

Getting to performance: NZTrio and relational dynamics

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Abstract

In this paper we examine a small arts organization – NZTrio – and its capacity to operate successfully as a cooperative, without having a designated leader. The Trio has developed highly attuned collaborative skills which enrich notions of relational leadership. We explore the history of the Trio noting the egalitarian ethos that pervades everything they undertake and the ethic of care that underpins their work together. Conversations at administrative and artistic levels are open, with ideas being held non-judgmentally. This translates into rehearsals that rely on small, nuanced gestures that inform relational leadership through an aesthetic lens.

Keywords: Collaboration, chamber music, ensemble, relational leadership, management

Getting to performance: NZTrio and relational dynamics

NZTrio played their first concert in March 2002. What started as a one-off event with music by Brahms and Ravel, in fact marked the beginning of a flourishing creative relationship that still endures. It is this journey towards a productive partnership, and more specifically how relational leadership and its aesthetic informs the ways in which the Trio operates that is the focus of our discussion.

Our quest to understand the Trio is oriented around aesthetics in its generic sense, in that we explore the sensate responses of its members to each other and the ways in which they attend to the integrity of their working relationship. We are also interested more particularly in the aesthetics of their art form: specifically how they bring music compositions to life in performance.

One of only two full-time professional chamber groups in New Zealand, NZTrio has gone from the security of a five-year tenure as a chamber group in residence at a university school of music to being a self-sustaining artistic enterprise. Known for commissioning works both from within and beyond New Zealand, the Trio performs music from the traditional repertoire, as well as new compositions. In 2012 they were recognized for their embrace of new music and for their innovative approach to programming by being awarded the prestigious KBB/CANZ (Composers Association of New Zealand) Citation for Services to New Zealand Music.

This ability to straddle the old and new relies on a paradoxical combination of maintaining simplicity while at the same time producing works that are complex and challenging (Garet, 1996), in an environment where “safety and vulnerability [are] twisted and knotted together” (Calderwood, 2005, p. 2). However, given that artistic innovation is difficult to sustain over time (Nytch, 2012), pianist Courtney Crappell (2011) ruminates that:

The modern music we perform and teach is incomprehensibly complex, while the traditional music we use seems anachronistic (designed for a different age and audience) and, therefore, also incomprehensibly complex (Crappell, 2011, p. 8).

Stated in this way, the problems of incomprehensibility in new music and anachronistic offerings of works from the canon, it seems there is little way forward for groups like NZTrio to carve niches in which to perform newly composed *avant-garde* music, and works from the traditional repertoire. And yet this is the challenge that NZTrio have embraced, with their website declaring:

Both versatile and genre-busting, NZTrio epitomises the *relevance* of live music in a digital age. This group smashes preconceptions of classical music being stuffy and intimidating by engaging their listeners with intimate and dynamic performances. NZTrio inspires people of all walks of life to see classical music, both old and new as approachable, essential and meaningful (NZTrio, 2013, emphasis added).

As authors, we became intrigued by the ways in which NZTrio has developed a compelling artistic brand. We enquired into the ways in which the Trio has striven to achieve the relevance they claim, especially in a marketplace that is inherently conservative (Kremp, 2010). Given these constraints, our quest was to discover how the Trio functions both as a performing ensemble *and* as an artistic enterprise, including their team of two managers. In particular, we questioned the nature of their leadership style from a relational perspective. Our interest was sparked by their insistence that they have no formal leader. Along with no single individual taking final responsibility, all five members (musicians and managers) are remunerated equally.

An egalitarian ethos pervades everything they undertake and having observed their development for the past 12 years, we question how the absence of a specific leader impacts on them and how relational leadership is fostered. Further, skepticism about collaborative leadership approaches (Cramton, 2001; Mauthner & Doucet, 2008) and enduring hierarchical organizational forms that privilege a controlling leader (Jaques, 1990) make NZTrio an interesting study, because they deliberately buck this trend.

