goal as well as reaching a certain level of quality. The State

or some other authority has prescribed the requirements; and they are influenced by ideology and politics.

In addition to offering new understanding and stimulus for an organist, these interesting projects trigger many questions concerning the actual character of the doctoral work in general, the nature of 'artistic research', and the politics around 'artistic doctorates'.

Vidar Vikøren:

a musician's performance practice studies

Vidar Vikøren is a practising organist, who has been studying and performing classical organ music of the first half of the Nineteenth century for his doctoral project; a repertoire, somewhat neglected in the present musical society. For an organist, the most common, and often the only composer known, within the established repertoire, is Felix Mendelssohn, and he is certainly in the very centre of Vikøren's study. But Vikøren consults other composers and plays their music as well. It is a sign of the times to try to introduce some music from outside the canon. As his 'dissertation' Vikøren submitted a book and a recording of organ music on a compact disc.

Vikøren studied the performance practice of the organ repertoire of the first half of the Nineteenth century, specifically its articulation. The change from the Eighteenth century 'ordentliches fortgehen' (normal articulation, slightly non-legato, to make it simple) to more or less – and possibly completely – legato articulation, happened gradually during the course of the Nineteenth century, maybe as late as in the beginning of the Twentieth century. (This change happened at different times and at varying speed in different cultural and social contexts.) While this was happening, the new more legato style of playing was propagated fairly heavily. And as the articulation of later times was dominated by very much legato, it is difficult to reconstruct the articulation practice of the early Nineteenth century. In consequence, a very practical and immediate question for an organist trying to make sense of early Nineteenth century music, which today does not have as strong a performance style tradition as some later Nineteenth century music, is what the articulation was like originally.

I have tried elsewhere to critically analyse the material, methods and results of this research and its application in the recorded performances (*Svensk tidskrift för musikkforskning* 2008, p. 160-161), so I will focus my attention to the relationship between research and art, and the specific nature of this project in question.

Vikøren's work is situated in the discipline of performance practice studies. It is carried out for the benefit of the practicing musician, and as such appears to be unproblematic. Most often, and obviously in this case, the impetus for research carried out by a musician is a problem of interpretation in the playing of a particular repertoire.

The choice of subjects is of an artist-musician's

It is obvious that in this case Vikøren, the researcher has benefited from the experience and know-how of Vikøren the professional and practising organist, active in the field of art. The knowledge and expertise acquired by long years of studying and performing is definitely a prerequisite for this kind of study. It is difficult to imagine a professional researcher from any discipline, even from musicology, able to identify the problems and interpret the texts under investigation – or even to find and choose them – without this experience. The choice of topic or research subject is always a function of the researcher's history and background no matter where they lie.

For a musician it is challenging to recognise relevant research subjects and carry out original research without being prejudiced by preconceived ideas and anticipated results. Uninhibited and unorthodox thinking in music often requires great effort because of a strict historical canon, strong traditions in performance, and a fairly authoritarian music education in conservatoires. Musicians also have to be extra alert because they carry (tacit) knowledge in their bodies, and are not prepared or educated to articulate, or even be conscious of it.

The nature of research

The fact that the musician-researcher operates predominantly in another domain does not affect the fundamental nature of the research work itself. The methods and practices are determined by the same principles employed in all research. In this case I do not find anything in the actual execution of performance practice studies carried out by a musician that would differ from research carried out by a musicologist. But I can imagine, and have also witnessed research subjects in musicology, which presuppose knowledge or practical command that only a musician can provide. To gain satisfying results in these cases, if the subject cannot be dropped altogether, co-operation with a musician has to be arranged, or the researcher has to obtain the necessary knowledge. It is difficult or even impossible for a practicing researcher to acquire the skills and knowledge of an artist.

For a musician who has received a purely musical education, an education in arts, it means much hard work to acquire the research skills the professional researcher has learned while the musician was hard at work with his art. Nevertheless, in my experience this is necessary. It is not feasible to practise some kind of half-hearted research or 'semi-research', with only casual command of the apparatus; it is simply bad research. However, I have encountered good studies with a limited subject and carefully circumscribed methods carried out by researchers who do not have long or extensive experience in research, many of them among musicians.

The application of research results

The practising organist is naturally eager to adopt the results of his/her research in his/

her playing. Vikøren has done this, not only to resolve some puzzles of the notation, but also to give the playing new impetus and interpretation. The researcher-musician investigates certain features of (historical) performance practice, in this case a specific characteristic in a specific corpus of music, and then adopts the practical implications in his/her playing.

