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PRACTICING AND THE PRACTICE OF ART

Editorial

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About Exercises

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When planning our first RUUKKU theme volume, we – the two musician editors – chose practicing as our topic. It was quite easy, since the topic was so close to us: for a musician, practicing is an everyday activity. It is hard and genuine work, which requires a lot of time. But each art genre has its own praxis. The way people practice a specific genre of art tells something essential about the genre and about the artists themselves. A performance, an exhibition, or an artwork is a kind of outcome, but with this RUUKKU issue, we peer inside the making of art, where nothing is yet finished and where the direction is not yet settled. Or is there a specific direction in the first place?

The art musician's relationship with music has changed. At the same time, there has been a change in the musician's relationship with the act of practicing. At the moment, art music may be the most work-oriented art genre there is – a circumstance that deeply affects the meaning of practicing. This has not always been the case. In her book *The Imaginary Museum of Musical Works* (1994), Lydia Goehr argues that, in the 18th century, art music focused on a living activity: musical compositions were often molded during the performance itself. The spotlight was not on the musical composition as it is today in modern concert halls, where an artist performs a musical work to the audience. Nor did music belong to composers. Compositions were identified by the noble patrons who commissioned them. Not until the end of the 18th century was the concept of 'work' invented to denote a single, entire, and finished composition. The canonization of great works by great composers thus took place with publications of "complete" works by Händel, Bach, Mozart and Haydn in scholarly editions.

Compared to the fine arts and sculpture, music faced an ontological problem: whereas fine art underlined the meaning of a complete product, such as a painting, music emerged only when it was performed. Unfortunately, this required something rather mundane: a living human being. A painting clearly emphasized independent art, but music was forced to find its own product to "put in a museum," as Goehr argues. To avoid the situation in which a composition is nothing but a series of performances of varying quality or just a pile of paper forming a score, art music ended up creating a specific work concept. A musical work embodied such higher values as Eternity and Beauty, requiring fidelity from its performer. This – if anything – in our opinion has affected musicians' work more than anything else for over two hundred years. The work concept, which was created in the romantic era

and which still influences our genre, demands a lot from musicians. They are required to serve the work, to execute accurately the markings in the score, and to mediate the original spirit of the work – all of which requires a great deal of practice. A musical work can be so difficult that it must be practiced several hours a day, perhaps for more than half a year, before it is ready to be performed publically. The change from the performance-oriented craftsmanship of the 18th century to today's culture is therefore drastic. Without going deeply into global questions (for instance, in China there are 50 million people who play the piano), it suffices to say that the technical-stylistic quality in the world of art music is very high. Children are capable of doing the same things that adults used to master after their music conservatory education. For every musical work, there are several high-quality recordings available. Being a professional means that a musician must sacrifice a great deal of energy and time to learn new works or even to maintain repertoire already learned. As for practicing, a musician does not have options.

It is reasonable to ask how musicians find the energy to practice in the first place. What makes practicing meaningful? The first thing that comes to mind is that there is an urge to spend a significant amount of time with good quality music. A musician does not see herself as a cornered servant oppressed by the composer's intention. Rather she may experience her relationship with the music as a very natural part of her life. It is a good idea to read the score carefully, because it makes it easier to understand the music – and not because one is afraid of making the dead composer turn in his grave. Long-term practicing, which usually begins at the age of five, shapes the body and the mind in many ways. Very often practicing is still a part of a musician's life even after active public performing has ended. Practicing is a habit, even perhaps a kind of 'meditation within the art'.

One of the most demanding things to learn as well as to teach is how to practice well. At the same time, practicing may be an important source of pleasure. As the pianist Olli Mustonen argues, "to play well is healthy." Along with being technically demanding, art music has other similarities to high-performance sports, for which athletes need to practice daily and in a disciplined way. If the exercise is not executed in precisely the right way, the results will be poor. The area that separates musicians from athletes is the way each deals with success. An athlete who wins is allowed to celebrate the victory openly, whereas a musician still needs to be (at least externally) humble and modest, since the musical work must be the focus, not the player's technical achievement – not even if the achievement has required extreme physical and mental effort. A musician's desire to succeed perfectly does not make her a lesser artist, but in general, everything that points to any kind of achievement in art, is taboo.

However, a musician's disciplined work, the goal of which is a living performance, is just one way to define the concept of practicing, as seen in the expositions on different genres of art in this issue of RUUKKU. Compared to art music,

probably the most contradictory approach is **Annette Arlander's**, who in her bilingual exposition *Practicing art – as a habit?* addresses the relationship between artistic praxis and habit. Arlander's practicing does not aim for a specific goal. Instead, for her the essential issue is the process, which evolves from a continuum of daily exercises. As examples, Arlander introduces two apparently minimalistic artistic projects that focus on two issues: place and repetition. In her project, Arlander keeps returning to the same site over and over again to record the object, which will show only very subtle changes, if any. Which is more important: the object or the action of recording, which gradually becomes a habit? Arlander also discusses the ontology of art-based, practice-based artistic research and asks which is more important: the process or the product?

In his exposition, **Tero Heikkinen's** three exercises for drawing space and form offer a chance to study skill. Heikkinen separates his exercises from the area of his expertise – spatial and furniture design – and sees them as independent: in this exposition, drawing is seen more as a research topic on its own, one that deals with free-hand, three-dimensional perspectival form and space.

A musician's perspective is introduced in jazz saxophonist **Per Anders Nilsson's** exposition *Deliberately Practicing the Saxophone*. Nilsson draws on his thirty years of experience with the instrument and analyses his own practicing from three different points of view: development and maintenance of general skills, avoiding stagnation, and practicing for specific events. His focus is on two different ways of playing: practicing (design time) and a more performative kind of playing (play time). For a jazz musician, improvisation is an essential part of musicianship, but behind the apparent spontaneity, one finds systematic and disciplined practice.

The exposition by a community artist, **Minna Heikinaho**, deals with the authorship of collective art and the way art of this kind is created. Heikinaho takes her reader on a journey that introduces both a single artist's experience and thinking as well as an artistic experience created within a community. The usual limits disappear, and the art is available to everyone. Her exposition offers different perspectives on the concepts of 'practicing' and 'praxis'. For Heikinaho, art is a medium for experiencing the city and belonging to it.

In his exposition, *There is nothing imaginary in imagination*, **Otso Kautto**, a director and former high-performance athlete, describes practicing and exercises as well as their relationship with ritual. With its demanding and goal-directed exercises, high-level sports resemble punctual art music. On the other hand, Jouko Turkka's methods in the area of theatrical art seem to hint that the meaning of practice is to reach a certain state of mind, which in turn would then enable other things – another way to define practicing. These two ways of practicing are introduced through the writer's own experience, the exposition itself becoming an exercise in which Kautto explores his way of being a writing artistic researcher. One academic

ritual – writing an article – is also implicitly discussed. Kautto treats this ritual with fictional means.

There are two voices in this issue of RUUKKU. **Mieko Kanno**, violinist, is a professor of artistic doctoral studies who writes about the musical craft. **Taneli Tuovinen** is a lecturer in the Aalto University School of Arts, Design and Architecture, who writes about touch and feeling in producing a research plan.

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