In what follows we summarize the literature on relational leadership in particular in the performing arts arena. We then examine NZTrio and our method of enquiry, noting particularly the ways in which they conduct themselves in rehearsals. We then discuss how these ideas might enrich notions of relational and collaborative leadership.

Informing Theory

Relational theories of leadership have grown out of “leader member exchange” (LMX) (O’Donnell, Yukl, & Taber, 2012), a theory that positions the leader and follower in a dynamic interplay which is informed by their developing relationship. This dynamism allows for the relationship to be cultivated by “respect, trust, and obligation” (Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1995, p. 257). Relational leadership is transformational in its orientation (Mathis, 2007) and provides an environment for “bonding” and “vigor” to be nurtured in such a way that job performance is enhanced (Carmeli, Ben-Hador, Waldman, & Waldman, 2009, p. 1554).

However, these LMX-oriented theoretical positions have preserved the binary polarity between the leader and his or her followers. The *relationship* itself as an ontological “entity” (see Uhl-Bien, 2006), necessarily maintains a continuing leader–follower distinction. Thus LMX conceives of the relationship as a third actor that may sustain or even limit group processes.

Recent developments, however, demonstrate that relationally-focused leadership is more fluid and polyphonic than the fixed view that is implied in LMX. Cunliffe and Eriksen (2011) argue that, given an open and unfinalizable context, relationships become dialogic, inviting engagement and conversation in ways that are ongoing and that resist closure.

Dialogism therefore embodies relationally-responsive living conversation and the understanding that conversations are never final; the need for ongoing dialogue; to be careful in bringing different views, values and meanings into the open; of respecting differences and shaping new meanings and possibilities for action from those differences (Cunliffe & Eriksen, 2011).

Rather than relying on a designated leader initiating and articulating visions that followers in turn enact, Cunliffe and Eriksen’s view of relational leadership maintains that “organizational members actively create their organizational world through their relationships with one another” (2011, p. 1432), thus blurring the clear distinctions between the leaders and followers. This implies that for relational leadership to flourish there is at least a reduced role for the leader, and at most the actual disappearance of a designated leader (Alvesson & Sveningsson, 2003).

This view, though, is dependent on the willingness for people to dialogue coherently and openly together. While we agree with this position, relational leadership relies on the quality of the conversations within which it occurs (Fairhurst, 2001). What is missing here is an articulation of the roles of gesture and acoustic space as the ground from which relational leadership grows (see Bathurst & Williams, 2013). Particularly important are the ways in which musicians function together in order to achieve compelling performances. Thus the sometimes explicit and at other times implicit ways of being for musicians in public performance, off-stage rehearsal, and behind-the-scenes management are our focus.

Several studies have been carried out on musicians who perform in small groups, most notably Murnighan and Conlon (1991) who analyzed 21 string quartets in the United Kingdom. Their analysis proposed that musicians achieve a comfortable degree of success by living with paradoxes without necessarily resolving them (the leader versus democracy, the role of the second violinist, and confrontation versus compromise). These paradoxes, though, firstly assume a hierarchical view where the first violinist is perceived as the "leader" (perhaps because of the use of the word "first" to describe the violinist who usually plays the upper melodic line), and secondly are constructed within the binary frame, thus creating a simplified explanation for a complex phenomenon. While we acknowledge that there may be considerable angst among members of a small group of workers who function in intense environments such as string quartets, we are not persuaded that the quartet structure in and of itself imposes this anxiety.

Other studies have attempted to understand the dynamics of music groups without resorting to polar either/or ways of knowing. For instance Bougon, Weick and Binkhorst (1977) conceived of a group of jazz musicians as a collective, mapping the relationships of the performers into a social etiograph which pictures the levels of connection that the musicians have to their craft and ensemble. Their study offers a much richer view of the kinds of attachments and resistances that musicians experience among themselves.