It is typical of this kind of research that the results are usually limited to details or strongly restricted features. Only seldom do the results provide the performer with a definitive practical application that is valid in all contexts. Often the results are generalities, probabilities, or the understanding of non-applicability. Assessing the context, its influence on the application, and choosing a suitable variation inspired by the research outcome is left to the performer, and can be a very complex task. The performer has to recruit his/her creative capacities to be able to resolve the original problem in practice, often intuitively or unconsciously albeit with the help of the research. To give an example – a rather banal one: To interpret an ornament sign/symbol, it is often possible to determine the tones and their order, and even their number. But it is frequently impossible to determine the rhythmic and agogic realisation of the ornament. (It is possible that it was originally left for the performer to decide upon. It is, however, most probable that certain practices were followed even though they were not explicated.)

I think it is important to realise that research cannot resolve all the problems arising in preparing for a performance. In addition to the complications created by varying contexts there are other basic problems: the decisions that have to be made are innumerable if not uncountable and their combinations infinite. Each decision will affect another one. How could it be possible to account for all of them?

In a verbal presentation it is possible to be informed of unresolved questions or avoid the unresolved matter. In a performance no problem can be left unsolved, every single feature must be, and will be, realised in one way or another, no matter how consciously or unconsciously. The player cannot jump over the problematic passage or stop playing and wait for the unresolved notes, bars or passages to go by in time and then continue playing.

Vikøren has demonstrated his findings on a compact disc with music from the period in question. The program includes a composition by J.S. Bach as an example of the earlier playing style with examples of 'modern' music from J.H. Rinck and Mendelssohn. If the function of the recording is to demonstrate the results of the research, it is surprising that Vikøren's playing does not implement all the findings of his research. My main complaint is that his registrations differ to a rather great extent from the ones he has found recommended in the original sources.

If the recording is not a technical demonstration of the findings but an independent artistic output – showing a general understanding of the music, style and performance practice in question – it must be read in a different fashion. But even as an artistic output it leaves something to be desired.

Reasons for ambivalence in this case are perfectly comprehensible and illuminate something of the complexity of the questions involved. Vikøren has recorded his compact disc on the wonderful and perfectly appropriate Wagner organ of the Trondheim Cathedral in Norway. However, the scarcity of 8' registers and the heavy action of coupled keyboards on this particular instrument have made Vikøren choose stop combinations which create a somewhat weak and thin sound, alien to what we know, and what he describes in his book.

Another player would probably have resolved the problems differently. The (artistic) choice and responsibility rests on the performer and cannot be taken away from him/her. The particular sound produced on the Trondheim organ by Vikøren's choices has probably influenced Vikøren's other choices as well. Exactly how, and in what feature of the performance, is difficult, if not impossible to tell. At any rate, a performance is a whole and will be, or should be, perceived as a whole. There is absolutely no necessity to play in a particular manner, the choices are made by the performer. Most of the reasons behind the choices or at least some of them will probably remain unknown, often to the performer, too.

The common problem of musicologists' performance practice studies not reaching practising musicians is avoided here, the researcher and the performer are one. However, frequently musicians decide to ignore the results of performance practice studies. Is it because they are conservative and hesitant to change hard-earned practices? Or is it because they have considered the context and decided the implications do not apply there? Or are there other, artistic considerations behind the decisions? What are Vikøren's reasons for not implementing the research results fully in his own playing? Unfortunately they are not accounted for.

Evaluating doctoral work

To be able to evaluate artistic (in this case doctoral) work as an examiner I have to be conscious of my own values and preferences. But it is exactly the same with research. Fundamentally there is no difference between art and research in this respect. A piece of work will be evaluated by each domain's research community according to their respective peer review standards. (Is there an 'artistic research' community? If there is one, and can be one, it certainly does not form a critical mass, an independent and authoritative community yet.) The values directing this evaluation are often impenetrable and obscure, and change with times and societies. In humanities, there are no absolute or objective truths, whose verisimilitude could be measured or validated against something else outside the subject/object. Interpretation is needed and carried out even with a 'scientific' method.

The choices and solutions made in preparing a musical performance and while actually performing cannot be proven or demonstrated to be 'correct' as a result of research or other deliberation, except perhaps in a tiny number of cases (depending naturally on the

values of the peer review). Every detail will be, and must be, evaluated in its context of a whole performance. In this respect artistic work resembles some qualitative research.