Similarly, although looking at larger groups, Maitlis (1997) sought to understand the nature of participation and satisfaction within bureaucratically governed orchestras. Her findings revealed a desire for participation in decision-making by musicians and this involvement was often thwarted by inflexible structures that were insensitive to relationally informed ways of being. Notwithstanding this inflexibility, orchestras are able to achieve a relational dynamic that is collaborative and participatory. For instance, Leonard Bernstein described conducting as "making chamber music on a large scale, together" (Bernstein in Matheopoulos, 1982, p. 10). By conceiving of the orchestra on an intimate scale he articulated his role as a conductor as

a great love affair ... but it's a mystery because, whatever happens, it's the most potent love affair you can have in your life. And it involves over a hundred people. It's incredible when you have over a hundred people breathing together, all pulsing together. It's almost unbearable at times ... when they are in the mood and this special something happens (Bernstein in Matheopoulos, 1982, p. 10).

Here Bernstein describes rather effusively a kind of relationship that goes beyond musicians responding to the conductor's baton and embraces something that is more dialogic and mutually informative, where the musicians and conductor work together to realize the work of art. Barker (2001) describes this as a shift from "cause-effect relationships [to] ... challenge-response relationships" (p. 492). However, the shift in emphasis does not imply instructions deriving from a single source but is omni-directional, with musicians and conductor challenging and responding to each other continuously, moment-by-moment. Skilled conductors like Bernstein acknowledge that they are not the focal point of the orchestra but are part of the dynamic interplay that ensues when musicians perform together.

This form of relational leadership that occurs among performers is focused "on energy, not matter; on becoming, not being, on coincidence, not causes, on constructivism, not determinism; and new states of awareness and consciousness" (Overman, 1996, p. 489). In order to be focused on energy and to be aware of the environment within which the performance takes place necessarily requires flexibility and openness for whatever individual moments present. For O'Dea (1993), honesty, courage, generosity, modesty and empathy are qualities which underpin collaborative groups. She claims that "pursuing the art of music and performance fosters the firm disposition to *care* about getting things right" (p. 241, emphasis in the original). This ethic of care necessarily means that performers attend to what is immediately obvious as well as elements that are implied

and suggested. Care, effectively enjoins performers to scrutinize carefully the singular and unique tonal qualities of actual sound sensation, not to miss, through evasiveness, abstractness or love of simplification, anything of interpretive relevance. And thus having made one vividly aware, it enjoins one responsibly and conscientiously to decide the appropriate thing to do given all of those relevant particulars (O'Dea, 1993, p. 242).

In what follows we explore collaborative, relational leadership through empirical data on the life of NZTrio. Before reading any further we urge you to watch one of the videos available of the Trio from their website <http://www.nztrio.com/watch-and-listen/video/> and to compare that with the roughhewn video clip recorded on an iPhone, of the group rehearsing which is available as supplemental file on the OA website for this article or by clicking here <http://digitalcommons.wpi.edu/oa/vol3/iss1/7/>.

NZTrio: Beginnings

NZTrio began working together from a position of mutual respect and trust and each player having had a past history of working with each other in various contexts. For instance, the violinist and pianist worked together as young people both during their high school years and as undergraduates studying at the same university. Beyond these two, Justine the violinist tells of her first encounters with the third member of the Trio, Ashley the cellist.

I have often told the story of when I first played with Ashley – he was the young soloists and I was a member of the accompanying orchestra. He was so assured, and his musicianship was so clear. [Later when we worked in the same orchestra] he was such a breath of fresh air – someone who played with a gorgeous sound and natural musicianship – and without fuss.

Several ideas are pertinent here and are instructive about the underpinnings of relational leadership. We note that affirming another's talent and unique contribution is crucial. Added to this, we observe that performing "without fuss" mitigates the deleterious effects of narcissism and self-absorption sometimes found among musicians (Young & Pinsky, 2006).

In the world of music performance, most of what the audience knows is what they see and hear from the stage. For instance, in an orchestral performance, musicians might be observed talking quietly to each other, warming up their instruments and fingers, and privately tuning, before the concert master, and then conductor, enter to begin the performance. Little is known about offstage behavior and protocols. And yet clearly much has occurred in rehearsal that makes the performance elegant and eloquent. During our research with NZTrio we were intrigued by how the three inter-related during rehearsals. Consequently we became interested in the ways they spoke with each other, both socially before and after the rehearsals, and more deliberately while working on the details of specific pieces. Through these observations we were better able to understand how they cohered together and built on their onstage performances, their informal relationships offstage during rehearsals and the ways in which they worked with their management team.

Our research was ethnographic in that we have studied the Trio in all its facets as participant observers over the past four years. According to Gagliardi (1996), ethnography is an apt method, especially focusing on aesthetics, because it provides a mechanism to articulate and "give a name to our sensations" (1996, p. 877) while at the same time allowing those as set responses to continue to inform the research as it unfolds. Strati (1999) concurs, noting that ethnographic study allows researchers to become socialized into the world of the people they are studying, and helps develop "empathic understanding [which] begins with the researcher's self-immersion in the role of the Other" (p. 73). The researcher and researched form a collaborative relationship

(Richardson, 2000) that is mutually informative. Our goal was to write an impressionistic account (see Van Maanen, 1987) of the Trio based on a variety of activities in which we have participated over the period of study.

Our immersion into the life world of NZTrio involved being subscribers of their concert series (they usually present three or four of these per year); we have been audience members in *ad hoc* concerts both in private residences and collaborative performances with other art groups (New Zealand Dance Company and Massive Theatre Company); we attended about 12 hours of rehearsals, and video recorded three hours for analysis, and have interviewed the Trio as an ensemble. We participated in 20 hours of discussion, developing two professional development packages; one for high-performing teams in the corporate sector and the other for young people considering a career in the performing arts sector as managers and promoters. During these observations we wrote field notes and as authors regularly met together in person or via email and telephone to discuss our shared experiences and developing understandings of the ensemble. In what follows we give our impressions of how the Trio functions, beginning first with describing their management structure, and then looking at their rehearsal culture, examining the ways in which they communicate with each other. We conclude with a discussion of the aesthetics of their collaborative leadership.

Before Rehearsing

NZTrio has a cooperative management style. In terms of its daily operations, paradoxically the Trio is a quintet. Their primary manager, who takes care of all of the administrative matters, is on an equal footing with the three musicians. They are all employed on a 60% per week basis and each receives the same remuneration for their labors. They also have a part-time assistant manager who attends to specific projects on an *ad hoc* basis. This egalitarian environment is crucial to understanding the nature of their cooperative enterprise because, as Dixon (1997) argues, residual power inherent in organizations' leadership structures can inhibit free and open dialogue. For NZTrio, however, the kinds of unfettered conversations that are difficult in conventional organizations are routine. In this way the Trio behaves similarly to those in improvisational theatre, giving and accepting invitations to explore ideas (Thomson, 2003).

The three musicians are intimately involved in all the decision-making and participate in e-mail exchanges daily. Weekly discussion meetings where key decisions are made are interspersed with these online conversations that keep each of the team updated as to progress on a particular issue. Therefore, the musicians do not delegate complete and sole responsibility for administering the affairs of their enterprise to their managers, but rather view the managers as integral to the ensemble.

For instance, the manager may suggest a particular travel itinerary that allows the Trio to perform at an international festival as well as maximizing their time by performing in venues either side of a festival. To set such an itinerary in place requires considerable hours of negotiating with travel agents, sponsors, hosts, not to mention working around each musician's own artistic commitments outside the Trio. These negotiations are active and fluid, with each member having input as decisions gradually become firmed-up.