In order to demonstrate single items of findings of research in a musical performance, in most instances one has to leave out the context, and isolate the realisation of the result as something not dependent on the context, the particularity of a performance. This makes me believe that demonstrating research results can hardly ever be realised or conceived as an artistic product. If among Vikøren's "demonstrations of proficiency for the degree of doctor", the music recording is considered a demonstration of his research results, it is unfortunately misplaced. As said before, it in fact does not fully or consequentially demonstrate the results of his research in articulation, phrasing, registration etc. If, on the other hand, the performance is considered an independent artistic output and rendering of Vikøren's artistic ideas of the compositions and their style, it fails its goal as well. The dichotomy is insurmountable and not of Vikøren's making. I would like to point out here that there is very much to enjoy and admire in the recording, not least some delightful and practically unknown pieces, a good differentiation of styles, an excellent choice and sound of a wonderful organ, and healthy handling of the instrument.

It is well known that a live performance is always different from a recorded performance, even if the latter has not included any or many cuts. If a recording of a performance is chosen, should it not consciously aim to diverge from a live performance? If demonstration of proficiency for an artistic degree were a live concert, it would still fulfil the requirement of publicity, especially with free admission for the audience. If wider dissemination is mandatory, then a recording would be needed. But then the nature of the artistic work would be somewhat different. Should there be a choice between these two depending on the goal of the project?

Are these problems the result of the manner the project has been realised, or of the academic requirements laid upon it? (This I say with hesitation, as I do not have any detailed information on this matter.) If the submission to be assessed were a recording or, even better, a live performance, it would not be possible to scrutinise the demonstrational aspect of the performance, and the 'whole' would have been more prominent, giving room to the original artistic achievement. Could Vikøren's 'demonstrations of proficiency' not include a live recital? Shouldn't the art and culture of performing live to an audience in a specific social occasion be practised and cherished? It should surely not only be possible, but indispensable to cultivate this fundament of music in doctoral work.

Perhaps these questions have been asked and answered by Vikøren and his supervisors, but I miss the explication, which could have been set forth in the book.

Tandberg: an artistic demonstration of proficiency

Svein Erik Tandberg's dissertation is another project that combines art and research. He too plays the organ, but his instrument could be any, because the main subject of the project is improvisation. However, the organ is a natural medium since improvisation has always formed a major part, if not all, of organists' work, be it in the church or elsewhere. Tandberg has studied the history and practice of improvisation and recorded 4 compact discs of music. The study takes the form of a book. The recordings are his improvisations either prepared in advance or played more or less ad hoc, the latter with other musicians.

Tandberg presents his basic question as: "How can one learn the art of improvisation?" I find this question, as a starting point, slightly misleading, because it represents something other than improvisation as the starting point, playing something pre-composed and set to musical notation in a score. But in most of known music history, 'music' was a synonym for 'improvisation'. Musical notation and playing from a written score was the exception. (Tandberg is conscious of this.) Strictly speaking, Tandberg's book (or recordings) do not teach us how to 'make music', to improvise. Another question was 'How does one improvise?' It is a little unclear to which property 'how' alludes to.

To me, Tandberg's achievement appears an ambitious artistic project. He has developed his improvisational skills with the help of historical information and analysis of the improvisation process itself. In this case there can be no hesitation as to the character of the recordings: they definitely constitute an artistic output.

Research in the service of art

The first part of Tandberg's book is dedicated to a historical survey that starts in the Fifteenth century and stretches up to the Twenty-first century. Not surprisingly, Tandberg shows that earlier organists improvised a lot, and that composition and improvisation were the same, or much closer to each other than they are today. Most of the activity that we would call improvisation today, was actually composing 'alla mente' (in the head), composing and planning beforehand without writing anything down. (In the days of weak copyright, musicians' renown and employment were very dependent on the individuality of their music; therefore it was not wise to render it on paper for anybody to copy.)

From later history, Tandberg studies reports left about organ improvisations from the Nineteenth century, namely improvisations by César Franck, Anton Bruckner and Johann Georg Herzog. They were all famous for their exceptional abilities to improvise, Franck and Herzog were also well known for their pedagogy and teaching. From the Twentieth century, four other famous organists' improvisations are scrutinised: Heinz Wunderlich, Ruth Zechlin, Rolande Falcinelli and Olivier Latry. The criterion behind this selection is not made explicit. These famous improvisers do not represent the mean abilities, achievements, or style of the average organist. Obviously they have been chosen

to act as encouraging examples, and to give new ideas to the studying improviser. This section of the study is therefore clearly determined by the artist-musician's needs. Tandberg, the improviser-expert, has uncovered much fascinating information about the work of his famous colleagues. As in Vikøren's case, I think Tandberg's expertise as organist-improviser is a necessary prerequisite to uncover valuable information from the 'informants'.