For the primary manager, who began her working life in a large corporate accounting firm before moving to private industry as a financial controller, this represents quite a different way of working. Where she had been used to group discussions among professional colleagues, making decisions, enacting those decisions and then reporting back to clients when appropriate actions had been taken, the Trio works quite differently. Each member is explicit about the desire to be continually informed and involved in decisions as they gradually take shape. This way of managing mirrors both rehearsal and performing etiquette. Each member is always and continuously responsible for deciding the next steps in fulfilling the artistic vision.

In translating these ways of behaving onto the live performance, for example, the Trio has been using a new theatre in the center of Auckland to perform their annual subscription series. It has taken several performances for the Trio to feel comfortable in the new venue, especially as the "Loft at Q", an upstairs small theatre which is part of the larger "Q" complex, presents a number of constraints in its layout.

Before the second subscription concert on July 22, 2012, patrons could not access their seats because of a problem with the piano. Stage lights had caused the instrument to go out of tune during the pre-concert rehearsal and it needed to be retuned before the concert. This left a number of people standing outside in the corridor waiting for the doors to open, an incident that could have caused a major disaster for the forthcoming performance, due to increased anxiety among the audience and performers. The manager's ability to create a sense of calm by ensuring that bar staff were available to serve drinks to patrons as they waited and speaking in a reassuring manner settled the atmosphere, that when the doors did open, a buzz of anticipation pervaded the theatre.

Although potentially disturbing their sense of calm time prior to the performance, they have learned over time to add that to unforeseen incidents without panicking or throwing tantrums. For instance, during our research observations we were scheduled to meet with them at a pre-arranged rehearsal venue, only to find that it had been double-booked and that another group had been given preference over them. An immediate reaction of one of them was to say to the other two "No problem, what are our alternatives?" Justine then set about locating various other rehearsal venues to see if any was available, demonstrating a commitment to finding a solution to the presenting problem, rather than attributing blame. This relaxed attitude towards unpredictable events enabled them to cope with a potentially disruptive audience at the Loft at Q concert.

Beyond the work of the manager in facilitating front-of-house relationships and their performing schedule, the Trio has also constituted a Board to oversee their affairs. This allows them the opportunity to receive advice on financial and administration matters, and quarterly meetings provide a vehicle for feedback and discussion. Extra-musical issues, which could cause anxiety if left unaddressed, are dealt with outside rehearsals in a continuous and timely manner, thereby freeing them to explore the art of music-making. As a collective the Trio's openness to receiving advice, and even criticism, is underscored by the expressed willingness of the manager to receive provocative commentary, and even critical feedback from the Board and advisers, in order that administration processes are continually refined. Thus the Trio, including the manager and other stakeholders, continually reflect on their work *in toto* rather than separating musical elements from the day-by-day vicissitudes of running an artistic enterprise.

The Rehearsal

As already mentioned, the Trio began working together from a position of mutual respect and trust, which underlies all their preparations. Choice of repertoire, the number of concerts, where to perform, what to wear, who to bring on to the Board, who is to manage the day-to-day affairs, are issues mostly dealt with outside of the rehearsal situation, so that rehearsal time is not taken up with organizational issues. The high regard each has for the other is further reinforced by the level of preparedness each brings to the first rehearsal, where mastery of the technical issues is "a given".

The success of any public performance is contingent on what occurs privately in rehearsals, and the rehearsal forum is the site where the nuances of relational leadership can be located. While performances have their own energy and creative encounters, the etiquettes and diplomacies that are expressed in rehearsal can in many ways determine the success of performances. For instance, during a rehearsal break, we enquired into the Trio's communication tactics. What intrigued us was that most of the comments were

couched as questions and tentative suggestions. We asked, "Why are you not more directive in your communication with each other?" Their agreed response was, "We are so close to a performance [in three days] that we want to minimize any angst and disagreement in order to preserve the integrity of the works as we know them at this stage."

This keen sense of diplomacy when relating to each other gives a solid sense of unifying purpose; meaning that at times one or other of the individuals has to be careful regarding how they would express their opinion about how a passage could be played, for the sake of the forthcoming performance.

This decorum is fleshed out by illustrating the Trio rehearsing *dirty pixels* by Michael Norris (2004) for a forthcoming concert. This was the Trio's first commissioned work, a rhythmically complex piece, with the performance instruction "relentless, driving", which they recorded on their *Spark* (2005) album.

Concerns posing as questions

We observed that it was rare for one of the Trio to voice concern about a particular passage as a statement, it being much more likely that concern was raised as a question. A rare example of concern expressed as a statement occurred early in a rehearsal we observed. This particular rehearsal began with very little preamble. Following a short informal discussion about a school group that Ashley had been working with, they began *dirty pixels*.

After playing only a few measures they stopped and Ashley said "whenever we play this, the first time it sounds solid yet the second time it is not so solid". He then indicated particular places where he said "it comes apart". The important point here is that blame was not individually attributed. They began again but stopped at a similar place. Ashley: "I feel like it is at [rehearsal letter] A where it comes apart". They played through the passage again and after stopping Justine asked "did that feel good?" Here Justine's question opened space for critique and analysis and in contrast, direct statements rather than questions were usually reserved for positive comments such as Justine's "that felt much better – it did seem different that time". Furthermore, anything that could have been construed as negative was directed at the speaker him or herself. For instance, Justine described a sense of "confusion" about what the other two were playing at a particular measure (here the Trio use the Anglicized term "bar" for measure).

Justine: "I get confused with what you are doing at bar 112 Sarah ... And then I run out of bow at bar 117"

Ashley to Justine: "Why don't you lead us into that section?"

Ashley to Sarah: "Sarah I need just a moment longer at bar 118 to get [my hand position] down [from a high register to a lower one]."

Comments about interpretation of the piece at hand tended to be couched as questions: "can we try that again?" and "can the downbeat be stronger?" rather than "we should try that again" and "the downbeat must be stronger".

Bodies in conversation

At times the Trio would only communicate with nods and single words. We observed that often they would acknowledge input from the other members with visual signs such as nodding, or simply saying "cool", a positive acknowledgement used and understood by all three. It almost seemed as if words were intentionally kept to a minimum in order not to taint the memory of the musical sound. Similarly, making pencil marks on their scores after brief comments was a visual signal that the suggestions had been agreed to. Failure to do this did not necessarily mean the suggestion had not been accepted, but marking

the part was seen by the group as an affirmation of the suggestion. No other comment appeared to be required. Thus the penciled annotations were not just reminders of what they had agreed to do, but were means of symbolically acknowledging and respecting each other's input.

We also observed the tendency to speak in half sentences, with one of the others completing the sentence, hedging, and posing particular problems as questions, as if they were feeling their way into a potential danger zone and waiting for acquiescence at each turn of the dark corridor. Phrases such as "I wonder" and "what if" with silences either side were examples of mechanisms to invite acceptance. For instance,

Ashley to Sarah: "At bar 20 I have one concern about the 6th quaver – I am not together with you Sarah."

Later:

Ashley to Justine: "I wonder ... if you should ... play quieter at [rehearsal letter] D?"
Justine: "Uh, uh"

Further on, when discussing how to move from a very loud passage to playing suddenly softly, Ashley suggested:

"What if the notes were ... almost not played? Could we play ... just loud enough so that the notes can *speak* ... but no louder?"

Working through the complexities of achieving tight ensemble playing and stitching together difficult cross rhythms in *dirty pixels* began to take their toll on the group's concentration as the afternoon wore on.

Ashley to Sarah: "did we get to 82 together?"
Sarah to Ashley: "Not quite"
Justine: "I wonder if it is coming too soon?"
Justine: "I'm feeling tired – this is starting to do my head in! Shall we keep going?"

In spite of this sense of exhaustion and still not achieving a sense of cohesion, they pressed on with the rehearsal, determined to rework passages that were still troublesome. This need to reach a sense of ensemble consistency and of conquering technical difficulties seemed to drive them forward. There was an underlying insistence that they *own* the work for themselves.