In the second part of the book, Tandberg examines the general character and idiosyncrasies of improvising and improvised music. In this section Tandberg takes up a multitude of points, so many that it is difficult to see much order or logic in the sequence of varying, although interesting, topics. The appearance is of a philosophical essay. Unfortunately a philosophical essay, if anything, needs extremely clear thinking and an organised presentation. It can be argued that in the strictest sense, according to the criteria set for quality in research, Tandberg's book does not provide much new information or new interpretation. However, I sense that reviewing the history and the action of improvisation has benefited Tandberg's art, which is made manifest on the compact discs.

Topoi, constrictions, corporal knowledge

When Tandberg discusses "the supply of musical structures, which the improviser has 'stored' or 'coded' in his/her body" and which he/she will use in the course of any improvisation, when "orientating towards the unheard and unknown", also in "subconscious procedures", my interest is immediately awakened. Several ideas come to mind, which I wish somebody else, if not Tandberg, would take up and elaborate on.

The first is the idea of *topos* as known from classical rhetoric, which might be useful in places and make discussion simpler. In the rhetoric of music, *topos* (Greek: place) is a motif, a figure, a texture, a rhythm, a sound, or any singular object or member of a category of similar objects, which denotes a certain meaning or context, and is usually removed from its original place, "elements of a recognisable source" (Jan Garbarek, quoted by Tandberg), a hunting bugle motif, the first four tones of Beethoven's Fifth symphony or even their rhythm, 'alla turca' music, etc. The improviser's vocabulary is full of different *topoi*. However, the listener might not recognise all of them. Are they part of the vocabulary of the improviser only or do they have significance also to the listener? Can they be called *topoi* or function as *topoi*, if they are not even vaguely familiar to the listener?

Tandberg is keen to enrich his material, range of choices and techniques, but he does not discuss another feature common to all improvisation, composing or any other artistic activity: the need for constriction. The conditions of any artistic work are determined by many factors: external circumstances, the medium, and just as many are set voluntarily by the artist. In fact a prerequisite of any work in art is the need to overstep limits or overcome restrictions, be they social, aesthetic, media or form. Quite often the narrower

the room to move and scarcer the choices, the more the imagination has to work. The result is a kind of overcompensation, which is the beginning of a work of art. (J.S. Bach voluntarily choosing the most severe species of counterpoint for his *Kunst der Fuge*. Another example is Girolamo Frescobaldi's *Recercar ottavo, obliquo non uscir di grado* for a keyboard instrument. In the 'nuove musiche' dissonances had an extremely important task in expressing the text and affect of the piece. Frescobaldi is asking himself: "Is it possible to compose interesting music without any dissonances?" *Recercar ottavo* is an answer to his question. No dissonances mean no stepwise movement: all voices move by jumps.)

Of much consequence would be to take a phenomenological view of the improviser's art and activity. The tacit knowledge of a musician is situated in his/her body and cannot be removed. Exactly how it settles there is a fascinating subject and will need much study to be understood better. From material available on the improviser, it does not follow that the improviser actually studies the material. Motivation to study the material is needed. Where does the motivation come from? Why does the improviser need to improvise? Intellectual study of the material is only the beginning of a process, when the information becomes knowledge and is gradually, after a lot of thinking and practising, finally ingrained in the body. Only then is it available as raw material for improvisation.

Functional or non-functional music?

Tandberg's improvisation is impressive in its variety – and quantity. The first CD is organ music for an Evangelical-Lutheran Christmas service in the (German) style of the Nineteenth century. The rendering is 'historically inspired', which means here that the style and the forms were taken from Johann Georg Herzog's instructions for a liturgical organist. Hence the stylistic framework is fairly narrow. The result is very satisfying, because of the liturgical role of the organ playing with a clearly defined function, with Herzog providing the stylistic frame, which was originally fashioned by, and for, this very function.

The second project is less functional as it is a series of improvisations, where the starting point of the central melodic material in each set of variations is a Gregorian melody, a chorale, a song, or one tone. The realisations vary from style pastiche to very free fantasies. Tandberg explains how Henri Bergson's philosophy has provided inspiration for this music-making. However, this reader is not convinced that Bergson's philosophy had come first and prompted the improvisations. I do not doubt the insight Bergson has provided in general for Tandberg, but the actual skill and even the artistic purposes surely existed independent of Bergson.