An ethic of ownership

At times when the sense of ensemble began to collapse one or other of the Trio would say "that was my mistake [at that place]". At no point was there a hint of accusation from one member to another for causing the problem. One of the members would ask that a passage be re-played in order to correct a developing difficulty.

Sarah: "That bar was not very good"
Justine: "Which one?"
Sarah: "Can we do 184 again?"

At one stage there arose a disagreement about the quality of the notes being played – should they be emphasized ("accented") or simply lengthened ("lines")? For instance:

Justine to Ashley: "You are playing accents instead of lines"

Here Justine sounds accusatory. However, instead of interpreting this as a challenge to his ability, Ashley responded to this potential impasse by questioning the integrity of the score, and the composer's intent. As a resolution the Trio decided to play the notes both ways and then decided on their preferred reading of the score. This elegant resolution directed us back again to the phenomena of relational leadership. Here, another "actor" – the score – is introduced into the conversation as a means for the Trio to distance themselves from the possibility of direct confrontation.

Relying on the score to act as separate but integral to their performance provided a vehicle for them to continually check with each other what was written in their parts, thereby facilitating open conversation. We enquired as to why each member did not have the full score in front of them to check. Their response was that to have this full score would diminish their ability to listen intently to each other and to hear the notes and lines in context.

What intrigued us throughout was the discourse of feelings and sensations. They not only described the overall sense of ensemble and shape of the music, but at the same time discussed solutions to particular problems that inhibited them. This focus on sensation, or more broadly aesthetics, provided a language for them to talk about difficult issues without blaming another member for causing the problem.

However, we rarely observed adopting compromise as a solution to a problem. On most occasions consensus was achieved by each agreeing spontaneously that they had achieved the right "feel" for any given interpretation.

The Aesthetics of Relational Leadership

Through our study of NZTrio we have discovered insights that enrich relational leadership through the Trio's aesthetic engagement with each other and their wider community of stakeholders and audience members.

Indeed, the basic measure of success and mastering any difficult section during rehearsals was how it *felt*. This ability to "stay with the senses" (Springborg, 2010, p. 243) while at the same time dealing with the highly technical demands of sophisticated music is underpinned by the mastery of their instruments *and* emotions. Such mastery, according to Ladkin (2008, p. 33) can inspire beautiful leadership where form and content meet.

Aligned with beauty is the sublime, which, for Kant (1790/2000) "is to be found in a formless object" (p. 102) arguing that it is a kind of "negative pleasure" (p. 102). Thus "the sublime cannot be wholeheartedly embraced without a concurrent experience of discomfort" (Ladkin, 2008, p. 37). Our observations of NZTrio, although revealing sublime moments, are far from the "sight of overwhelming natural forces awakes in us consciousness of moral strength comparable to ... that with which the Hebrew prophets faced the exile, shame and destruction of their nation" of which Carritt (1949, p. 223) writes. The two incidents that we cite that could have derailed the Trio's work (the unavailable rehearsal venue and the late concert start) were dealt with in a matter-of-fact way. It was the ordinariness of their responses to these negative incidents that contributes further understandings of relational leadership through an aesthetic lens.

Furthermore, communication in music ensembles relies on the members to respond to the nuances of verbal and physical prompts. The use of physical gestures (Crossley, 2006), typical of chamber music groups, forms an essential element of NZTrio's expressions of relational leadership. These gestures rely on bodily interactions that continually inform them of their work (see Bathurst & Cain, 2013). For instance, Justine expressed her tiredness in their *dirty pixels* rehearsal by saying "this is starting to do my head in!" This colloquialism signaled to the others mental and physical exhaustion. The complexities of the passages on which they were working involved intense and close listening to each

other, while concentrating on their own individual parts. Here leadership is expressed as a collaborative phenomenon that Quinn and Dutton (2005) term "positive affective arousal" which gave them the energy to continue despite the difficulties they were experiencing. By drawing on their collective strength, Justine's expression of mental tiredness was received non-judgmentally and the other members responded supportively.

The kind of relational leadership expressed by NZTrio demonstrates a sophisticated "collective virtuosity" (Marotto, Roos, & Victor, 2007, p. 390) at work which enables them to respond intuitively to each other. Marotto, et al (2007) elevate this to what they call sense of peak experience in which "people are transported out of their quotidian lives into a sense of heightened experience and shared values creating a homogenous community" (p. 390). However, our observations of the Trio reveal skill levels that are not as idealized as Marotto et al. (2007) claim. Indeed their sense of virtuosity *is* quotidian in that their preferred ways of working are "without fuss". This enriches further notions of relational leadership by the group avoiding opportunities to stand out while at the same time stretching their technical abilities.

Summary and Future

We have focused on the relational strategies NZTrio uses to develop their brand and maintain a loyal audience. They work cooperatively not only in rehearsal but also in relationship with their manager, Board and other advisors and there is a keen sense of openness to others' perceptions of their work. For instance, the Trio regularly invites feedback from audience members and stakeholders, and on the day following the July 2012 subscription concert one of the authors sent an e-mail to the manager commenting on some of the issues around the uses of space in the theatre venue. During the concert the temporary staging on which the trio performed squeaked when the pianist's page turner moved. Another irritation, was an audible clicking somewhere at the back of the theatre, perhaps caused by a spot light as it heated and cooled. That same day the manager responded:

Thanks so much X, for taking the time to send this through.
We really rely on friends and family for feedback – we've made these notes and will talk them through with Q at our debrief.

Our examination of NZTrio is only at its formative stages. We remain intrigued about the cooperative leadership style and the shift that they have expressed from privileging a single individual to developing a cohesive whole which functions together.

As a piano trio they are highly successful within Aotearoa New Zealand and have a growing international reputation. Perhaps the single greatest asset of the group, apart from their individual musical acumen, is the respect they hold for each other as musicians, and maybe even more importantly, as people.

During the course of our observations of the Trio, both in rehearsals and concerts, we were aware of an unwritten, yet clearly understood, *modus operandi* in rehearsals, which transferred to concert presentations. Because we had observed the rehearsals and seen how the members' consideration and respect for each other transferred to the concert situation, the concerts were infinitely more "believable" for us, and as a result, more enjoyable.

We have outlined some of the communication mechanisms that we observed, which we posit might offer ways in which contemporary organizations might themselves develop their relational leadership. Questions rather than demands, an easy familiarity with each other, economy of words to discuss interpretation, a clearly understood vocabulary of body language and signals, and the willingness for each player to frame ensemble mistakes as their personal failing are some of the mechanisms and devices that contribute

to their ways of working together. These elements are aesthetic in their orientation in that the Trio relies on the sensate responses in the moment to inform them of solutions to problems as they emerge.

Although its structure is rational in that its operation is guided by a Board whose focus is on financial sustainability, a management team that attends to daily operational matters and an advisory group that maintains an interest in its strategic direction, the Trio could be called an aesthetic organization. It behaves as a logical enterprise "within the technical universe" (Dobson, 1999, p. 32), yet it relies on the *felt* senses of its members as its core way of operating (Dobson, 2010). Beyond these ephemeral moments, in seeking for elegant realizations of musical pieces that are faithful to the composer's intentions along with flair that can be identified as a particular NZTrio sound, the Trio mirrors the formal structures and creative expressions that are organizations (see for example, Dean, Ottensmeyer, & Ramirez, 1997, p. 422). Thus it is the aesthetics of this enterprise make it an intriguing study.

We remain impressed by NZTrio's ability to grapple with the wider organizational issues that confront arts enterprises. The ways in which they engage with their manager and Board offer cues as to how other teams might behave aesthetically in designing and implementing innovative ideas. In this way these artists contribute to the wider world of organizations and demonstrate a way of being that further animates relational leadership practices.

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