What is the purpose of this project? Is it a study in different improvisation ('composing') techniques? Is it a demonstration of the improviser's stylistic awareness and capability for pastiche?

Tandberg's third project is ensemble-improvisation. (The other musicians are Schola

Gothia with Ulrike Heider as leader, Linda Kallerdahl [vocal], Andreas Hall [woodwinds, electronics], Emma Nordlund [cello], Henrik Wartel [percussion, electronics], Martin Öhman [percussion, electronics], Harald Stenström [electric double bass, ensemble leader].) On the surface, the music seems totally free and purely incidental, but even here, where the general style in form, vertical and horizontal coincidence is very free, some constrictions or starting points were deemed necessary: the whole is based on Gregorian melodies from the Vatican Liber Usualis forming a Christian Mass. To listen attentively to two whole compact discs is quite challenging, but at times, very rewarding. This part of the project appears most 'Tandbergian' and therefore, in the end, most original as a piece of art.

Similarly to the 'variation' project, in preparing this improvisation, Tandberg recounts his inspiration: Dietrich Bonhoeffer's theology. I am convinced of the importance of Bonhoeffer's ideas to Tandberg, but I also boldly presume that they are an afterthought to justify the third project, or represent a general background of Tandberg's thinking and had not provided immediate incentives for the practical realisation. If I am wrong about 'cause and effect' with this and the second project, I wish Tandberg had written more about their exact relationship.

The decision to be open about the ideas behind artistic projects and realisations is recommendable and interesting. However, it must be extremely difficult to be able to analyse them exhaustively. This should not of course prevent anyone from trying

The influence of position and the importance of transparency

Tandberg's selection of music has naturally been determined by his musical abilities and artistic preferences, with the approval of his supervisors, of course. It is a (relatively) free outcome of his individuality conditioned by his position, and as such independent and original artistic work. What is the role of the written work, then?

While Tandberg's book contains a mass of interesting information and illuminating pondering, which clearly show the writer's expertise in the field, it is difficult to call it true research. To be blunt, the research questions are too vague and extensive, they have not been answered consistently, the grounds for selecting the material are unclear, the method(s) have not been explained, and the results are unclear, or at least scattered along the whole (well over three hundred pages long) text. I have a slightly uneasy feeling in sensing an attempt to artificially 'objectify' the discussion instead of openly explaining the writer's position and the purpose of the study.

If the purpose is not original research, it follows that it has another function. It is obvious that Tandberg's study has enriched his art, perhaps given it new directions, surely made him realise his own position more clearly, given new understandings of the art of improvisation in general, provided insight into the history of improvisation, and

who knows what else. Surely for a doctoral dissertation all this should be explained. Or should I be happy with the end result, the recorded music? Or if this project were considered a purely artistic one, would we need anything else than a live performance of improvisation?

In my opinion, both Vikøren and Tandberg should have stated more clearly the (artistic?) goals of their project, and explained how they expected to achieve them. Another point, which I am trying to understand is: What is the relationship of the 'research' and the art? The writers' views in this respect are vague at the very least. In scholarly dissertations it is commonplace to try to analyse how well the goals have been reached; this would have been illuminating also here.

I sympathize with the difficulties facing these pioneers and their supervisors, myself having been subject, or subjected, to the same tribulations and probing. In the end this discussion concentrates on the question of the position of art.

Is art dirty?

To me it is embarrassing to call Vikøren's or Tandberg's work 'artistic research'. True research it is not, why then call it that? Or does the addition 'artistic' here provide justification for a lesser quality of research, because art is something difficult to define, unorganised, chaotic, and uncontrollable? If this kind of study and work is called 'artistic research', it undermines not only research in general but also the end result, which is not research, but art.

Why couldn't an artist be admitted able to reach such heights in their art that he/she should be worthy of a Doctorate? Should the degree of Doctor be reserved only for excellence in research or in something containing at least a reasonable amount of research? The symmetry between a researcher's position and an artist's position is obvious to me. Does society understand only the importance of research, but not the value of art? Does society require justification for art? Does research then supply justification for art, even if the research is half-hearted or simply bad? Are researchers jealous of letting some of their authority slip away to artists? If there exists a Doctorate in art, is it wise to let research institutions decide on the qualifications? And is it dangerous to let art institutions do this?

Do we have the courage to answer these questions truthfully?